

Suicide rates fell in Canada during pandemic despite rise in unemployment

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The results of research into suicide rates in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic show that rates fell despite a simultaneous increase in unemployment. The researchers say the measures put in place by the Canadian government to reduce insecurity during the stringent shutdown of the economy offer suicide reduction lessons for governments globally, even after the pandemic has passed.

The study, published in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, compared [suicide rates](#) in Canada between March 2020 and February 2021 with the same period the year before. The rate reduced from 10.82 deaths per 100,000 in 2019/20 to 7.34 deaths per 100,000 in 2020/21.

Lead researcher Dr. Roger McIntyre, of the Mood Disorder Psychopharmacology Unit at the University of Toronto, said: "It was projected that in Canada there would be an increase in completed suicides, or 'deaths of despair' unless financial provisions and social programmes, as well as other services including mental health programmes, were immediately initiated to specifically address aspects of insecurity including economic and housing."

The researchers describe how the Canadian government provided [financial support](#) to employed and self-employed Canadians of \$2000 (CAD) every month for up to 28 weeks and \$1250 (CAD) to students every month for up to 16 weeks. Leniency on mortgage payments was recommended and there was increased funding for emergency childcare provisions. In addition, funding was deployed for emergency psychiatric services in the form of access to 24/7 crisis lines as well as the provision of psychotherapeutic and counselling services at no charge to Canadian residents.

Dr. McIntyre added: "It is noteworthy that the observed decrease in the Canadian suicide rate alongside an increase in rates of psychological distress, [mental illness](#) and reports of suicidality reflects the multifactorial and discrete phenomenology of suicide during the COVID-19 pandemic."

He concluded: "A national imperative in Canada, and globally, should be to reduce suicide rates. Government interventions that broadly aim to reduce measures of insecurity, as well as provide [social support](#) and timely psychiatric services, should be prioritised as part of a national

suicide reduction strategy, not only during but after the termination of the COVID-19 pandemic."

More information: Roger S McIntyre et al, Suicide reduction in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic: lessons informing national prevention strategies for suicide reduction, *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* (2021). [DOI: 10.1177/01410768211043186](https://doi.org/10.1177/01410768211043186)

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