

# Study finds suicide rates among cancer patients are falling

May 30 2024, by Ernie Mundell

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Even as suicide rates have risen among Americans generally, one group appears to be bucking that trend: People diagnosed with cancer.

Experts are crediting improved access to counseling and other "psychosocial care" with easing the emotional toll of cancer and keeping more patients from making tragic decisions.

Nevertheless, [cancer patients](#) still face elevated risks for suicide, noted a team led by Dr. Qiang Liu of the National Cancer Center at the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences in Beijing.

"The cancer-related suicide rate is estimated to be double that of the general population in the United States," Liu's group noted in the study. "Notably, the risk of suicide in men is significantly higher compared to women. This heightened cancer-related suicide risk remains elevated for up to 15 years following their diagnosis."

The new report was published May 27 in the journal [Translational Psychiatry](#).

In the study, Liu's team looked at data on over 5 million Americans who'd been diagnosed with cancer between 1975 and 2017.

Of the more than 8,000 who died by suicide, most (82%) were male, white (93%) and older (73% were ages 50 to 79).

However, there was some good news: The rate at which suicide claimed the lives of people with cancer has declined steadily over the decades.

These deaths first started to decline gradually between 1989 and 2013, the numbers showed, and then dropped much more sharply—by about 27% each year—between 2013 and 2017.

Liu's team credited a combination of factors behind these promising trends, not the least of which is the fact that many tumors are no longer the [death sentences](#) as they were a generation or two ago.

There have also been "promising advances in medical treatments for malignancies," the Chinese researchers noted.

However, beyond those advances, "this period witnessed an evolving role of psycho-oncology care, [palliative care](#) and [hospice care](#), leading to the promotion and increased utilization of these services by patients with cancer, enhancing their overall quality of life," Liu's group wrote.

"Furthermore, the development of integrated care models, including collaborative care models, has provided a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to cancer care," they added.

If you or a loved one is struggling with [suicidal thoughts](#) and feelings, the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) can help.

**More information:** Qiang Liu et al, Trends in cancer-related suicide in the United States: a population-based epidemiology study spanning 40 years of data, *Translational Psychiatry* (2024). [DOI: 10.1038/s41398-024-02917-9](#)

There's help on dealing with the emotional toll of a cancer diagnosis at the [Mayo Clinic](#).

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