

# Older adults in Illinois at increased risk for suicide

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Nearly 20% of suicides in Illinois between 2020 and 2021 were among people 65 years and older, according to recently released data from Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. The suicides

disproportionately affected white men between the ages of 65 and 74 years, with at least a high school education living in small urban and rural environments and involving firearms as the source of fatal injury.

"Older adults are at increased risk for suicide," said Maryann Mason, Ph.D., associate professor of Emergency Medicine. "Knowing the factors present in these deaths can help us create more effective prevention strategies that work for our older adults and communities."

The data brief, [Analysis of Older Adult Suicide Deaths in Illinois, 2020–2021](#), shows among residents aged 65 and over, 248 preventable deaths were recorded in 2020, and 271 were recorded in 2021. This trend is consistent with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) newly released [National Preventable Violent Death Surveillance Summary](#).

Key findings include:

- The majority (52.7%) of older adult suicide decedents were between the ages of 65 and 74.
- Most (82.9%) suicide decedents were men.
- Firearms were the most frequently used weapon (58.7%).
- 20% of those who died by suicide had a mental health diagnosis of depression; only 14.1% of them decedents were receiving current mental illness treatment.
- 4% of the suicides occurred at the decedent's home.

According to coroner/medical examiner reports, 18.5% of those who died by suicide were reported to be showing signs of feeling depressed at the time of their death, and 9.4% had antidepressants in their system.

"This highlights potential gaps in health care detection and treatment of depression," said Mason, who also is the associate director of Feinberg's

Buehler Center for Health Policy and Economics. "Our data reveals it might be important to begin outreach in 'early' aging and immediate post-retirement years and to potentially focus on safe storage and 'retirement' of firearm ownership among the populations most represented among these suicide deaths."

Of the 40 cases where depression was a circumstance, 29 (73%) had physical health problems as a co-occurring factor. This may indicate a need for greater attention to co-treating [mental health issues](#) when physical health issues emerge for [older adults](#), Mason said.

The Northwestern team collected the data from the Illinois Violent Death Reporting System (IVDRS), which explains the who, what, when, where, how and why violent deaths occur. IVDRS is a part of The National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS), the only state-based surveillance system that pools unique data elements from multiple sources into a usable, anonymous database. IVDRS covers all types of violent deaths, including homicides and suicides, in all settings for all age groups.

Individual case-level data are compiled from [death certificates](#), coroner/[medical examiners](#), [law enforcement](#), toxicology and autopsy reports and assessed for patterns and trends. Once certified by the CDC, the data is made available to health departments and community action groups to help ground prevention efforts.

**More information:** Analysis of Older Adult Suicide Deaths in Illinois, 2020-2021. [infogram.com/analysis-of-older ... 2021-1hxj48mpkdop52v](https://www.infogram.com/analysis-of-older-adult-suicide-deaths-in-illinois-2020-2021-1hxj48mpkdop52v)

Provided by Northwestern University

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