



# Delaware County Suicide Prevention Awareness Task Force

## Suicide among Older Adults

PA is the third oldest state. Nationally, suicide among the aged, among older men especially, is increasing. Elders make up about 13% of the population and 20% of all suicides. Elders, especially men, use highly lethal means such as firearms. Elders make less use of crisis lines and mental health services.

### What's the problem?

- In the United States and Pennsylvania the highest rates of suicide are among older adults!
- Many older adult victims recently saw a primary care physician: 20% that day and 40% within one week.
- Older adults who complete suicide are more likely to experience a late onset episode of depression.

### What are the key risk factors of elder suicide?

• Depression, including late-onset depression	• Poor social support
• Co-morbid disorders, e.g., diabetes, heart disease, stroke, other chronic illnesses	• Barriers to accessing health care, especially mental health and substance abuse treatment
• White male, Veteran	• Access to firearms
• Widowed, divorced	• Low self-esteem, poor coping skills
• Social isolation	• Financial loss

### What are some important protective factors?

• Readily available family and social supports	• Restricted access to highly lethal means of suicide
• Mental, physical and substance abuse Care	• Problem solving and conflict resolution skills
• Easy access to services and support.	• Beliefs that discourage suicide.

### What are the warning signs of suicide?

Contact a mental health or medical provider if you encounter any of these behaviors:

• Hopelessness	• Rage, anger, revenge, recklessness
• Feeling trapped/no way out/helplessness	• Increasing alcohol and/or drug use
• Withdrawal from family, friends	• Anxiety, agitation, sleep problems
• Dramatic mood changes	• No reason for living, desire to die

### What are the immediate danger signs of suicide?

Immediately call 9-1-1 or a crisis center (or 1-800-273-TALK) if you encounter:

- Someone threatening to hurt or kill herself or himself
- Someone looking for ways to take her or his life (i.e., a gun, pills, other lethal means)
- Someone talking, writing, or drawing about death, dying, or suicide

### What can you do to help prevent elder suicide?

- Increase depression and suicide risk screening in primary care settings
- Make sure that all family members know the warning and danger signs of suicide and what to do.
- Remove unused firearms and safely store/lock/disassemble firearms kept in the home.

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