



OLDER AMERICANS
Substance Abuse & Mental Health
Technical Assistance Center

Suicide Prevention *for Older Adults*

DID YOU KNOW?

- Older adults (age 65+) represent only 13% of the U.S. population, yet account for nearly 20% of U.S. suicides.
- Older adults are less likely to report suicidal thoughts compared to younger adults.
- Suicide attempts are more likely to be deliberate and fatal.
- The most frequent methods of suicide among older adults include the use of guns (men: 77%; women: 34%) and poisoning themselves (men: 12%; women: 29%).
- Men account for 82% of suicides among older adults and have a higher suicide rate than women (38 vs. 5.7 per 100,000 persons).
- More than half (58%) of older adults (age 55+) contact their primary care provider within 1 month of considering suicide.

Major risk factors for suicide include:

- Older Age
- Being Male
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Depression
- Substance Abuse
- Prescription drugs such as Valium have been linked with suicide among older adults

Suicide in older adults is a serious public health problem that can be stopped. The following information is taken from the following: SAMHSA Older Americans Technical Assistance Center "Evidence-Based Practices for Preventing Substance Abuse and Mental Health Problems in Older Adults," the National Suicide Prevention Strategy and information from the Centers for Disease Control.

Protective factors often shield people from the risks associated with suicide. A number of protective factors have been found:

- **Effective clinical care** for mental, physical, and substance abuse disorders;
- **Easy access** to a variety of clinical interventions and help seeking support;
- **Family and community support;**
- **Support** for ongoing medical and mental health care relationships;
- Skills in **problem solving, conflict resolution, and nonviolent handling of arguments;** and
- Cultural and religious beliefs that **discourage suicide.**

To meet the needs of older adults, the National Suicide Prevention Strategy has set the following goals and objectives:

- Promote awareness that **suicide** in older adults is a public health problem that is **can be stopped;**
- Develop broad-based support for elder suicide prevention;
- Develop and provide strategies to **reduce** the **stigma** associated with aging and with being a senior consumer of mental health, substance abuse, and suicide prevention services;
- Develop and provide **community-based suicide prevention** programs for older adults;
- Promote efforts to reduce **access to deadly means** and methods of self-harm by older adults;
- **Provide training** for recognition and assessment of at-risk behavior and delivery of effective treatment to older adults;
- Develop and promote effective clinical and professional practices;
- Improve access to and **community linkages** with mental health, substance abuse, and social services designed for the evaluation and treatment of older adults in medical and long-term care settings;
- Improve reporting and portrayals of suicidal behavior, mental illness, and substance abuse among older adults in the entertainment and news media;
- Promote and support research on late-life suicide and suicide prevention;
- Improve and expand surveillance systems;
- Provide interventions that **improve social relations** and **decrease isolation** in older adults; and
- Increase **access** to older adult specialty health care.

A Few Resources:

National Strategy for Suicide Prevention

Phone: If you are thinking about suicide, call your local crisis center or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255).

Website:
<http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/suicideprevention/fivews.asp>

National Suicide Prevention Initiative

National Mental Health Information Center (NMHIC), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Phone:
1-800-789-2647

Website:
<http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/nspi/>

www.samhsa.gov/OlderAdultsTAC/



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Center for Substance Abuse Prevention

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