

National suicide prevention strategies

Progress, examples and indicators



**World Health
Organization**

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Foreword

Suicide is a global public health concern. Close to 800 000 people lose their life to suicide every year. Suicide knows no boundaries and cuts across every sociodemographic level and all regions of the world. A suicide attempt is a crucial risk factor for subsequent suicide. Families, friends, school friends, work colleagues and communities affected or bereaved by suicide or suicide attempts are often left without assistance. Silence and stigma prevent those in need from seeking help. Suicide remains the second leading cause of death in 15–29-year-olds and the majority of suicides (79%) occur in low- and middle-income countries, where resources for identification and management are often scarce. These concerning facts highlight an ongoing tragedy which can no longer be ignored.

National suicide prevention strategies are essential for elevating suicide prevention on the political agenda. A national strategy and associated action plan are necessary to push forward the implementation of suicide prevention. Without these, efforts are likely to abate and suicide prevention will remain neglected. It is fundamental for governments to take the lead in developing comprehensive multisectoral suicide prevention strategies for the population as a whole and vulnerable persons in particular.

This document aims to support countries in continuing the progress that is being made in preventing suicide and to inspire governments and policy-makers to establish or revise national suicide prevention strategies that are adapted to engage local communities. The document highlights the fact that governments are in a position to lead coordination between multiple stakeholders who may not otherwise collaborate. Governments have a crucial role in developing and strengthening surveillance for both suicide and suicide attempts at the national level. High-quality surveillance for suicide prevention must be perceived as a necessity in order to provide the data to inform necessary action. Without high-quality surveillance, the safety of a population is compromised.

The document presents examples from each region of the World Health Organization (WHO), showing the variety of approaches undertaken in national suicide prevention strategies and the indicators that have been chosen. The elements for developing, implementing and evaluating a national suicide prevention strategy are described and actions to overcome common barriers are presented.

National suicide prevention strategies are essential for working towards the ultimate goal of suicide reduction. The Member States of WHO have committed themselves in the Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020 to work towards the global target of reducing the suicide rate in countries by 10% by 2020. The suicide rate is also one of the indicators for health target 3.4 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The target is to reduce premature mortality from noncommunicable diseases by one third by 2030 through prevention and treatment and the promotion of mental health and well-being. The targets are unlikely to be achieved unless governments actively engage in efforts to prevent suicide.

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