



Suicide Risk Among Older Adults

What is the problem:

In the United States and Pennsylvania the highest rates of suicide are among older adults

- Non-Hispanic white men age 85 and older were most likely to die by suicide at a national rate of 49.8 suicide deaths per 100,000 persons.
- Suicide behavior in late life is intentional and lethal, especially among older white males.
- Older adults who complete suicide are more likely to have experienced a late onset episode of depression.
- 20% of older men saw their family physician the day they completed suicide.

What are some of the key risk factors for suicide?

- Depression, especially late-onset depression
- Poor social support – widowed or divorced
- Co-morbid disorders, (e.g., diabetes, heart disease, stroke, other chronic illnesses)
- Barriers to accessing health care, especially mental health and substance abuse treatment
- Financial loss
- Social isolation
- Access to firearms

What are some important protective factors?

- Readily available family and social supports
- Cultural and religious beliefs that discourage suicide and support self-preservation
- Effective clinical care of mental, physical and substance abuse disorders
- Restricted access to highly lethal means of suicide such as firearms

What are some warning signs of suicide?

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

- Feeling hopeless or helpless
- Rage, intense anger, overwhelming thoughts of revenge, recklessness
- Anxiety, agitation, sleep problems
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Increasing alcohol and drug use

What are the immediate danger signs of suicide?

Immediately call 9-1-1, a local crisis center, or 1-800-273-TALK (8255) if you encounter:

- Someone threatening to hurt or kill herself or himself
- Someone seeking ways to take her or his life (firearms, pills, or other lethal means)

What can you do to help prevent suicide?

- Encourage depression and suicide risk screening in primary care settings
- Make sure that family members know the warning and danger signs of suicide and what to do.
- Remove firearms and safely store; lock, or disassemble firearms kept in the home.
- Share this information with others in your community.

For further information on mental health services in Pennsylvania, please use the following link:

http://parecovery.org/services_suicide_prevention.shtml.