



Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody

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Rt Hon Chris Philp MP
Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London, SW1P 4DF

Tuesday 15 August 2023

Dear Minister Philp,

I am writing on behalf of the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody (IAPDC) to request a meeting with you to discuss the alarming increase in deaths in and following police custody. This is a key area of focus for the IAPDC, including in our recent report where we worked with Police and Crime Commissioners to look specifically at good practice identified in local areas to address mental health and risk, apparent post-custody suicides, and embedding learning following a death.¹

You will be aware that figures published last month by the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) show a sharp rise in the number of deaths in or following police custody, from 11 deaths in 2021/22 to 23 in 2022/23. This is an increase of more than double and the highest figure in five years. Almost half of these deaths involved the use of force while 13 of the 23 people who died had mental health concerns. There were also 90 deaths following police contact.

The prevalence of mental ill health in these police-related deaths demonstrates the tragic human cost of a disjointed response between police and health services to incidents involving mental health crises. Examples include the sad deaths of Oladeji Omishore, Kaine Fletcher, and Godrick Osei, all of whom were experiencing a mental health crisis and subject to police

¹ IAPDC, 'Preventing deaths at point of arrest, during and after police custody: a review of police practice submitted to the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody by Police and Crime Commissioners and associated bodies', December 2022, available [here](#).

restraint. These deaths often have a considerable impact on families, communities, and public confidence in police.

We welcome joint efforts between the Home Office, Department of Health and Social Care, and partner organisations to ensure people experiencing a mental health crisis receive the right care from the right agency. However, the recently launched National Partnership Agreement requires a carefully staged approach with strong safeguards to ensure people at risk of serious harm to themselves and others are not left without care and support. The IAPDC is keen to support the monitoring and evaluation of this new agreement.

Further, the IOPC figures show a significant number of apparent suicides within two days of release from police custody, with three quarters of the 52 people who died by suicide in 2022/23 having had known mental health concerns. This number has remained concerningly high over the years, with 57 deaths in 2021/22 and 55 in 2020/21. It indicates inconsistencies across forces in pre- and post-release processes to mitigate risk and keep people safe.

The IAPDC is working closely with the National Police Chiefs' Council to organise a roundtable event to discuss how police forces and voluntary sector organisations can work collaboratively to reduce the risk of suicide following release from custody. We are also taking forward a wider programme of work to build on the findings and recommendations from our report, including an event later in the year on policing-related mental health interventions.

As part of this, I recently met with Tom Whiting, Acting Director General at the IOPC, and the IAPDC is continuing to work closely with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners. We would welcome strong support from you and the Home Office for this work.

I would be grateful to meet with you over the coming weeks to discuss how we can work together to prevent avoidable police custody deaths. As well as this, I would like to understand how you are working with the Mental Health Minister to safeguard the lives of people detained under the state's care. It would be a welcome opportunity to also discuss the upcoming meeting of the Ministerial Board on Deaths in Custody, which you are chairing and where I hope you will bring the strong leadership required to address these issues.

I look forward to hearing back from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "L. Emslie". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Lynn Emslie, Chair of the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody

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