

Social Determinants of Suicide

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE ON SUICIDE



Background

Suicide is a major public health problem worldwide, influenced by a wide range of societal level factors. The social determinants of health and equity are described as ‘the conditions in which we live work and play’. These include, but are not limited to, income distribution and poverty, employment conditions, access to education, violence and trauma, social isolation; culture and discrimination; infrastructure such as communication and transport; and commercial factors like access to food, and regulation of firearms, alcohol and gambling. Addressing these underlying determinants through public health initiatives, including universal interventions aimed at entire populations and selective interventions targeting sub-groups have been shown to improve health of populations. However, adoption of these measures in the suicide prevention field is limited. Adopting these approaches to suicide prevention could reduce suicide by improving lives and preventing the onset of suicidal distress. Preventive and early interventions can also reduce the need for costly mental health treatments and ease the burden on health and social systems.

In recent years, National Suicide Prevention Strategies in many countries (e.g., Australia, Canada, Ireland, England and New Zealand) have incorporated a public health approach to address the underlying social causes of suicide. Our SIG, established in 2025, aims to share information on new knowledge, policies, and interventions that address the social determinants of suicide, facilitate international collaboration in research, and foster interdisciplinary knowledge exchange and collaboration across research, policy, and practice.

What is needed

- High-quality research examining the association between social and commercial factors, and suicide is needed.
- High-quality research examining the impact of social policies/interventions on suicide is needed.
- Whole-of-government, multisectoral initiatives are required to address the social determinants of suicide.

Facts & Figures

Well-established evidence on the associations between suicide and the following social determinants: housing and the environment; income; unemployment; and early childhood development.

Limited evidence on the associations between suicide and determinants of health outcomes, including education, social inclusion and nondiscrimination, working-life conditions, affordable health care services, structural conflict, and food insecurity.

While high-quality studies on the effectiveness of social policies and interventions on suicide remain limited, there is compelling evidence supporting interventions that target income protection.

Commercial factors, such as the widespread availability and promotion of alcohol and gambling are a significant contributor to suicide risk, yet are often overlooked in suicide prevention efforts.

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Resources

- [Understanding the Social Determinants of Suicide](#)
- [What Can be Done to Decrease Suicide](#)
- [Socio-economic and Environmental Determinants of Suicide](#)

Useful References

- **The social determinants of suicide: an umbrella review.**
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- **'Playing to extinction': The commercial determinants of gambling-related harm, self-harm and suicide.**
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Lancet Public Health. 2024;9:e816—e824. doi: 10.1016/S2468-2667(24)00158-0
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