

Suicide Prevention among Older Adults



Colorado Office of
Suicide Prevention

June 1, 2006

Jarrod Hindman

Program Manager

Governor's Suicide Prevention Advisory Commission, 1998

- Develop an evidence-based, statewide suicide prevention plan for Colorado
- Plan must respect Colorado's diverse population
- Plan must address suicide and suicidal behavior among all age groups
- Plan must involve many sectors of society
- When the commission came to an end, suicide prevention efforts must not

Governor's Suicide Prevention Advisory Commission, Nov. 1998

Four Principal Areas of Recommendations

- State capacity building
- Public education and information campaign
- Training
- Community-based planning

House Bill 00-1432

Directed the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment to set up the Office of Suicide Prevention to act as the state coordinator for suicide prevention programs throughout the state. The Office of Suicide Prevention was created through legislative action in June 2000.

Allocated \$157,830 to fund this office

House Bill 00-1432

Authorized the office to accept gifts, grants, and donations to assist in performing duties as the state coordinator and creates the Suicide Prevention Coordination Cash Fund.

Made the Office of Suicide Prevention responsible for training, assessments, administering local grants, and conducting a public awareness campaign.

Definition

Older Adult = a person over age 65

Are Older Adults at risk for Suicide?

In the US in 2002:

- Older adults made up 12.3% of the population and accounted for almost 17.5% of all suicides.
- 85% of older adult suicides were male; the number of male suicides in late life was 5.5 times greater than the number of female suicides.
- The suicide rate for men over age 85 was 51.1 per 100,000. That was 4.6 times the 2002 US rate for all ages (11.0 per 100,000).

Are Older Adults at risk for Suicide? (cont'd)

In the US in 2002:

- Although older adults attempt suicide less often than those in other age groups, they have a higher completion rate.
 - For all ages combined, there is an estimated 1 suicide for every 25 attempts.
 - Among the young (15-24 years) there is an estimated 1 suicide for every 100-200 attempts.
 - Over the age of 65, there is 1 estimated suicide for every 4 attempts.

Are Colorado Older Adults at risk for Suicide?

In Colorado in 2002:

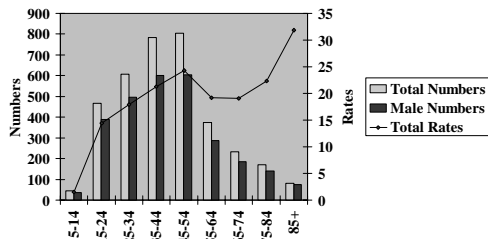
- Older adults made up 10% of the population and they accounted for 13% of all suicides.
- 81% of older adult suicides were male; the number of male suicides over age 65 was approximately 4 times greater than the number of female suicides.
- The suicide rate for men over age 85 was 68.3 per 100,000. That was approximately 4 times the 2002 Colorado rate for all ages (16.0 per 100,000).

Is suicide really a problem?

- More people in Colorado die of suicide than are killed in motor vehicle crashes. (average: 720 deaths; 2,560 hospitalizations)

Colorado Suicide Death Rates

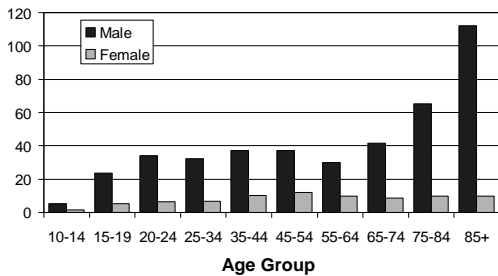
2000-2004

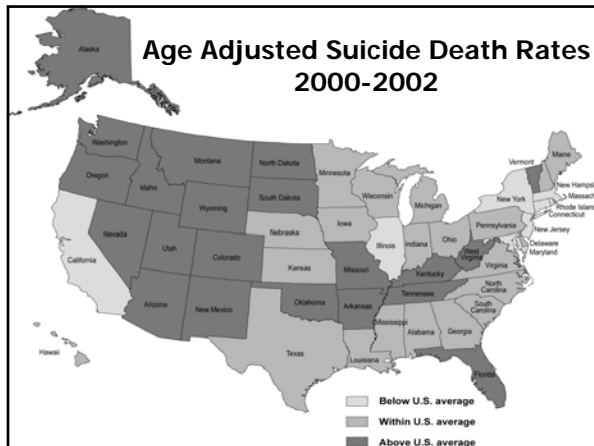


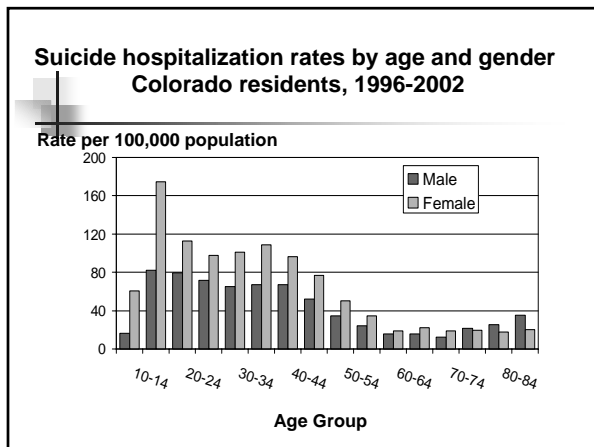
Suicide death rates by age and sex

Colorado residents, 1996-2002

Rate per 100,000 population







- ### Possible Warning Signs
- Depressed mood
 - Loss of interest in things previously enjoyable
 - A marked noticeable change in a person's behavior like lack of attention to grooming
 - Breaking medical regimens (not taking prescription medications)
 - Stock-piling medications or buying a gun

Possible Warning Signs

- Social isolation
- Saying good-byes
- Talking about suicide
- Statements like: “I’m going to go away” or “You won’t have to worry about me anymore.”
- Reckless behavior like increased substance use

Depression is the most common Risk Factor for Suicide

- 90-95% of people who die by suicide have a diagnosable mental illness, predominately depression.

The most common risk factor of suicide is mental illness.
The Surgeon General's Call To Action To Prevent Suicide (1999)

Is Depression a part of Aging?

MORE older adults have a few symptoms of depression but the frequency of depression in older adults is LOWER compared to younger adults.

Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General (1999)

Depression is not a normal part of aging.

Risk Factors unique to Older Adults

Older adults who had attempted suicide said that the two concerns that contributed most to depression and a feeling of hopelessness were:

- Inadequate finances (inflation outpaces social security benefits and Medicare doesn't cover medical expenses, resulting in not being able to pay bills, not knowing where the next meal is coming from and not having enough money to pay bus fare and get out of the house, etc.)
- Social Isolation (following retirement, older adults no longer need to venture out of the house on a daily basis and have interaction with others).

Hill, R. (2005) A Focused Look at Suicide and Suicide Prevention Among Older Adults in Southern Arizona. (Interviews with 38 older adults.)

Risk Factors unique to Older Adults

Other concerns mentioned by older adults:

- The recent death of a loved one (feeling that there is nothing left to live for).
- Physical illness with chronic, uncontrollable pain (not wanting to be a burden to anyone, especially children; not anticipating a full recovery; limited mobility).

Hill, R. (2005) A Focused Look at Suicide and Suicide Prevention Among Older Adults in Southern Arizona

What to do

- ASK— “Are you having thoughts of suicide?”
- LISTEN— “Tell me what’s been going on for you.”
- TAKE ACTION— Connect to supportive services

What actions can I take?

- If risk is *high*: Call 911 or bring the older adult to the emergency room
- If risk is *medium*: Connect the older adult
 - To Crisis Hot Lines 1-800-SUICIDE or 1-800-273-TALK
 - To their primary care physician
 - To mental health services: Mental Health Association of Colorado list of affordable mental health care <http://www.mhacolorado.org/> **303.377.4920**
 - To social supports

Resources

- Local Resources
- Suicide Prevention Coalition of Colorado
<http://www.suicideprevention-colorado.org/>
303.377.3040 X22 Bgierczak@mhacolorado.org
- Office of Suicide Prevention at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
www.cdphe.state.co.us/pp/Suicide/suicidehom.asp
303.692.2539 jarrod.hindman@state.co.us
