

Advocacy for a National Suicide Prevention Strategy

for a brighter
Quebec

Le collectif

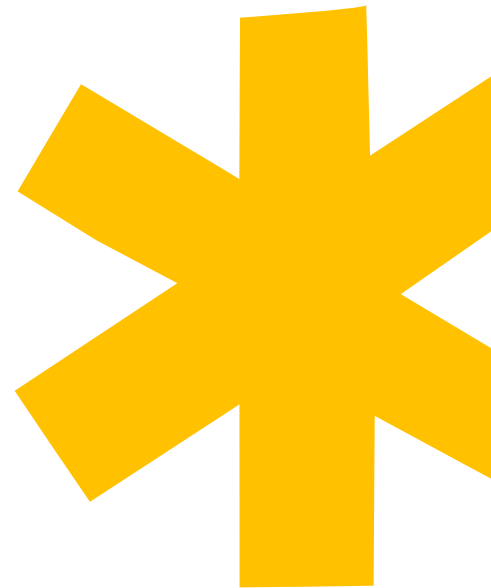
For a National Suicide
Prevention Strategy

September 2019

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- There are 3 suicides and 80 suicide attempts every day, in Quebec.
 - Many families and communities are devastated.
 - Considerable human costs.
 - Major economic costs.
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A suicidal person does not want to die; he or she wants their pain to end. He or she feels hopeless and has an altered perception of reality. This ambivalence about death explains why it is important to act quickly and appropriately to strengthen the human safety net around vulnerable people.

The vast majority of suicide survivors report being happy to be alive.



Preamble

Today, 3 new families and communities will experience one of the worst tragedies imaginable. Three other families and communities will experience the same tomorrow, and three more the day after tomorrow. To effectively and sustainably address suicide, Quebec needs a comprehensive strategic plan to help ensure accessibility, continuity and quality of services in all regions of the province. With dedicated funding, such a plan would allow us to better focus on the fundamental right to security of each of our citizens. Knowing that suicide can be prevented and that we have all available tools to do it, we have a collective responsibility to ensure the safety of the most vulnerable people of our society.



Current situation

Same number of deaths as 40 years ago

Because it leads to the permanent and irreversible loss of an important person for loved ones and society, each suicide is one too many. It is estimated that for each suicide, 7 to 10 people are left in grief and having to deal with a heavy burden, not to mention the many other people who are affected. Add to this the impact on society of the estimated 28,000 suicide attempts each year.¹

For several years, rates have remained the same in Quebec. The annual number of suicide deaths today is the same as it was 40 years ago. This is equivalent to more than 43,000 lives lost, a population the size of the city of Boucherville.²

Some demographics have higher rates of suicide and suicidal behavior, and also experience levels of distress that need to be urgently addressed:

- First Nations and Inuit communities;
- Men, especially ages 35 to 64;
- People with mental health or addiction-related disorders;
- People who have attempted suicide;
- People living in physically and socially disadvantaged environments;
- Some professions such as emergency workers, farmers, etc;
- Members of the LGBTQ2+ community.

The social landscape in Quebec has recently undergone transformations that must be considered in weighing our options in terms of suicide prevention. Young people are experiencing more anxiety and depressive disorders, 3 people use digital platforms

to express their distress and absenteeism due to mental disorders is on the rise. ⁴ Also of concern is the fact that an estimated 90% of people who take their own lives are suffering from a mental health problem or mental disorder.⁵

A major human and economic costs

Suicide and attempted suicide have considerable human, social and financial costs:

- Human costs for bereaved people, people affected by suicide and caregivers;
- Costs related to absenteeism from work and loss of productivity;
- Insurance costs;
- Costs related to premature death and years of lost income;
- Social services and medical care costs.

A study published in 2015 estimated that one suicide costs Quebec society between \$500,000 and \$1 million⁶.

On the other hand, there is evidence of the cost-effectiveness of preventive mental health intervention. One study showed that implementing suicide prevention programs among Canadians was cost-effective and could even result in significant savings. In addition to direct benefits, several suicide prevention programs have shown indirect benefits.

A national suicide prevention strategy

What Quebec needs to do to reduce the number of suicide deaths and attempts

The World Health Organization's (WHO) flagship measure to reduce suicide is a national suicide prevention strategy.⁸ However, no such strategy has been in place in Quebec for 15 years. There are programs and services available but they are often too fragmented, isolated or inconsistent across the province.

The implementation of national strategies often has a significant positive impact. In Quebec, the "Stratégie québécoise d'action face au suicide, S'entraider pour la vie (1998)", whose main orientations are still relevant in 2019, has led to considerable progress and essential services being implemented. Once the Strategy was implemented, suicide rates decreased by 4.1% annually after 1999 and over the next ten years for males, and by 2.6% annually for females. Teenagers have seen their suicide rate decrease by an average of 9.5% annually.⁹ In Japan, the implementation of coordinated programs in the community has led to a further reduction in suicide deaths than in Quebec. In England, where a national strategy is in place, suicide rates are currently close to the lowest rates ever recorded and remain lower than in other European countries.¹⁰

Under legislation passed in 2012, the Government of Canada published the Federal Framework for Suicide Prevention in 2016. In addition, in May 2019, a motion to create a national suicide prevention plan was unanimously passed by all members of Parliament in the House of Commons. Quebec must now follow suit and go further.

For example⁷:

- Rapid response teams can cut health costs by half for each young person with suicidal thoughts;
- Expanding access to psychotherapy saves about \$2 for every dollar spent, in addition to relieving pain.

It is time that we make use of our expertise and effective tools at our disposal.



We have what it takes to act now

Globally, since the 1990s, there has been a significant improvement in knowledge of suicide and its prevention. We now have a better understanding of high-risk groups, risk and protective factors, effective interventions, etc.

Quebec is no exception; knowledge has greatly improved both from a clinical and research perspective. The necessary knowledge exists. We now need leadership, engagement and investments that translate into concrete and preventive actions.

Benefits of a national suicide prevention strategy¹¹

- Clearly signals the government's willingness to stand up for suicide prevention;
- Provides more inspirational and unifying leadership;
- Increases the effectiveness of the various prevention measures by bringing them together under a logical and coherent framework;
- Identifies stakeholders;
- Brings together stakeholders and engages the public;
- Provides guidance on essential prevention activities;
- Establishes a continuum of measures and outcomes to be achieved (e.g., reducing suicide rates among targeted groups, reducing hospital admissions due to attempted suicide).

for more
resources



The need to innovate

Significant areas of intervention remain to be developed or strengthened in Quebec.

This is the case with early prevention and mental health promotion, especially among young people. It has become necessary to help them develop their resilience by equipping them to better cope with difficulties and distress before they lose hope. Promotion programs must start at an early age and continue over the years.

We can also be creative in developing new partnerships. In Quebec, workplaces are less involved in suicide prevention than workplaces in other countries and regions. Yet, suicide prevention is cost-effective, both from a human and financial perspective.

There are also promising initiatives in the field of new technologies. Quebec has equipped itself to promote the development of suicide prevention through these tools, which must be integrated into our approaches.

At the government level, suicide prevention should not only fall under the purview of the ministry of health and social services. Other ministries (such as public safety, labour, education, youth, etc.) also need to be involved in what needs to be a whole-of-government strategy.

For a national strategy to be effective, it must take into account Quebec's social and cultural context, involve several sectors and stakeholders including those affected, put forward local and community approaches in addition to comprehensive approaches, allocate sufficient resources to achieve the desired outcomes, include effective planning and regular evaluation.

We must ensure accessibility, continuity and quality of the continuum of services, with a focus on mental health promotion, prevention, intervention and postvention

Examples of concrete measures

A national suicide prevention strategy must include concrete actions. Here are some examples of effective measures as recommended by the WHO and several experts in suicide prevention in Quebec.

Universal measures

Target the general public and include both health promotion and prevention initiatives.

Examples :

- Strengthen mental health promotion programs and campaigns, including by reinforcing coping strategies in young people, promoting skills to better address life's challenges and developing workplace intervention initiatives;
- Support and promote 1-866-APPELLE, Quebec's suicide prevention helpline, crisis lines and other assistance and listening services;
- Financially support resources for suicide prevention, mental health and addiction prevention and treatment initiatives;
- Raise public awareness through awareness campaigns in Quebec;
- Control access to means by which people take their own lives;
- Facilitate access to psychotherapy;
- Support and promote online intervention;
- Foster new partnerships in suicide prevention, particularly with workplaces;
- Support suicide prevention and mental health research and evaluation.

Selective measures

Target groups and communities that are considered high risk or that have one or more risk factors based on research and evidence.

Examples :

- Develop, promote and support networks of gatekeepers for suicide prevention, particularly among vulnerable groups and demographics with higher suicide rates;

- Implement targeted measures for groups that are more vulnerable or have higher suicide rates or support them in developing and implementing their own regional and local strategies through the creation and strengthening of sustainable partnerships (e.g., First Nations and Inuit communities, professions including emergency workers and farmers, men, socially and economically disadvantaged groups of individuals, youth with mental illness);
- Provide postvention support;
- Provide services that take into account the reality of people from culturally diverse backgrounds and linguistic minority communities;
- Support relatives of individuals at risk of suicide.

Targeted measures

Target individuals who have already demonstrated behaviours associated with being at risk of suicide. Those interventions are aimed at specific individuals and their personal risk factors.

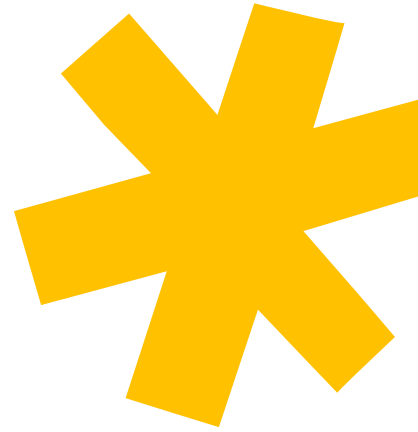
Examples :

- Improve crisis services including housing and close follow-up of people who attempted suicide;
- Support training and follow-up training for front-line workers. Collaboration between less experienced and more experienced workers should also be encouraged;
- Develop and strengthen specialized training programs.

Conclusion

The implementation of a national strategy has been called for by many suicide prevention experts for several years. Such a strategy is all the more urgent today for the following reasons:

- Recently, the Quebec public was moved by many stories, in the media, of people experiencing distress and suicidal behaviour; these stories have highlighted gaps in the health system when it comes to suicide prevention, more specifically the accessibility and continuity of services, as well as the tragedies experienced by bereaved families.
- The government and the opposition parties have committed to working on the issue; the government has already taken concrete action in the mental health sector, particularly with a view to updating Quebec's action plan on mental health.
- Three people will die by suicide today.



About the collective

Created in 2019, *Le collectif* for a National Suicide Prevention Strategy brings together organizations working or with a heartfelt interest in suicide prevention and mental health. Its goal is to convince the Quebec government to adopt a dedicated national strategy for suicide prevention to reduce deaths by suicide. To this end, the Collective also seeks to engage the public through a communications campaign.

Document produced in 2019 by the Association québécoise de prévention du suicide (Quebec association for suicide prevention) for Le collectif for a National Suicide Prevention Strategy.





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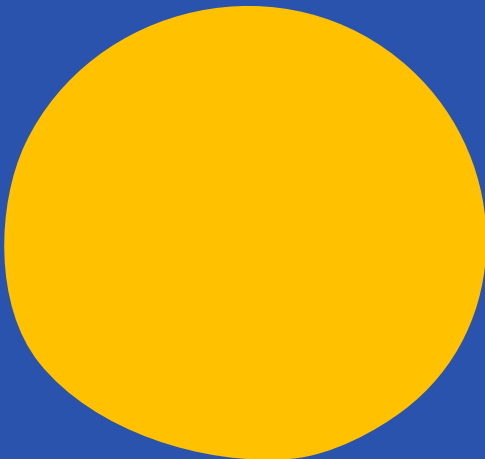
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