

## Introduction

This report brings together evidence from the first external economic analyses of Shout from experts in the field, **Frontier Economics**<sup>1</sup> and the **Institute of Global Health Innovation, Imperial College London**<sup>2</sup>, alongside additional evidence from the **Metropolitan Police Service**. The analyses determine the practical and financial efficacy of the service in relation to suicide prevention, in order to estimate the number of lives saved by Shout and the commensurate cost savings to the UK economy.

Building on these findings, insights from data and clinical experts at Mental Health Innovations point to the conclusion that, if only 1% of the interventions initiated by their text messaging support service Shout resulted in a life saved, then in a little over three years since launch, the service has **prevented the suicides of 126 children, young people and adults**<sup>3</sup>. Each life saved has a commensurate economic benefit and Shout could therefore be **estimated to have saved the UK economy £252 million** to date, based on a 'value for life' calculation of £2m, which Frontier Economics determines to be reasonable<sup>4</sup>.

The report explores the impact that Mental Health Innovations could have through Shout in future years, both in terms of the lives saved by the service, and the cost benefit to the UK economy.

## About Shout

Shout is the UK's first free, confidential, 24/7 text messaging mental health support service for anyone struggling to cope, created by charity Mental Health Innovations.

Since its launch in May 2018, Shout has taken more than 1,500,000 text conversations with 540,000 children, young people and adults across the UK who were in distress and in urgent need of support. Suicide - either thinking about it or being at the point of making a plan - is the most common presenting issue for people texting Shout, highlighted in 35% of conversations<sup>5</sup>. Signposting partnerships such as the one we have with Google ensure that we are reaching people with a means of support in the very moment that they are considering or searching for harmful subject matter around suicide online.

Shout Volunteers are trained to assess risk and to de-escalate texters experiencing suicidal thoughts or urges. This is achieved by engaging warmly with them, validating their experience and supporting them to make a safety plan. When de-escalation is not possible and a texter is deemed to be at imminent risk of suicide, Shout works with the emergency services to keep the texter safe. From 525,000 conversations relating to suicide, Shout has actioned interventions for more than 12,000 individuals.

*"The volunteer I spoke to tonight was absolutely fantastic. Calmed me down, listened to what I was saying, ensured I had the relevant resources before I left. **They quite literally saved my life tonight. Thank you.**" - Feedback from young male Shout texter*

*"With an alarming rise in suicide rates among young people in the UK, it has never been more important to invest in innovative services that can support young people, at scale, in the very moment and place they are in distress. This is why Shout is such a vital service. By providing free, immediate, 24/7 digital mental health support, Shout is saving lives. Without a doubt, Shout is the most accessible effective crisis resource in the UK for young people to turn to."*



### PROFESSOR PETER FONAGY OBE

CEO of Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families, Director of Psychology and Language Sciences, UCL, and Mental Health Innovations trustee

## A picture of suicide in the UK

In 2020, 6,221 suicides were registered in the UK<sup>6</sup>. While the highest rates of suicide are consistently among men aged 45–49, in recent years the UK has seen a concerning rise in suicides among young people, especially girls and young women, who make up 77% of Shout's texters<sup>7</sup>. In fact, between 2020 and 2021 in England and Wales, females aged 24 years or under saw the largest increase in suicide rates since ONS records began<sup>8</sup>.

The rate of suicide among girls and young women increased by 133% between 2012 and 2021; that's eight times the increase seen among boys and young men<sup>9</sup>. The number of suicides among all young people aged 10–24 increased by 37% over this time. Furthermore, suicide and intentional self-harm is currently the leading cause of death among children and young people aged 5–19 and young adults aged 20–34<sup>10</sup>.

Shout is uniquely positioned to provide crisis support to the growing number of children and young people at risk. As a digital service, it appeals particularly to the young, with 64% of texters aged under 25 and 9% aged 13 or under. Around a third of Shout's texters are school-aged children under 18, meaning the service has provided support to the equivalent of one child in every secondary school classroom in the UK. Suicide is the most common reason those under 18 text Shout, accounting for 37% of their conversations. Meanwhile, self-harm, a significant risk factor for suicide, is a theme in 21% of conversations with young women.

*"Thank you. Tonight you helped me choose to live. You were so understanding and you quickly found things I was interested in that reminded me that my life can be more than the pain I am in."* –  
Feedback from genderqueer Shout texter

## The economic benefits of Shout as a suicide prevention service

### Frontier Economics

Frontier Economics conducted a break-even analysis of Shout, looking at how many suicides need to be prevented each year to cover the annual cost of running the service, and found:

- Shout delivers value for money on suicide prevention alone, before considering the wider benefits the service generates in relation to other mental health conditions or the emotional benefits to individuals of preventing a suicide.
- At a value for life of £2m, **if Shout prevented just 3.3 suicides each year, it would break even.** Testimonies, including those from the Metropolitan Police and Shout texters, indicate that the service exceeds this and has **saved at least 18 lives in its first three years**, equating to more than five lives a year. However, given that it is highly unlikely that this anecdotal evidence captures all instances where lives were saved – especially given that the high number of interventions, coupled with reporting back to Shout from texters or emergency services on whether a life has been saved is not done on a comprehensive basis – **the actual figure could be much higher.**
- Shout provides a service that is especially valued by young people, meaning that the threshold for breaking-even could in fact be lower, given the greater number of life years saved by preventing the suicide of a young person.
- Shout provides support to many people at risk of suicide who would likely not otherwise be captured by alternative mental health programmes and systems.

*"We conclude that there is very strong evidence to show that Shout saves significantly more lives through suicide interventions than would be needed to 'break even' on its total costs. This does not take into account the additional life years saved from the youthful demographic they serve, or any other benefits for other mental health conditions."*



**MATTHEW BELL**

Director, Frontier Economics

## Institute of Global Health Innovation, Imperial College London

The Institute of Global Health Innovation, Imperial College London, developed an economic model to determine whether Shout is cost-saving, comparing the total annual costs to health and emergency services in the scenarios that the Shout service is and is not available. The analysis found that:

- At a cost of £10 per conversation, **Shout is cost-saving to health and emergency services**, even under the assumption that there is a reduction in attempted or completed suicides in only 15% of those that contact Shout.
- In addition to these potential cost savings for the public sector, Shout is likely to offer **further savings to the rest of the economy** through potential lost earnings, victim support, reducing distress and encouraging help-seeking behaviour.
- There is a plethora of anecdotal evidence and clinical justification for the **immense value of Shout to the community and economy** which also credits Shout with saving lives. This encompasses qualitative feedback from texters, their families and the emergency services.

*“Shout is an exciting innovation that is already changing the shape of mental health provision in the UK. This report shows how the simple, text-based service is providing immediate, life-saving support to people at high risk of suicide. At the same time the 540,000 people who have contacted the service are increasing our understanding of who is experiencing mental health crises, where there are gaps in services and how we can offer better support. With demand for help rising year by year, especially from young people, Shout is needed now more than ever.”*



### PROFESSOR THE LORD DARZI OF DENHAM,

OM, KBE, PC, FRS. Co-Director, Institute of Global Health Innovation, Imperial College London

*“Shout has helped me keep myself going when I didn’t want to be here anymore. I have accessed Shout countless times and can honestly say **it has saved my life.**”* - Feedback from teenage female Shout texter

### Evidence from the Metropolitan Police Service

Given the stringent nature of the intervention procedure that is in place between Shout and the Metropolitan Police, in accordance with the Investigatory Powers Act<sup>11</sup>, estimating that only 1% of interventions result in a life saved is conservative. Metropolitan Police information shows that for about 1 in 3 interventions in London during the first half of 2022, the texter required medical assistance.

Shout’s clinical review of these particular interventions judged texters to be in a life-threatening situation in at least half of the cases. Many of these cases included texters having taken overdoses. As such, the actual number of suicides Shout has prevented, and the subsequent savings to the economy, could be much greater.

12-year-old Jack (*not real name*) started experiencing severe anxiety during the Covid-19 pandemic. He spent more time on his own, no longer connecting with his friends and struggling with online schooling. He became anxious about the future and things had become so difficult for him that, one evening, he decided to end his life. That night, in a pivotal moment while standing on a bridge, Jack texted Shout.

*“The volunteer who responded to Jack that night guided him to a calmer place, working with him to stop, take stock, and **find the courage to phone the emergency services**, who came and helped him.”* - Jack’s parent

# Conclusion

Every life lost to suicide is a tragedy, yet we know that suicide is often preventable and not inevitable. This report demonstrates the value of Shout in preventing suicide in the UK, particularly for children, young people and those who are not accessing alternative mental health support.

Independent analysis also determines that **Shout is a value-for-money suicide prevention service**, generating significant cost savings for both the UK economy and the organisations that commission the service. These **savings extend far beyond the scope of this report**, given the wider benefits the service generates in relation to other mental health conditions, such as anxiety, depression and self-harm.

- There are no comparable alternatives to Shout. Its accessibility as a free, digital service that is available 24/7 is key to its ability to connect with an individual at the crucial moment when they are in crisis and prevent someone moving from thinking about suicide to attempting or dying by suicide. **Shout offers national support, at scale.**
- Shout's daily conversation numbers trebled during the course of the Covid-19 pandemic. As demand for the service continues to increase, so too does the potential for the service to prevent an even greater number of suicides in the UK.
- Mental Health Innovations forecasts demand for Shout to continue to grow at a rate of 25% year-on-year and anticipates the proportion of interventions actioned to remain consistent over time. Therefore **by the end of 2025 the service could prevent 288 more suicides and save the UK economy £576m.**
- Further investment from public, private and philanthropic organisations is crucial to achieving this and will enable Shout to maintain and grow the infrastructure, technology, clinicians and volunteers it needs to continue providing crucial suicide de-escalation services and life-saving interventions for any child, young person or adult in the UK who needs help.

*"Been suicidal for around 18 months, tonight I was actually going to act on my thoughts, someone was there and that was enough, thank you." - Feedback from female Shout texter*

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[giveusashout.org](https://giveusashout.org)

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**85258**  
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1. Frontier Economics (October 2022) *Break-even analysis of Shout 85258: Valuing the benefits of suicide prevention.*
2. Institute of Global Health Innovation, Imperial College London (December 2021) *Cost-effectiveness of crisis text messaging support for suicide prevention: An economic analysis of the Shout service.*
3. What we mean by 'preventing a suicide' is that the intervention of a Shout Volunteer or Clinician at a crucial moment was able to stop an individual from dying by suicide. Had the emergency services not been alerted through Shout's intervention protocol, it can be reasonably assumed that the individual's life would have been lost. This assumption is based on testimonies from the Metropolitan Police, emergency services, texters and family members of texters.
4. The London School of Economics and Political Science (April 2020) *Estimating the monetary value of the deaths prevented from the UK Covid-19 lockdown when it was decided upon - and the value of "flattening the curve."*
5. Shout data from May 2018 - August 2022.
6. 4,912 in England (ONS, 2021), 285 in Wales (ONS, 2021), 805 in Scotland (SootPHO, 2021) and 219 in Northern Ireland (NISRA, 2021). Please note, this is the most up-to-date estimate for the whole of the UK as suicide registrations for Northern Ireland in 2021 are not yet available.
7. 64% of these texters were under the age of 25 and 77% of young texters identified as female.
8. ONS (2022) *Suicides in England and Wales: 2021 registrations.*
9. ONS (2022) *Suicides in England and Wales dataset.* Suicides of females aged 10-24 in England and Wales increased from 81 in 2012 to 189 in 2021. Suicides of males aged 10-24 increased from 375 in 2012 to 436 in 2021. Suicides of males and females aged 10-24 increased from 456 in 2012 to 625 in 2021.
10. ONS (2021) *Deaths registered in England and Wales: 2020.*
11. [Investigatory Powers Act 2016.](#)