

Pennsylvania Suicide Prevention Initiative

Suicide Among Older Adults in Pennsylvania

The problem?

- In the United States and Pennsylvania the highest rates of suicide are among old adults!
 - o For ages 75 79 there are 32.1 suicides per 100,000
 - \circ For ages 80 84 there are 35.5 suicides per 100,000
 - o For ages 85 plus there are 33.2 suicides per 100,000
- Suicide behavior in late life is intentional and lethal, especially among older white males.
- Many older adults who commit suicide have recently visited a primary care physician: 20% on the same day and 40% within one week.
- Older adults who commit suicide are more likely to have suffered from a depressive illness than individuals who kill themselves at a younger age.

What are the key risk factors of suicide?

Depression, including late-onset depression	Poor social support
Co-morbid disorders, including diabetes, heart	Barriers to accessing health care, especially mental health
disease, stroke, other chronic or terminal illnesses	and substance abuse treatment
White male	Access to firearms
Widowed, divorced	Low self-esteem, poor coping skills
• Isolation	Financial loss

What are some important protective factors?

•	Readily available family and social supports	•	Restricted access to highly lethal means of suicide
•	Effective clinical care of mental, physical and	•	Learned skills in problem solving conflict resolution, and
	substance abuse disorders		non-violent handling of disputes
•	Easy access to a variety of clinical interventions and	•	Cultural and religious beliefs that discourage suicide and
	supports in a variety of settings.		support self-preservations

What are the warning signs of suicide?

Contact a mental health or medical provider if you encounter any of these behaviors:

Hopelessness	Rage, anger, revenge, recklessness
 Feeling trapped/no way out/helplessness 	Increasing alcohol and/or drug use
Withdrawal from family, friends	Anxiety, agitation, sleep problems
Dramatic mood changes	No reason for living

What are the immediate danger signs of suicide?

Immediately call 9-1-1 or a crisis center (or 1-800-273-TALK) if you encounter:

- Someone threatening to hurt or kill herself or himself
- Someone looking for ways to take her or his life (i.e., a gun, pills, other lethal means)
- Someone talking, writing, or drawing about death, dying, or suicide

What can you do to help prevent suicide?

- Support state and local suicide prevention efforts
- Make sure that all family members know the warning and danger signs of suicide and what to do.
- Remove unused firearms and safely store/lock/disassemble firearms kept in the home.

A Collaborative including: Pennsylvania Department of Aging, Pennsylvania Behavioral Health and Aging Coalition, Survivors of Suicide, Departments of Public Welfare, Health, Education, and Aging, Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, County MH/MR Administrators Assn. and several county programs, County CASSP Coordinators, CASSP Institute, American Trauma Society, The STAR Center, PA Child Death Review Team, PA Protection and Advocacy, PA Psychiatric Society, PA Assn. of School Social Workers, NAMI of PA, Mental Health Assn. of SE PA., PIN of PA, PA Del Val NAPNAP, a County Medical Examiner, a City Health Bureau, a State University, a Behavioral Health MCO, Common Roads, Juvenile Detention Center Assn. of PA, PA Community Provider's Assn., PA Council on Children, Youth, and Family Services, Providers and Student Assistance Program Trainers, School Districts, Yellow Ribbon Chapters, Feeling Blue Suicide Prevention Council, Montgomery County Emergency Service, and other organizations.