



A Clinician's Perspective On Aging & Suicide Risk

A note before reading: This piece contains links to sources that may include sensitive content. We include these source links to provide context for our research. Our intention is to help increase suicide awareness, prevention and sensitivity, while also doing the most possible to be responsible and protective of our readers.

Thanks to advances in medicine, people aged 65 and older are now the fastest-growing age group worldwide. In the U.S., the population age 65+ grew nearly five times faster than the total population (U.S. Census) over the last century.

Our Elders are Vulnerable

In 2022, adults aged 85 and older had a suicide rate more than double the national average — and those aged 75–84 followed closely behind (Los Angeles Outpatient Center). Despite these numbers, we can do so much more to understand how we can protect our elders' mental health.

Unlike younger age groups, older adults who attempt suicide are much more likely to complete it for a number of reasons:

- They're less likely to be found in time or rescued.
- Their physical frailty makes recovery less likely after an attempt.
- Easier access to lethal means, i.e. 70% of suicides in this group involve a handgun (National Library of Medicine).

Unfortunately, it's not easy to foresee these tragedies. Many older adults who die by suicide don't have a documented behavioral health diagnosis. Sixty percent of older men and 50% of older women who died by suicide did not meet the criteria for a mental health condition (National Institutes of Health).

Loneliness, Illness and Loss are Risk Factors

As people age, they often experience chronic illness, declining mobility and the loss of independence that comes with entering long-term care. The death of a spouse or close friend, pain from conditions like cancer or

[More on Page 2](#)



Sixty percent of older men and half of older women who died by suicide did not have a documented behavioral health diagnosis.

National Institutes of Health

LCT00201-20250617





COPD, and cognitive decline from diseases like dementia all contribute to a sense of hopelessness. Social isolation is the greatest risk — research shows that lacking meaningful social connection is linked to a significantly increased risk of early death from all causes, including suicide (National Library of Medicine).

How to Help

Suicide prevention in older adults is more than just screening for depression or prescribing medication. It's about fostering a sense of belonging, purpose and connection. There are some simple ways we can make a difference in the lives of older people:

Spend time with them. A regular visit, a shared meal or a walk in the park are all moments that can matter more than you think.

Call or video chat. Even if you can't be there in person, consistent contact lets them know they're remembered.

Invite them along. Include older loved ones in your daily activities, such as grocery shopping, attending a community event or spending a quiet afternoon at home.

Offer practical help. Many older adults can't drive or navigate technology easily. Offer rides, help with errands or set up devices so they can connect with others online.

Encourage involvement. Help them find local senior centers, faith communities or volunteer opportunities. Even inviting their advice on family matters can remind them of their value.

Check in often. Loneliness is not just about being alone, but about feeling forgotten. A text, a postcard or a home-cooked meal left on the doorstep can lift a dark day.

Secure their surroundings. Loved ones might have the opportunity to address lethal means for suicide, potentially with the help of a health care professional, by helping to secure an older family member's home. Asking the questions about plans non-judgmentally can provide a lot of information that can be folded into safety planning, including securing firearms and other objects that can be used for an attempt.

Support is always available. The **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline** offers 24/7 access to trained mental health professionals. A single phone call can save a life.

#StopSuicide

Help is available right now. If you or someone you know is in crisis, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 9-8-8 or 800-273-8255.

Reviewed by Senior Director of Clinical Strategy & Research, LCSW, BCBA, CCM and Clinical Consultant, LMHC.

