

Chronic pain may be an important contributor to suicide

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Chronic pain may be an important contributor to suicide. Nearly 9 percent of people who died by suicide in 18 states from 2003 to 2014 had documentation of chronic pain in their incident records. Findings from the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) are published in *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

More than 25 million adults in the U.S. have some level of daily [pain](#), and 10.5 million have considerable pain every day. Chronic pain has been associated with risk factors for [suicide](#), but previous studies primarily examined nonfatal suicidal behaviors, rather than suicide deaths associated with [chronic pain](#) or the characteristics of such deaths.

Researchers from the Division of Violence Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention analyzed data from 18 states participating in the NVDRS for at least one year from 2003 to 2014. The NVDRS details characteristics of [violent deaths](#), including suicide,

and the circumstances identified as directly contributed to the death. The researchers found that of 123,181 suicide decedents included in the study, 10,789 (8.8 percent) had evidence of chronic pain, and the percentage increased from 7.4 percent in 2003 to 10.2 percent in 2014. More than half (53.6 percent) of suicide decedents with chronic pain died of firearm-related injuries and 16.2 percent by opioid overdose. Although not mutually exclusive, back pain, cancer pain, and arthritis accounted for a large proportion of pain conditions in persons who died by suicide. Likewise, anxiety and depression were diagnosed more often in suicide decedents with pain than in those without it.

The researchers showed that among suicide decedents with chronic pain for whom toxicology results were available, opioids were much more likely to be present at the time of death than in those without pain. The author of an accompanying editorial suggests that the role of opioids in [suicide risk](#) should be explored and that [suicide prevention](#) should be a component of care for those suffering from chronic pain.

More information: *Annals of Internal Medicine* (2018).
<http://annals.org/aim/article/doi/10.7326/M18-0830>

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