



WISCONSIN'S GROWING SUICIDE CHALLENGE INCREASES DRIVEN BY THOSE 45 OR OLDER

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Today's young people are the future. They are the workers, business owners, mothers, and fathers of tomorrow. It is sad when any person dies, but it seems particularly tragic when that person is young with many years ahead of her or him.

Since 2000, Wisconsin has reduced the number of deaths of young people under 25 by 12%. Accidents and homicides – two of the top three causes of death among this group – have declined 18% and 19%, respectively.

Unfortunately, suicide – the second leading cause of death for young people – rose 14% during 2000-2017. During those years, Wisconsin lost almost 109,000 potential years of life due to suicide among its youngest residents.

This growing problem is not exclusive to the young. Since 2000, the number of suicides among all ages jumped 56% (see table opposite). In 2017, Wisconsin averaged about 17 suicides per week, more than four times the number of homicides.

BY AGE

The increase during 2000-2017 was driven primarily by those 45 or older. Suicides rose 143% among those 45 to 64 years of age and more than 60% among those 65 or older (see table opposite).

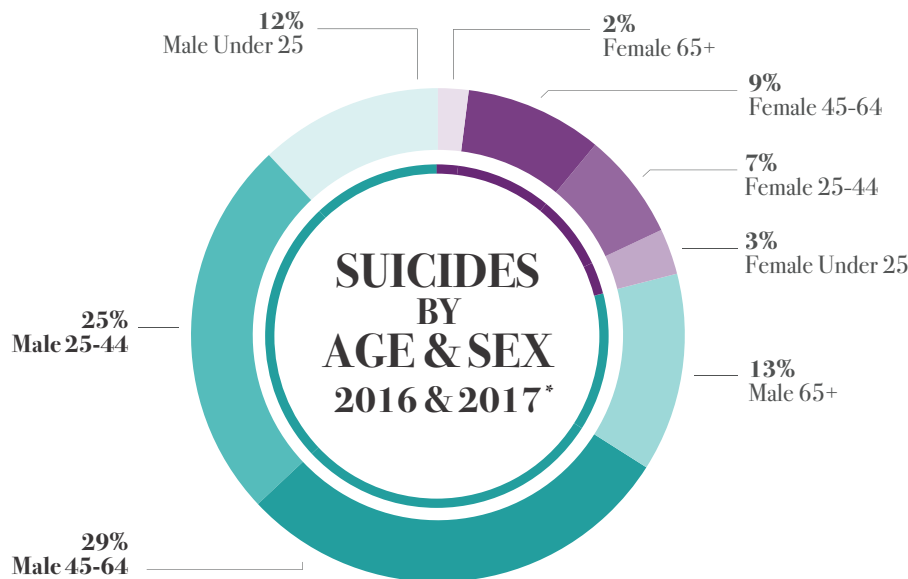
Part of the reason for these increases is that the size of these age groups grew as the populous baby boomer generation aged. Suicide rates, or the number of suicide deaths per 100,000 people, eliminate this population effect.

These rates are shown in the bottom half of the table opposite. While suicide is a growing problem among all ages, it has become particularly acute among those 45 to 64 and those 85 or older. Among the former age group, the suicide rate climbed seven points during 2007-2017 to 22.4 per 1,000 people. This group now has the highest suicide rate. Among those 85 or older, the rate climbed eight points to 18.7. In 2000, Wisconsin's most senior population had the lowest rate of suicide; by 2017, it was third highest.

MALES MORE LIKELY?

While suicide affects both sexes, males accounted for 79% of these deaths during 2017. In fact, the male share has hovered around this percentage since at least 1989.

The problem is even more acute for 25 to 64-year-old men. They made up a little over a quarter of Wisconsin's total population in 2016-2017, but accounted for 54% of all suicides (see chart). By comparison, women this age accounted for the same percentage of the state's population but committed less than 16% of all suicides.



*The number of suicides for 2016 and 2017 are combined due to the volatility of sex and age data from year to year.

SUICIDES BY AGE 2000 - 2017

NUMBER			
Age	2000	2017	% CHG
All	588	915	55.6
15-24	99	112	13.1
25-44	245	293	19.6
45-64	145	352	142.8
65-84	74	122	64.9
85+	15	24	60

RATE*			
Age	2000	2017	% CHG
All	11.0	15.8	4.8
15-24	12.3	14.4	2.1
25-44	16.4	20.6	4.2
45-64	15.4	22.4	7.0
65-84	11.4	14.8	3.4
85+	10.7	18.7	8.0

*Per 100,000 People

Data source: Wisconsin Department of Health Services

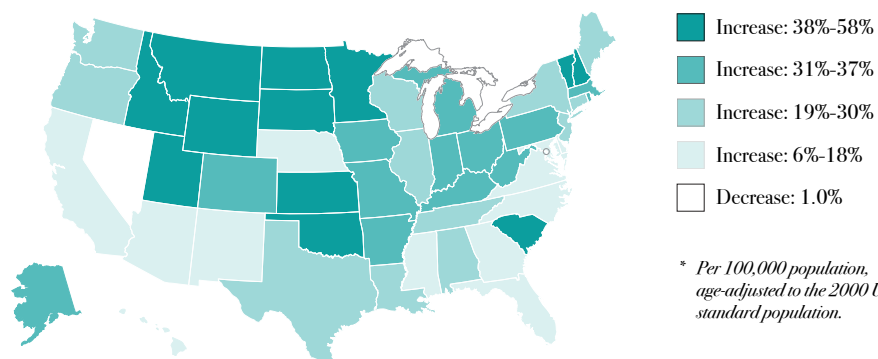
These numbers are grim, but the problem is more pervasive than what these figures suggest. First, the number of attempted suicides is about 30 times higher than the number of deaths. According to the National Survey of Drug Use and Mental Health, about 1.4 million Americans attempted suicide in 2017, while the Center for Disease Control reported about 47,000 deaths by suicide nationally in that year.

Second, while men are more likely to commit suicide, women are more likely to attempt it. The same National Survey of Drug Use and Mental Health found that for every 100 men who said they had attempted suicide in the last year, 140 females reported a similar attempt.

This challenge is not unique to Wisconsin as suicide rates have risen across the country. The question for policymakers is: "What can be done to reverse this trend?" The recently released recommendations from the Speaker's Task Force on Suicide Prevention and the legislation to follow might be a step in the right direction. ♦

% CHANGE IN ANNUAL SUICIDE RATE* BY STATE FROM 1999-2001 TO 2014-2016

Source: CDC



* Per 100,000 population, age-adjusted to the 2000 U.S. standard population.