

SANE

FACTSHEET

SUICIDAL BEHAVIOUR

QUICK FACTS

Suicide means not only a tragic loss of a life, but also great sadness and soul-searching by the family and friends and community of the person who has died. Over 3,300 Australians died by suicide in 2019 (AIHW, 2020). For every person who dies this way, it is estimated at least 20 more attempt suicide (ABS, 2009).

Death by suicide is highest for men aged 45-49 or 80-84 (AIHW, 2020). Men make up around three quarters of deaths by suicide, although attempted suicide is more common in women than men (AIHW, 2020).

SUICIDE AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Around 20% of Australians are affected by some form of mental health issue every year, yet many do not receive the treatment and support they need (ABS, 2008). The suicide rate among people with a mental health issue is at least seven times higher than the general population. It is one of the main causes of premature death in this group.

Many people who die by suicide have experienced a mental health issue. Often people who are considering suicide are dealing with a combination of mental ill-health and difficult life events. But with effective treatment, social support and time, many who have tried to end their life, or considered ending their life, can go on to live full and meaningful lives.

WHY DO PEOPLE FEEL SUICIDAL?

For people with a mental health issue, the distress caused by their experiences can be so great they may feel an overwhelming desire to end their life. People recently discharged from psychiatric care are at higher risk of suicide. Knowing someone who has recently died by suicide may also increase risk.

Suicide can also be related to distressing life events such as unemployment, relationship breakdown, being in debt or social isolation. Sometimes people feel like they are a burden to others and that loved ones would be better off without them. A suicide attempt may be an early sign of a mental health issue developing, so it is important to get help from a doctor. For someone with a mental health issue, the following may contribute to the risk of suicide:

Depressive illness

Many people who attempt suicide have experienced major depression or bipolar disorder,

and may experience very negative or self-critical thinking and periods of very low mood.

Related: [Depression](#), [Bipolar disorder](#)

Psychotic symptoms

Some may attempt suicide because they are confused and distressed by hallucinations or delusions, or to bring 'relief' from untreated symptoms of psychosis.

Related: [Psychosis](#)

Borderline personality disorder (BPD)

People with BPD may harm themselves or behave in a suicidal way. Some find self-harm helps them cope temporarily with intense, negative emotions.

Related: [Borderline personality disorder \(BPD\)](#)

Drugs and alcohol

Harmful use of drugs (such as marijuana, heroin or amphetamines) and alcohol is closely related to suicidal behaviour.

Related: [Cannabis & psychosis](#)

WHAT IS SELF-HARM?

Self-harm means any behaviour which involves the deliberate causing of pain or injury to oneself. Self-harm is usually a response to distress – often the distress associated with mental health issues or trauma. In the short-term, some people find that it provides temporary relief from the psychological distress they are experiencing. While people who self-harm do not necessarily mean to kill themselves, it often becomes a compulsive and dangerous activity, and requires careful professional help.

Related: [Self-harm](#)

With support and time, many people who have experienced suicidal thoughts or actions come to see things differently and live full lives. Visit [Better Off With you](#) to find real stories of people who have tried or considered ending their lives, and how they found their way through.

RESOURCES

Support for suicidal thoughts and actions (and if you are concerned about someone)

[Kids Helpline](#) 1800 55 1800

[Lifeline](#) (24-hour crisis telephone counselling) 13 11 14

[Suicide Callback Service](#) 1300 659 467

Call 000 for urgent medical attention or police attendance

Information and advice on mental health issues

Contact [SANE counselling support](#) on 1800 187 263 or online, available Monday to Friday 10am-10pm AEST/AEDT.

Related SANE resources

[Finding help if you're feeling suicidal](#)

[How to help if someone is suicidal](#)

REFERENCES

1. AIHW National Mortality Database and ABS Causes of Death, Australia 2020
<https://www.aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/data/deaths-by-suicide-in-australia/suicide-deaths-over-time>
2. Australian Department of Health, The Mental Health of Australians 2: 8.1 Prevalence in the Australian population, May 2009
<https://www.aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/data/deaths-by-suicide-in-australia/suicide-deaths-over-time>
3. ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2008. National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing: summary of results, 2007. ABS cat. no. 4326.0. Canberra: ABS.