



World Suicide Prevention Day  
Working Together to Prevent Suicide  
September 10, 2019



## Suicide Awareness and Prevention

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The theme for World Mental Health Day 2019 is Suicide Prevention. Each year, suicide ranks among the top 20 leading causes of death globally for people of all ages. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that suicide accounts for over 800,000 deaths per year, which equates to one suicide every 40 seconds<sup>1</sup>. Suicide occurs throughout the lifespan and is the second most common cause of death among young people aged 15-29 years old. A high percentage (79%) of all suicides occur within low and middle-income countries, where the majority of the world's population are based<sup>2,3</sup>.

Research suggests that for every individual who dies by suicide, there may be more than 20 other individuals attempting to end their life<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, for each suicide, approximately 135 people suffer intense grief or are profoundly affected in other ways. This amounts to 108 million people per year who are significantly impacted by suicidal behaviour.

Everyone can make a contribution to prevent suicide. Suicide is universal and knows no boundaries so it affects everyone. The millions of people affected each year by suicidal behaviour have unique insight and distinctive voices. Their experiences are invaluable in informing suicide prevention measures and influencing the provision of supports for suicidal people and those around them. The involvement of people with lived experience of suicide in research, evaluation and intervention is considered effective and should be promoted in the work of every organisation addressing suicidal behaviour<sup>4</sup>.

National suicide prevention strategies are essential in the global strive towards the ultimate goal of suicide reduction. Globally, 38 countries are reported to have national suicide preventions currently in place<sup>5</sup>. A national suicide prevention strategy is essential because it indicates a government's clear commitment to prioritizing and tackling suicide, while providing leadership and guidance on the key evidence-based suicide prevention interventions<sup>6</sup>. Countries are encouraged to continue their work where it is already ongoing, to strengthen suicide prevention efforts, and to place suicide prevention high on the political agenda, regardless of where a country stands currently in terms of suicide rate or suicide prevention efforts. The Member States of the WHO have pledged their support to the Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020 to strive towards the global aim to reduce the suicide rate in countries by 10% by 2020<sup>3</sup>. This suicide rate reduction also encompasses an indicator to the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, to which all UN countries have committed to working towards<sup>7</sup>.

Mental health and suicide are still heavily stigmatised, and these stigmas remain major obstacles to suicide prevention efforts. Those who are left behind or who have attempted to take their life often face considerable stigma within their communities, which can significantly hinder help seeking. As a result, stigma can become a barrier to accessing suicide prevention services. This issue is particularly concerning in those countries wherein suicide acts are still classed as criminal offences. While suicide

has been decriminalised in many western countries, it is still illegal in approximately 25 countries, and an additional 20 countries follow Islamic or Sharia law where suicide attempters may be punished with jail sentences<sup>8</sup>. In addition, stigma can negatively affect recording and reporting of suicide acts. International decriminalisation may aid in decreasing stigmatisation, instigating more help seeking, improving surveillance and informing resource allocation.

Similar to World Mental Health Day observed annually on October 10<sup>th</sup>, World Suicide Prevention Day takes place each year on September 10<sup>th</sup> and is hosted by the International Association for Suicide Prevention. Over 1000 events take place in more than 50 countries each year to mark WSPD. The fundamental aim of the WSPD is to raise awareness of suicide prevention. Those who partake in WSPD also build relationships, reach out to communities and share the message that suicide is preventable. WSPD knows no boundaries - geographic, cultural or social. For some countries, this event has facilitated the development of a national suicide prevention strategy. Furthermore, some countries have extended this day to a week or month in which to observe this important public health issue.

*'Working together to prevent suicide'* is the current theme of World Suicide Prevention Day and it has been chosen internationally to highlight that we can all do our bit to help those who are struggling to cope. This theme emphasises an essential component of effective global suicide prevention efforts that is collaboration. No single organisation, intervention, discipline or person can solve the complex issue of suicide. To come together to prevent suicide is a starting point, to maintain collaboration requires dedication, but success lies in working together to achieve a common goal. In the current environment of limited resources, there has not been a time when embracing collaboration and adopting an integrated approach to suicide prevention has been as important.

Both WMHD and WSPD have a common aim: to remind us that reaching out to people who are going through a difficult time can make a difference. As many people who are feeling low can feel like their problems are a burden for others, or that those around them do not care, reaching out may help to boost their moods and give them hope. The key message is that **suicide is preventable**.

#### References:

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