

Facing the Facts

Suicide in Canada

Suicide is a significant and underestimated cause of death in Canada. The real tragedy is that many of these deaths can be prevented. A first step in solving any problem is learning more about it.

What are suicidal behaviours?

Suicide is defined as intentional, self-inflicted death. The issue of suicide is broader than just suicide deaths; it also includes thoughts of suicide, threats, gestures, attempts, and bereavement after suicide.

Why should we be concerned?

Suicide is a leading cause of premature death in Canada. Many of these deaths can be prevented. Statistics Canada data indicates that in 1999¹:

- the leading causes of death among males, all ages, were:
 1. Diseases of the circulatory system, e.g. heart disease and stroke
 2. Cancer
 3. Respiratory diseases
 4. Injury and poisoning
- suicide accounted for the greatest number of deaths within the category, injury and poisoning.

How many people attempt suicide?

It is difficult to say exactly how many people attempt suicide in Canada each year. There is no official registry that collects data on suicide attempts. Many people may not seek medical help for an attempt or they may deny that their injuries are the result of a suicide attempt.

Using information from the Canadian Vital Statistics Database, Langlois and Morrison (2002) provide data on rates of hospitalization for attempted suicide in 1998/1999²:

Age Group	Total	Male	Female
10-14	40.8	15.5	67.5
15-19	152.2	87.3	220.8
20-29	117.9	98.0	138.4
30-44	118.3	97.6	139.3
45-59	68.3	55.1	81.3
60-74	25.0	24.7	25.2
75+	21.0	27.6	17.2

(all rates are per 100,000 age-specific population)

How many people die by suicide?

Number of suicides

In 2001, 3,692 Canadians died by suicide or from injuries resulting from intentional self-harm.³

- 2,870 of these deaths occurred among males; 822 among females.
- Males died by suicide more than three times as often as females, a statistic that follows international trends.
- No deaths by suicide were recorded among children under age 10.

Rate of suicide

In 2001, the crude rate of suicide (not standardized for age) in Canada was 11.9 per 100,000 population.^{3,4}

- The suicide rate for males was 18.6 per 100,000 population and 5.2 per 100,000 population for females.
- Contrary to common belief, suicide rates are not highest among adolescents. During the period 1997-2001, the highest rates occurred among^{3,4}:

Gender	Age	Rate/100,000
Combined	45-49	18.5
Males	40-44	28.7
Females	45-49	9.3

What methods are used for suicide?³

Method	Males	Females
	% of Deaths	% of Deaths
Self-poisoning	10.3	36.9
Gases	10.7	7.7
Hanging	42.9	33.9
Drowning	2.5	4.0
Firearms	21.5	4.3
Burning	0.7	0.6
Cutting	2.9	1.5
Jumping	6.8	8.4
Motor vehicle	0.9	0.6
Other	0.9	2.2

Data Year - 2001. ICD-10 X60-X84 and Y87.0

Total may equal more than 100 due to rounding.



What can we do to prevent suicide?

Suicide is a worldwide public health issue. People from all cultural, religious, educational, and socioeconomic backgrounds can be affected by suicide or suicidal behaviours.

Potentially, everyone has a role in the prevention of suicide. Individuals, communities, and governments can help people in crisis.

As individuals, we can...

- learn about suicide, particularly the warning signs that may indicate someone is thinking about, or planning, suicide
- ask about suicide directly if someone seems to be at risk
- show we care by providing support and creating a network of help
- support community agencies and associations that provide suicide prevention services or information
- reduce the stigma associated with seeking help for mental health issues or suicide by examining our own attitudes and behaviours
- offer support to individuals who may be coping with the suicidal behaviour of a family member or friend and to those who have been bereaved by suicide
- take care of our own mental health

As communities, we can...

- ensure caregivers receive suicide intervention, prevention, and postvention training
- encourage cooperation and networking among community agencies
- encourage the development of policies and institutions that support individuals at risk of suicide
- support the efforts of suicide prevention agencies
- collaborate with the media to promote responsible reporting of mental health and suicide stories

As governments, we can...

- pass legislation limiting access to firearms and other means of suicide
- provide adequate funding for suicide prevention
- implement and support a national suicide prevention strategy
- address factors that contribute to suicidal behaviours, e.g. substance abuse and mental illness
- support agencies and programs that promote mental health and resilience among individuals and communities

For further reading:

Health Canada. (1994). *Suicide in Canada: Update of the Report of the Task Force on Suicide in Canada*. Ottawa, ON: Author.

English:

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/mentalhealth/pdfs/suicid_e.pdf

French:

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/mentalhealth/pdfs/suicid_f.pdf

Leenaars, A. A., Wenckstern, S., Sakinofsky, I., Dyck, R. J., Kral, M. J., & Bland, R. C. (Eds.) (1998). *Suicide in Canada*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

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Malenfant, E. C. (2004). Suicide in Canada's immigrant population. *Health Reports, 15*(2), 9-17.

Minore, B., & Hopkins, H. (2003). *Suicide response plans: A comparative cross-jurisdictional analysis*. Iqaluit, NU: Centre of Excellence for Children and Adolescents With Special Needs.

<http://www.coespecialneeds.ca/PDF/suicide.pdf>

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1995). *Choosing life: Special report on suicide among Aboriginal peoples*. Ottawa, ON: Minister of Supply and Services Canada.

Stevenson, L., & Ellsworth, Q. (n.d.). *National Inuit youth suicide prevention framework*. Ottawa, ON: Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami.

Tanney, B. (1995). Suicide prevention in Canada: A national perspective highlighting progress and problems. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior, 25*(1), 105-122.

White, J., & Jodoin, N. (2003). *Aboriginal youth: A manual of promising suicide prevention strategies*. Calgary, AB: Centre for Suicide Prevention.

<http://www.suicideinfo.ca/csp/gp.aspx?tabid=144>

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1. Statistics Canada. (2002). *Leading causes of death at different ages, Canada, 1999. Shelf tables*. Ottawa, ON: Author.
2. Langlois, S., & Morrison, P. (2002). Suicide deaths and suicide attempts. *Health Reports, 13*(2), 9-22.
3. Statistics Canada. *Causes of death, shelf tables*. [1997-2001]. Ottawa, ON: Author.
4. Statistics Canada. (2003). *Annual demographic statistics 2002*. Ottawa, ON: Author.