

# Plus 65

At the end of the day...





# Topics included in this toolkit:

## Statistics

An overview of suicide statistics relating to people 65+.

## Warning Signs

Signs that might indicate suicide ideation seniors.

## Risk Factors

Factors that may put someone 65 and older at risk of suicide.

## Protective Factors

These factors can help protect people 65+ from suicide.

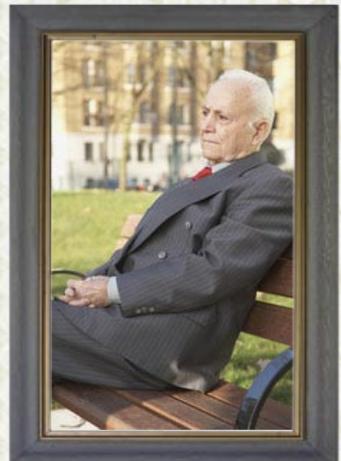
## Related Links

Links for more information relating to suicide in older people.

## References

## Case Study

A senior's story about her experience with suicide.



# Statistics

People 65 years and older, particularly men, have the **highest suicide rate** of any other group.

This contradicts a **popular misconception** that the highest rate is among the young.

The **Baby Boomers** (those born between 1946 and 1964) have had higher suicide rates than previous generations. They are amongst the largest population cohorts in Canada and have just begun entering the 65 and over age range. This could translate into a tremendous increase in suicides in the coming years (Canadian Coalition for Mental Health, 2008).



Men 65 and older have the highest suicide rate in Canada. Men 90 years and older have the highest rate of all - 33.1 per 100,000 (Statistics Canada, 2008).

In the USA, older Americans are also disproportionately likely to die by suicide - 14.3 of every 100,000 people. The rate is highest for non-hispanic white men 85 and older - 49.8 per 100,000. The rate for the general population is 11 per 100,000 (National Institute of Mental Health, 2010).

**The older someone is, the greater risk of suicide.**

# Suicide Attempts and Suicides



Young people: 200+ attempts for every suicide

General population: 100+ attempts for every suicide

+65 adults: 2-4 attempts for every suicide

(Marcus, 1996)

## Why?

- Older adults intentions are harder to gauge - they tend to talk about it (suicide) less, display less equivocal warning signs
- Social isolation - many live alone so there is less chance of survival in an attempt
- Tend to use more lethal means (like firearms) when attempting suicide
- Cause of death may be less rigorously investigated in older persons (Centre for Suicide Prevention, 1998)



# Warning Signs

## Warning Signs of Acute Risk:

- Threatening to hurt or kill him/herself, or talking of wanting to hurt or kill him/herself
- Looking for ways to kill him/herself by seeking access to firearms, available pills, or other means, and/or
- Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide, when these actions are out of the ordinary

## Additional Warning Signs:

Mnemonic "IS PATH WARM" makes it easier to remember the signs to look for:

- **I**deation (thinking and talking of death)
- **S**ubstance Abuse
- **P**urposelessness
- **A**nxiety/Agitation
- **T**rapped (feeling that there is no way out, no where to get help, a wish to get away from everything)
- **H**opelessness/Helplessness
- **W**ithdrawal (isolating oneself from those around you)
- **A**nger
- **R**ecklessness
- **M**ood Changes



(American Association of Suicidology, 2012)

# Risk Factors

- Suicide ideation
- Personal history of suicidality
- Experience of a suicide loss
- Living alone/social isolation
- Physical handicaps
- Mental illness
- Negative life events and transitions
- Loss (health, relationships, independence)
- Depression



(Canadian Coalition for Seniors Mental Health, 2008)

The risk of suicide can be greatly reduced if the individual possesses some of the following:

# Protective Factors

- Good health/health practices
- Strong social network and contact
- Family/friends support
- Active interests
- Feeling a purpose in life

(Canadian Coalition for Seniors Mental Health, 2008)



# References

Canadian Coalition for Seniors Mental Health. (2006). *National guidelines for seniors mental health: The assessment of suicide risk and prevention of suicide.*

Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health. (2009). *Suicide prevention among older adults: a guide for family members.*



Centre for Suicide Prevention. (1998). Suicide among the aged. *Alert 28.*

CTVNews.ca. (2012, February 9). Suicide among seniors a real but overlooked problem. Retrieved from <http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/TopStories/20111006/seniors-suicide-depression-111006/>

Lester, D, and Tallmer, M.(Eds.). (1994). *Now I lay me down: Suicide in the elderly.* Philadelphia: Charles Press

Marcus, E. (1996). *Why suicide?* San Francisco: HarperCollins

Osgood, Nancy. (1992). *Suicide in later life: Recognizing the warning signs.* Toronto: Lexington Books

# Related Links

## **Publications from the Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health**

Suicide prevention for older adults:  
a guide for family members

[http://www.ccsmh.ca/pdf/ccsmh\\_suicideBooklet.pdf](http://www.ccsmh.ca/pdf/ccsmh_suicideBooklet.pdf)

Late Life Suicide Prevention Toolkit

<http://www.ccsmh.ca/en/projects/suicide.cfm>

Suicide: Assessment and Prevention for Older Adults  
(pocket brochure for clinicians) (May 2008)

[http://www.ccsmh.ca/pdf/CCSMH\\_suicideBrochure.pdf](http://www.ccsmh.ca/pdf/CCSMH_suicideBrochure.pdf)

## **Other Publications**

A fact sheet on depression  
and suicide in older adults put  
out by The National Institute of  
Mental Health (United States)

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/older-adults-depression-and-suicide-facts-fact-sheet/index.shtml#how-common>

Fact Sheet of Suicide and  
Older Adults put out by the  
American Association of Suicidology

[http://www.suicidology.org/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?folderId=235&name=DLFE-487.pdf](http://www.suicidology.org/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=235&name=DLFE-487.pdf)



**“These older individuals are having everything taken away from them...”**

## **A Case Study**

Iris Stanley is one senior who has considered suicide. A once-active senior who loved hiking and swimming, Stanley, 71, had trouble coping after she came down with a number of illnesses at once and ended up in a wheelchair. Her decline was so sudden and so severe, she prepared to end her own life.

“I was frustrated and angry at my own body. I had always lived an active healthy life, I was totally floored,” she tells CTV News.

“My life to me was not enjoyable. It wasn’t what I wanted or what I expected. It just didn’t seem worthwhile anymore.”

Stanley won’t say how or what she planned to do. Stanley did say, however, she changed her mind after thinking about what her suicide would do to her adult children.

“I sat there and had everything ready (for the suicide). I thought of my son and my daughter, and they weren’t prepared for it. They weren’t aware of how ill I was,” she says. “So I didn’t do it.”

Instead, she looked for, and found, help for her depression.

Stanley is just one of many Canadians who has found the stress of aging can be too much. Many seniors have to cope with illness as they age, as well as the stress of losing spouses and friends, and their own independence.

Dr. Leon Kagan, the director of Geriatric Psychiatry at the University of Alberta, says many seniors cope well with aging. It’s when they begin to lose their independence that they become at risk for depression.

“What makes them vulnerable to suicide is, I would say, the isolation that develops, more than anything,” he says.

“These older individuals are having everything taken away from them in terms of their work, their health, their families and finding their role diminished.... And for some of them, taking their own life seems like it might be the only option that they have.”

**Dr. Marnin Heisel**, a clinical psychologist and an assistant professor in the Departments of Psychiatry at the University of Western Ontario, says part of the problem is that many doctors aren't always looking for suicide risk among their older patients. And many seniors don't realize they can seek out mental health support.

**"Suicide can be a hidden problem.** We tend not to hear about in older adults. It tends to be an issue that gets neglected," he says.

(Retrieved from <http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/TopStories/20111006/seniors-suicide-depression-111006/>)





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