

Suicide Prevention: One World Connected was the theme for this year's World Suicide Prevention Day on September 10th, 2014. This theme helps remind us that we are all connected to each other through shared experiences, sorrow, hope, determination, commitment, and compassion.

Suicide is a major public health problem. The psychological pain that leads each of these individuals to take their lives is unimaginable. Their deaths leave families and friends bereaved, and often have a major ripple effect on communities.

Each year approximately 3800 people in Canada die by suicide. It is one of the leading causes of death among young people. While it is easy to see this as an issue for 'other people' and disconnect ourselves from the problem, suicidal ideation and suicide are serious risks among Newfoundlanders. In fact, suicide rates per 100,000 population are higher in the Western Region than the Provincial average. In a Provincial survey of high school students, 17% reported seriously considering suicide. An alarming 14.1% had made plans and 8.4% had attempted suicide.

We often feel powerless against such an overwhelming and emotionally-charged act such as suicide. However, we can all have a role to play in helping those at risk. Connectedness is essential to individuals who may be vulnerable to suicide. Social isolation can increase the risk of suicide. However, having strong social connections can protect against it. We each have the opportunity to reach out and connect with someone who seems to have separated themselves from others. Reaching out to someone to offer them support and friendship may be a life-saving act.

Unfortunately, fear of stigma leads 60% of people with mental health problems to avoid seeking help. We also each have the capacity to help break down stigma and fear in our communities. We can each work to make our own conversations more inclusive and let others know that it is okay to talk about mental health and to access services if needed. Let others know that, with you, there is no need to fear being labeled or treated differently.

Knowing the warning signs of suicidal thinking can help each of us to be better equipped to notice risky behaviours and address these with our friends and family. Some of the warning signs to look for include:

- Mood changes or extreme changes in attitudes and ideas
- Feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, purposelessness, and guilt
- Withdrawal from family, friends and interests
- Loss of interest in usual activities or daily routines
- Change in eating, sleeping, personal appearance, or lack of self-care
- Increase in drug and alcohol use or risk taking behaviour

- Giving away personal possessions, telling final wishes and/or making plans for death
- Looking for ways to die (ex: pills, weapons or other means)
- Writing or talking about death, dying or suicide, or an expressed intent to commit suicide (ex: “I wish I was dead”, “there is nothing to live for anymore” or “people will be better off without me”)

If you suspect someone you know may be suicidal, talk to him or her directly, honestly, and openly. Be a good listener and encourage your friend or family member to talk with a professional. Don't promise that you won't tell anyone because you need to talk to someone yourself. You cannot carry this burden alone. Talk to a health professional in your area or contact the Mental Health Crisis Line for support and direction. If you need immediate support, access your local hospital or police.

For more information or to access services, contact the NL Health Line or visit www.westernhealth.nl.ca to find contact information for your local Mental Health & Addiction Services office.

NL Health Line 1-888-709-2929
Mental Health Crisis Line 1-888-737-4668