



## International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP)

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### Responding to global suicide-related risk arising from the COVID-19 pandemic

#### Statement from the Executive Committee of the International Association for Suicide Prevention.

On 11 March 2020, the WHO declared the COVID-19 virus a global pandemic. To help reduce the spread of the disease, governments have adopted a variety of community-wide measures, including social distancing and household lockdowns, quarantine of infected and exposed individuals, restrictions on international and domestic travel, closure of schools and 'non-essential' workplaces, and cancellation of all large-scale public events. At present there is a lack of robust evidence about the impact of the pandemic and of these governmental responses to the pandemic on suicidal behaviour. However, evidence relating to previous public health emergencies, while limited, gives reason for concern. Deaths by suicide increased in the USA during the 1918–19 influenza pandemic (Wasserman 1992), and studies on Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) found an increase of suicide among the elderly (Cheung et al, 2008; Yip et al, 2010, Chan et al, 2006), associated with social disengagement, mental stress, anxiety, and fears of being a burden on the family. Recent informed commentaries suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic may lead to an increase in suicidal behaviour due to the development or exacerbation of known risk factors for self-harm such as mental ill-health, social isolation, entrapment, grieving, loneliness, hopelessness, unresolved anger, stigma, unemployment, financial strain, domestic violence, and excessive alcohol consumption (Holmes et al, 2020; Gunnell et al, 2020).

The International Association for Suicide Prevention, in collaboration with national and international organisations, intends to play a leading role in responding to global suicide-related risks arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and other future public health emergencies. The IASP urgently needs your help to develop and implement a strategic plan to reduce COVID-19-related suicidal behaviour. We call upon you to work in collaboration with the IASP, sharing research and other evidence from your country about the impact of the pandemic on suicidal behaviour so that we can collectively integrate sources of key information and insights from your membership, from external stakeholders and, wherever possible, from governments.

IASP is building a central pool of resources (expertise, research, guidelines for good practice) which will be available to support your organisation in its important work to mitigate the potentially damaging impact of the pandemic on population mental health and suicidal behaviour. If you need assistance or wish to collaborate with us, please contact us directly at [admin@iasp.info](mailto:admin@iasp.info). Together we can deliver our suicide prevention work more effectively both during the pandemic and during its aftermath.

#### IASP Executive Committee

14 May 2020

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