

# Suicide in Older Adults

## Why is older adult suicide important?

Older adults can be at an increased risk of suicide. Research has indicated that the suicide attempts of older adults are more likely to be fatal due to their tendency to be long planned and involve more lethal means. One study found that up to 75% of older adults who ended their life by suicide had done so within a month of seeing a primary care health professional.

## Why is this particularly important in Cumbria?

Compared to the national average, Cumbria has a much higher proportion of older adults. It is estimated that by 2020, nearly 25% of the Cumbrian population will be aged over 65. This means we need to get better at identifying those who are at risk of suicide to have the best chance of preventing such tragedies

## What's the good news?

Some interventions have been found to be successful in decreasing the suicide rate of older adults. Interventions range from a simple phone-call service which regularly checks in with 'at risk' older adults to multi-layered strategies, offering a combination of strategies such as psycho-education, depression screening treatment, and ways to increase social connectedness.

## Suicide and Dementia

Generally, the risk of suicide in people with dementia is considered to be relatively low. However, the risk is thought to be greatest in the earlier stages of the disease, most likely because insight and cognition are still relatively intact, preserving the ability to carry out a plan of suicide. One study identified that 3 months after a dementia diagnosis can be the most vulnerable period.

## Summary

The reasons why an older adult decides to take their own life are a complex mix of factors.



By making ourselves aware of the risk factors for suicide in later life, we have a better chance of providing a timely intervention when it's needed.

## What are the risk factors for suicide in older adults?

- Psychiatric Illness, Depression
- Physical Illness and Pain
- Functional Impairment
- Social Isolation
- Social Disconnectedness, feeling like a burden, or like you don't belong
- Adverse Life Events
- Poor Coping Style
- Access to Lethal Means
- Males are generally more at risk than females

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## Feedback

We appreciate and encourage feedback, which helps us to improve our services. If you have any comments, compliments or complaints to make about your care, please contact the PALS team (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) on 01228 814008 between 10.30 and 4.30 Monday to Friday or email [PALSCIC@ncuh.nhs.uk](mailto:PALSCIC@ncuh.nhs.uk).

If you would like this factsheet in another language or format, for example Braille, large print or audio the PALS team will be able to assist you (contact details above)

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