Suicide Prevention: A Call for Policy Change and Public Health Action, World Health Assembly 2025

Co-organized by the Kingdom of the Netherlands and United for Global Mental Health, in collaboration with the WHO

Session timing and logistics

Date: Tuesday, 20 May 2025

Time: 08:30 am – 10:00 am

Location: Nations Business Centre, Rue du Pré-de-la-Bichette 1, 1201 Geneva, Switzerland

Session Overview

Globally, an estimated 720,000 individuals lose their lives to suicide each year and for each person who dies, at least 20 more have attempted suicide.[1] While it affects people of all ages, it is the third leading cause of death among 15-29 year olds, and close to 8,000 children between the ages of five and 14 are estimated to have died by suicide worldwide in 2021.[2] Given the global burden of suicide deaths and its devastating impact on the community, suicide prevention needs to be recognised as a priority public health issue.

Targeted policy change can lead to a decline in suicide rates. Discriminatory legislation such as criminalisation of suicide in at least 24 countries worldwide[3], deters people from seeking the help they need, increasing the risk of suicide, and exacerbating the stigma and shame associated with suicide.

Research shows that suicide rates can be reduced through a combination of factors, including repealing discriminatory legislation such as the criminalisation of suicide, and restricting access to lethal means of suicide, investing in psychosocial support, early identification and intervention in case of suicidal behaviours, and responsible media reporting[4].

Objectives of this session

- To provide WHO member states with the latest information and best practices on suicide prevention and demonstrate why this needs to be a global priority at the WHA and the UNGA HLM on NCDs and Mental Health
- Provide civil society organisations a platform to share evidence regarding various suicide prevention strategies that have been successful worldwide
- Foster global partnerships to achieve a reduction in suicide mortality

Session flow

75-minute roundtable discussion with remarks from suggested speakers.

Run of show

Timing	Section	Speaker	Question / statement overview
5 minutes	Opening remarks	Marjolijn Sonnema, Deputy Minister of Health of the Netherlands	Opening remarks: The importance of international collaboration and exchange on suicide prevention
5 minutes	Setting the scene	Devora Kestel, WHO Director of Department on Mental Health and Substance Use	Outlining means of effective interventions
45 minutes	**Interactive panel discussion with five experts:** **Moderator:** Paul Bekkers, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations - Jo Robinson (President, International Association for Suicide Prevention, IASP) - Dr. Ayanthi Karunarathne (Director, Medical Services Ministry of Health, Sri Lanka) - Pieter Ventevogel (Senior Mental Health & Psychosocial Support Officer, UNHCR) - David Johnson (Founder, Let's Unpack it, Barbados & Secretariat member, Caribbean Suicide Decriminalisation Coalition) - Zion Ameh (Founder, Mandate Health Initiative, Nigeria)		
15 minutes	Member state statements: ● India - Dr. Kaustubh Giri, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India ● Guyana - Dr. Leslie Ramasammy, Permanent Representative to the UN and Former Health Minister ● Cambodia - H.E. Professor Sok Chou, Deputy Director General for Health, Ministry of Health ● Japan - Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan ● Bangladesh - Dr. Mohiuddin Al Helal, Senior Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare ● OHCHR - Mr Khaled Hassine, Human Rights Officer, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ● UNICEF - Ms. Zeinab Hijazi, Global Lead for Mental Health, UNICEF		

5 minutes	Closing	Sarah Kline, CEO United for Global Mental Health	Summarizing the session and looking ahead

REFERENCES

[1] World Health Organization. (2024, August 29). Suicide. https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/suicide

[2] Michalek, I.M., Koczkodaj, P., Michalek, M. et al. Unveiling the silent crisis: global burden of suicide-related deaths among children aged 10–14 years. World J Pediatr 20, 371–391 (2024). https://doi.org/10.1007/s12519-023-00781-z

[3] United for Global Mental Health. (2024, September 10). Decriminalising suicide: Saving lives, reducing stigma. Retrieved March 12, 2025, from https://unitedgmh.org/the-global-advocate/decriminalising-suicide-saving-lives-reducing-stigma/

[4] World Health Organization. (n.d.). Suicide Prevention. Retrieved March 11, 2025, from https://www.who.int/health-topics/suicide#tab=tab_2