

# Suicide and Older Adults in Canada

Certain changes in behavior or mood can indicate that an older adult may be considering suicide. It is important to recognize the warning signs, risk factors, and ways to reduce the risk.

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## Warning signs

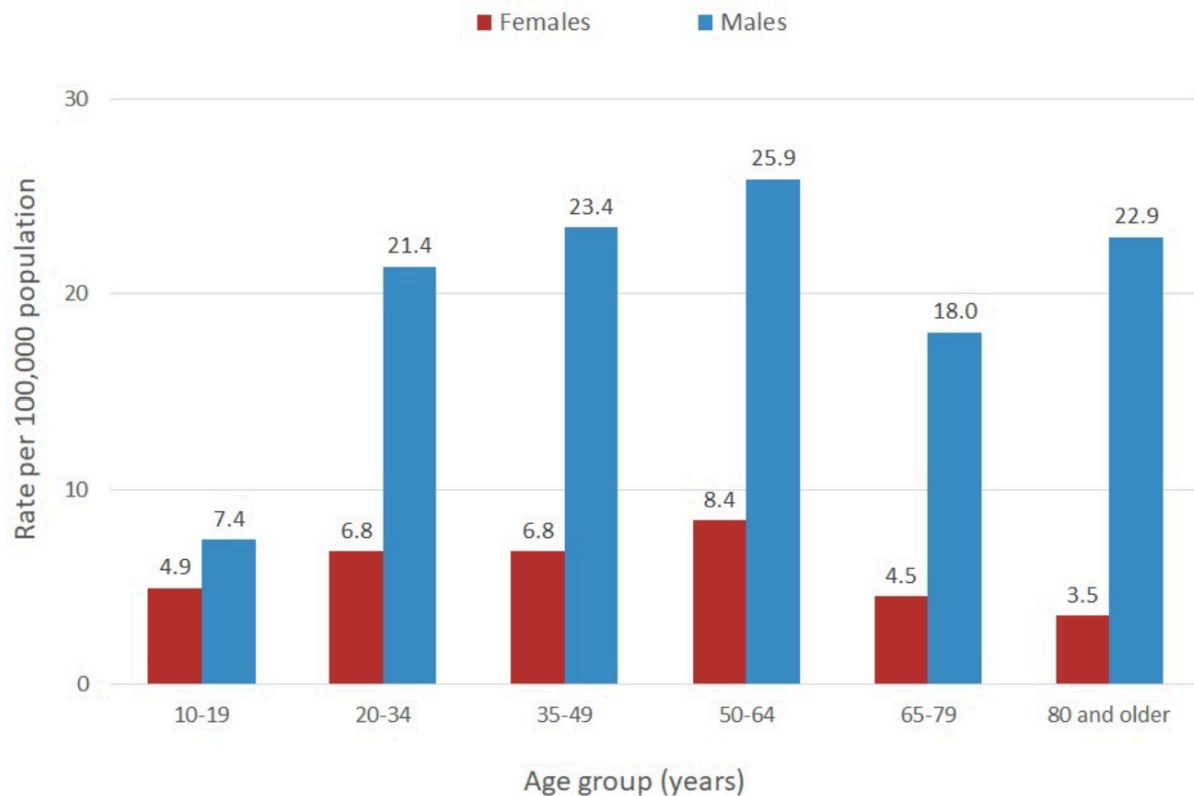
Certain changes in behavior or mood can indicate that an older adult might be considering suicide. Some warning signs include:

- [Losing interest in hobbies or activities they once enjoyed](#)
- [Withdrawing from friends or family](#)
- [Experiencing changes in sleeping or eating patterns](#)

- Expressing feelings of hopelessness or mentioning that they feel like a burden

## Prevalence

CHART: Death rates by suicide per 100,000 population in 2019 (by age and sex)



source: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/suicide-canada-key-statistics-infographic.html>

The incidence of suicide is vastly higher among males than females. Males over the age of 80 have a higher suicide rate than those between 65 and 79.

## Why are older adults at greater risk?

Older adults face a higher risk due to several factors, including:

- **Experiences of Loss:** This can include the loss of health, loved ones, physical mobility, and independence.
- **Significant Life Changes:** Transitions such as retirement, changes in financial status, or moving into care facilities can significantly impact their well-being.

- **Fewer Social Relationships:** older adults often have fewer social connections as loved ones pass away.
- **Living Alone:** Many older adults are more likely to live alone, which can lead to feelings of isolation.
- **Feelings of Being a Burden:** Some older adults may worry about being a burden to their loved ones.
- **Chronic Illness and Pain:** Ongoing health issues can contribute to their vulnerability.
- **Substance Abuse:** is a risk factor
- **Mood disorders:** are particularly prevalent among older adults who die by suicide

### Older Adults: Suicide Risk Factors



These factors contribute to the increased risk older adults face in various aspects of their lives.

Research shows that prior suicidal behavior puts one at greater risk for suicide; those who died by suicide were much more likely to have had a history of self-harm behavior.

Among people who attempt suicide, 1 in 4 older adults will succeed, compared to 1 in 200 youths.

Even if older adults fail a suicide attempt, they are less likely to recover from the effects due to frailty or underlying health conditions.

## What can reduce risk?

1. **Adopting a healthy lifestyle:** This includes maintaining good physical and mental health.
2. **Building supportive relationships:** Having strong connections with friends and family.
3. **Being open to asking for help:** Reaching out when needed is essential.
4. **Finding meaning and purpose in life:** Engaging in activities that give you a sense of fulfillment.
5. **Limiting access to lethal means:** Ensuring that potentially deadly items, such as firearms or harmful medications, are not accessible.

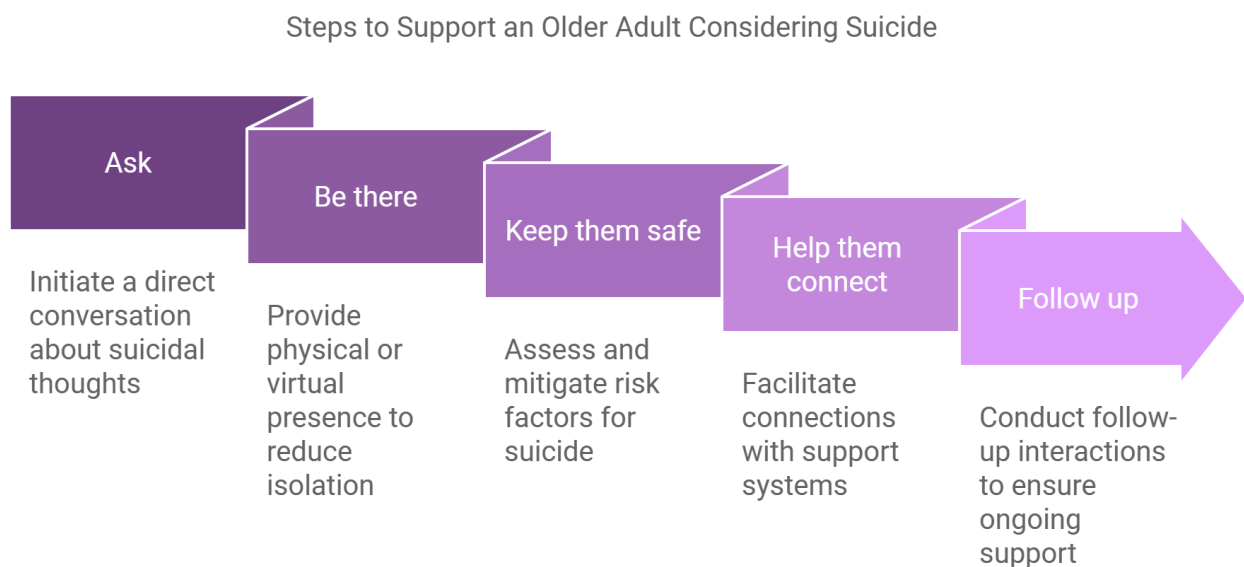
Older males die by suicide more often than any other group because they use more lethal means when attempting suicide.

## Five steps to help an older adult considering suicide

1. **Ask.** Be direct with someone at risk. Ask, "Are you thinking about suicide?" and "How can I help you?" Listen to their responses and acknowledge their emotional pain. Encourage them to focus on reasons to keep living.
2. **Be there.** If possible, be physically there to help alleviate feelings of isolation. If in-person visits aren't feasible, connect via phone or video calls. Collaborate with the individual to identify additional support, and avoid making promises you can't keep.

- 3. Keep them safe.** Check if the person has previously attempted suicide and if they have a specific plan or timeframe in mind. It's also important to know if they have access to their chosen method of self-harm. The more detailed the plan, the higher the risk. Those at imminent risk may require intensive intervention.
- 4. Help them connect.** If a senior in your life is considering suicide, they need to establish support systems they can rely on, including suicide prevention helplines like the Lifeline and local community resources.
- 5. Follow up.** Studies show that follow-up can reduce suicide-related deaths in high-risk groups. After your initial conversation and helping establish a support network, be sure to check-in.

Source: <https://www.bethe1to.com/bethe1to-steps-evidence/>



## Canadian Suicide Hotline

9-8-8 is for anyone who is thinking about suicide or who is worried about someone they know. Call or text 9-8-8 toll-free, anytime for support in English or French.

Call: 9-8-8 (toll-free, 24/7)

Text: 9-8-8 (toll-free, 24/7)

**Sources:**

Older adults and suicide fact sheet

<https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Older-adults-and-suicide-fact-sheet.pdf>

Canadian Clinical Guidelines on the Assessment of Suicide Risk and Prevention of in Older Adults

<https://ccsmh.ca/areas-of-focus/suicide-risk-and-prevention/clinical-guidelines/>

Suicide and Older Adults: What You Should Know

<https://www.ncoa.org/article/suicide-and-older-adults-what-you-should-know/>

Suicide in Canada: Key statistics

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/suicide-canada-key-statistics-infographic.html>

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