

Individuals 75 years and older have the highest suicide rate.

In 2005, **more than 7,000 Americans age 60** and older died by suicide.

Approximately **90% of older adults who die by suicide** have a diagnosable mental health and/or substance abuse disorder.

Older adults make up 12% of the population, yet account for **17% of suicides**.

58% of older adults had seen their primary care physician within one month of their suicide.



SUICIDE PREVENTION ACTION NETWORK USA

Senior Suicide:

*Understanding the Risk,
Preventing the Tragedy*



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ABOUT SENIOR SUICIDE

Anyone at any age can be at risk of suicide, but older Americans are especially vulnerable. Older adults experience the highest suicide rates in the nation.

Research shows that older adults who attempt suicide are much more likely to die by suicide, leaving limited opportunities to save a life once suicidal behavior begins. Ongoing thoughts of depression and hopelessness should not be considered a normal part of aging. Rather, these feelings of despair can be addressed and treated.

I lost my cousin to suicide in November of 2004. I remember my mother calling to say he killed himself and I felt as though I couldn't breathe — it was so shocking. I've come across people who have said that with the elderly, they've lived their life and it isn't as devastating as it is with the children. Suicide is suicide.

Heidi Bryan (Radnor, PA)

FACTS & FIGURES

- Every day, nearly 15 adults 65 years and older die by suicide in America.
- Older males die from suicide at a rate more than seven times that of older females.
- Among older adults, white individuals are almost three times as likely as non-whites to die from suicide.
- Of the top 10 states with the highest rates of older adult suicide, nine are in the West.

I was 17 when my grandfather was diagnosed with cancer; six months later he passed away. My grandmother was devastated. You could see a difference in her, but I guess I just thought it was how a person acts when they've just lost their soul mate. On February 23, 2007, she took her own life.

Jodi Canary (Colorado Springs, CO)

RISK FACTORS FOR SENIOR SUICIDE

- Depression
- Substance abuse
- Debilitating physical health problems
- Social dependency or isolation
- Family discord, losses
- Access to firearms

PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR SENIOR SUICIDE

- Effective clinical care for mental and physical health and substance abuse.
- Restricted access to highly lethal means of suicide.
- Strong connections to family and community support.
- Skills in problem solving and conflict resolution.

WHERE THERE IS HELP

- Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.
- Talk to your primary care physician.
- For local suicide prevention resources, visit www.spanusa.org/states.
- Contact your local agency on aging, senior center, community mental health clinic or religious institution.

STUDIES POINT TO BEST PRACTICES

New research is already making strides for improving prevention for senior suicide.

- The IMPACT study of patients 60 and older doubled the effectiveness of depression treatment and reduced suicidal thoughts by approximately 50%.
- The PROSPECT study, using a similar approach, resulted in a reduction of suicidal ideation for participants receiving enhanced care management.
- Much more work is needed to develop these and other approaches to preventing suicide in older adults.

I had been happily married to my husband for 30 years when he took his life on June 11, 2003 at age 67. I always remember Bill saying, "There is nothing that can happen to you that is worth taking your life over." Yet, his brain totally gave up. The public needs to be informed that people can die from depression.

Sue Pitkin (Annapolis, MD)

CHANGE IS NEEDED

- Did you know that Medicare requires a patient to pay 50% of the cost for outpatient mental health care, but only 20% for outpatient physical health care?
- Did you know that the federal government does not have a grant program to fund older adult suicide prevention programs?
- Do you know if your state has a suicide prevention plan that includes older adults?
- Visit <http://capwiz.com/spanusa/home/> to find out what you can do to make a difference.