



## PAHO to launch initiative to curb rising suicide rates in the Americas

**Washington, DC, 10 September 2025 (PAHO)** – As the Americas grapple with a 17% rise in suicide deaths since 2000, the only region in the world to experience an increase, on 11 September, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) will launch a new initiative to reverse this trend. Announced on the eve of World Suicide Prevention Day, the effort aims to save lives by equipping countries with practical, evidence-based interventions to save lives.

In 2021 over 100,000 people in the Americas died by suicide. While rising rates in North America are a major driver of this upward trend, countries in the Southern Cone are also seeing significant growth, and Caribbean nations continue to report the region's highest suicide mortality rates.

"Each suicide is a profound tragedy that impacts individuals, families, and communities," said Dr Jarbas Barbosa, PAHO Director. "This initiative seeks to transform leadership, governance, and suicide prevention actions to reduce these losses."

### Breaking down barriers to suicide prevention

The new initiative will address key challenges that hinder progress in suicide prevention, including limited access to community-based mental health services, stigma, and weak coordination across sectors. Its approach is aligned with the World Health Organizations core interventions, which include:

- Restricting access to the means of suicide
- Promoting responsible media reporting
- Fostering socio-emotional skills in adolescents
- Ensuring early identification, treatment, and follow-up for people at risk

PAHO will focus on three priority areas:

1. **Strengthening national plans** – Supporting countries to design or update national suicide prevention strategies and action plans tailored to the needs of at-risk populations.

2. **Expanding access to quality mental health care** – Training health workers and communities to identify and support at-risk individuals, and respond effectively, while providing resources for families affected by suicide or self-harm.
3. **Raising awareness and reducing stigma** – Collaborating with media professionals on responsible reporting and implementing campaigns to break the silence around mental health.

## **Suicide in the Americas: key findings**

Suicide disproportionately affects older adults, with 71% of male and 65% of female suicides occurring among those over 50. While men face higher rates (14.7 per 100,000 population, compared to 4 per 100,000), the rate among women has increased more sharply (23% since 2000, compared to 14.4% among men). Suicide attempts were also nearly five times more frequent among women.

Several underlying factors appear to be driving these increases. Among men, suicide is closely linked to alcohol and drug use, as well as unemployment and living in areas with high homicide rates. For women, educational inequality and unemployment are the strongest associated factors.

“This crisis demands action beyond health systems,” said Renato Oliveira e Souza, Chief of the Mental Health and Substance Use Unit at PAHO. “It requires collaboration across society to elaborate and implement national suicide prevention strategies that can be effective in reducing suicide mortality.”

## **Join the webinar: Changing the narrative**

On 18 September, PAHO and the University of Toronto will host the webinar “Shaping responsible communications to raise awareness on suicide prevention in the Americas”. The event will focus on the role of responsible reporting and the importance of culturally informed, stigma-reducing awareness campaigns. Register on [PAHO’s website](#) to join experts and learn actionable strategies.

## **Links**

[Launch of the PAHO Regional Suicide Prevention Initiative](#)

[PAHO - Suicide prevention](#)

[Webinar: Shaping responsible communications to raise awareness on suicide prevention in the Americas](#)

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The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) works with the countries of the Americas to improve the health and quality of life of its population. Founded in 1902, it is the world's oldest international public health agency. It serves as the Regional Office of WHO for the Americas and is the specialized health agency of the Inter-American system (OAS).