

# Researchers call for action to end mental-health-related deaths

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A new paper published in *The Lancet Psychiatry* has called for radical action on a global scale to put an end to the growing mortality rates of people with mental illness and mental distress.

The paper, written by 40 global experts—including the University of Glasgow's Prof Rory O'Connor, Chair in Health Psychology—followed an extensive road mapping process of evidence reviews and consultation with mental health researchers, clinicians, policy experts and people with lived and living experience of mental illnesses and suicide.

The group mapped the range of factors which increase the risk of early mortality for people who are suffering from [mental health conditions](#). These include adversities such as traumatic life events, unemployment, stigma and marginalization, lack of meaningful societal relationships, and poor access to health care, education, housing, and income security.

Although these factors are widely acknowledged, more research is urgently needed into the ways we can reduce these risks and deliver changes to both medical and wider government policies, to improve the life expectancy for people diagnosed with mental health conditions or in [mental distress](#).

The paper, produced by MQ Mental Health Research, sets out [ambitious goals](#) for implementing concrete solutions, and calls on government policymakers to coordinate their response to the mental health challenges we face nationally and globally. The paper also challenges the private sector such as social media companies and employers to make changes now to save lives in the future.

The 18 recommendations outlined in the paper include delivering integrated health care, community-based interventions, restriction of access to lethal means of suicide, reduction of inequalities as well as increased investment in [mental health services](#) and research.

The paper's lead authors are Professor Rory O'Connor, Director of the Suicidal Behavior Research Laboratory at Glasgow University and Professor Carol Worthman from the Anthropology Department at

Emory University in the U.S.

Professor O'Connor, from the University of Glasgow's School of Health and Wellbeing, said, "Globally, too many people die prematurely from suicide and the physical health problems associated with [mental illness](#) and mental distress. These devastating losses are preventable.

"For this first time, we have brought together a multidisciplinary global team of academic, policy, clinical, and lived and living experience experts with the specific aim of understanding the driving forces behind these deaths together with what needs to be done to tackle this public health crisis.

"The time to act is now, to rebuild health-care systems, to prioritize mental health funding, and address the effects of stigma, discrimination, marginalization, gender violence, and victimization."

The paper offers a practical roadmap for implementing the solutions, but the authors are keen to make it clear that any solutions must be co-designed by people with lived and living experience of mental illnesses, in order to be successful. The paper's authorship itself integrated many people with first hand and family experience of mental illness.

Mental health campaigner and contributor to the paper, James Downs, said, "From the very start, Gone Too Soon has prioritized the knowledge and expertise that comes from having lived and living experiences of mental illness.

"As someone with longstanding serious mental illness, comorbidity, and suicidality, it has been meaningful to have an active role in this ambitious research alongside world-leading experts. By integrating experts by experience on an equal footing, we have aimed to create a fuller, more representative knowledge of the problems that underpin

why people like me are likely to live shorter and more difficult lives as a result of mental illness. I hope the solutions we have proposed are more impactful as a result of lived experience being included in the project, and that we have set an example for how to co-produce knowledge and co-design more effective solutions together."

The authors recognize that this is an ambitious paper, and the solutions must be implemented across all levels of society, including at a global political level.

Professor Carol Worthman said, "The Gone Too Soon road mapping process revealed cross-cutting factors behind mortality from both suicide and [mental health](#) comorbidities.

"We also discovered that many of these factors operate across the social-ecological spectrum, from individuals through families, communities, and society.

"These insights open possibilities for common solutions that reduce premature mortality from both suicide and comorbidities and suggest opportunities to leverage ramifying effects via strategic interventions.

"That our global team combined diverse expertise and living and lived experience was crucial for identifying common cross-cutting factors and recognizing the local forms they take, thus advancing inclusive efforts to promote human welfare."

**More information:** Rory C O'Connor et al, Gone Too Soon: priorities for action to prevent premature mortality associated with mental illness and mental distress, *The Lancet Psychiatry* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/S2215-0366\(23\)00058-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(23)00058-5)

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