

# Suicide



## Noteworthy:

- In 2003, an estimated 477 Alberta men and women died by suicide, compared to only 119 in 1961.
- In 2000, the rate of death by suicide for Alberta men was 3 times higher than for women; men tend to use guns more often.
- Women attempt suicide three times more often than men.
- According to the Calgary Regional Health Authority, suicide is the leading cause of death among Calgary males aged 10 to 49 years.
- For every death by suicide, there are an estimated 125 attempts.
- 260,500 Albertans and their families were affected by suicide in 1998.
- Suicide is most prevalent among the 35-50 year old age group.
- Rates of suicide among Aboriginals is close to 45 per 100,000 population—three times the Alberta average.
- Alberta's suicide rate has averaged 122% of the Canadian average rate over 40 years.

## Suicide in Alberta: How Much?

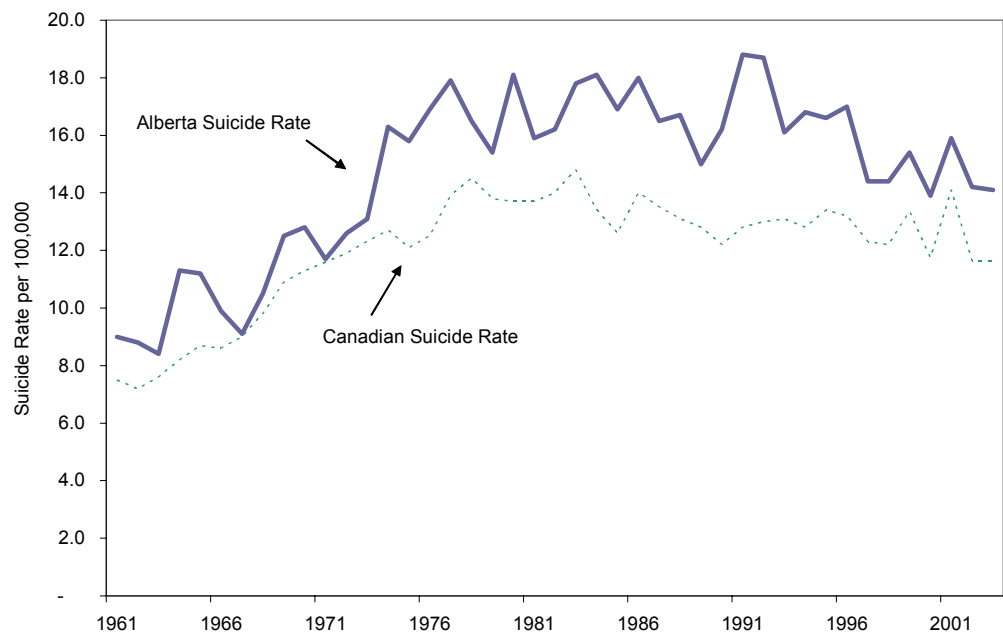
Suicide is a serious problem in Alberta as well as Canada, with some describing it as an epidemic. Alberta has the second highest suicide rate in Canada for both men and women. According to the Calgary Regional Health Authority, suicide is the leading cause of death for boys and men aged 10 to 49, ahead of murder, traffic accidents, and all other causes of death. In 2003, an estimated 447 Alberta males and females from all age groups died by suicide. This

compares to 82 suicides in 1950, 119 in 1960, 213 in 1970, 389 suicides in 1980, and 403 in 1990.

The number of suicides per 100,000 population has risen since the 1950s and 1960s, from a low of 7.8 per 100,000 population in 1953 to a high of 18.7 per 100,000 in 1992 (see figure below). In 2003, the estimated suicide rate was 14.1 per 100,000 population, an improvement over 1992 but

still almost double the rates in the 1950s. Typically more men die by suicide than do women; men tend to use firearms while women use less lethal options (see men vs. women suicide rate figure). According to the Alberta Support Network, for every death by suicide in 1998 there were roughly 125 attempts.

### Suicide Rates: Alberta vs. Canada, 1961 to 2003



Source: Office of Chief Medical Examiner, Alberta Justice and Statistics Canada, Vital Statistics

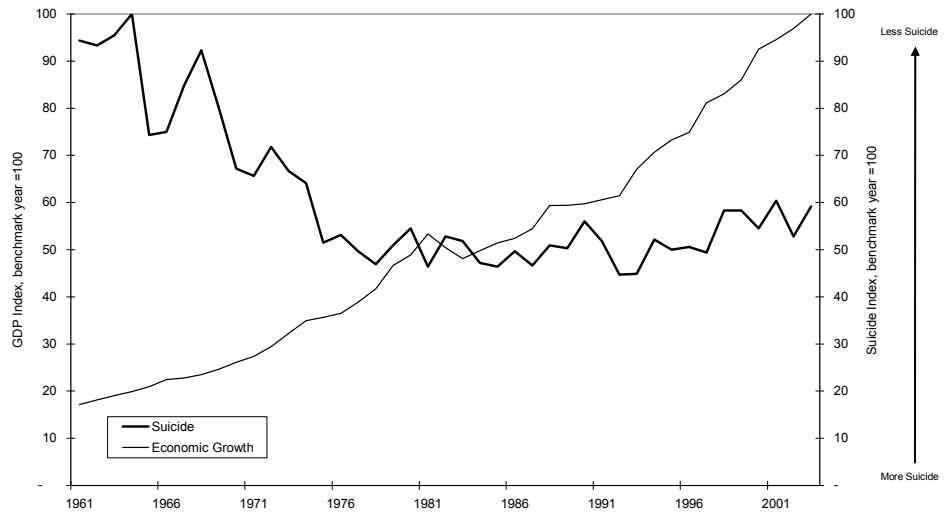
# So What?

Suicide affects all of society by robbing a family, household or community of human lives as well as consuming resources and human energy in dealing with both deaths by suicide and attempted suicides. The GPI Accounts consider suicide a regrettable action and a negative societal cost. The suicide index shows that in Alberta, while we have more economic prosperity than in the 1960s, we also have more suicide (see figure to the right).

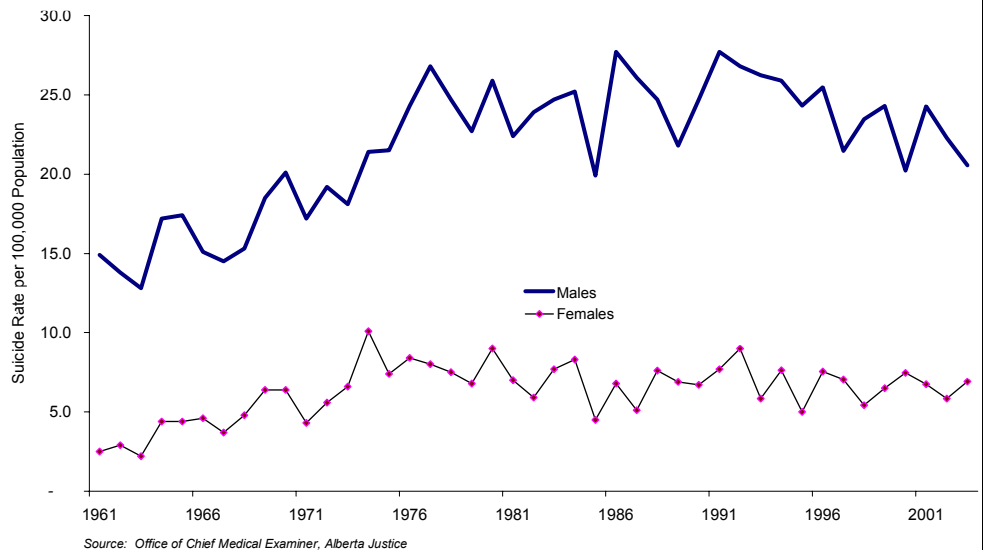
The reasons for suicide are complex and theories abound. Health Canada lists “the role of environmental influences and mental disorder, the existence and nature of predisposing genetic or biochemical factors, and the parallel issues of proper and effective treatment and prevention,” noting that “suicide is an action; it is not an illness.”

How the socio-economic “cocktail” of impacts from financial stress, debt loads, a super-charged economy and marital breakdown affect suicide is not well understood. Societal fragmentation, social isolation, media influences on self-worth, unemployment and environmental factors are additional considerations. Understanding the influences that lead to suicide presents one of the greatest challenges in health sciences and studies of mental illness. Paradoxically, the action of suicide both contributes to current GDP and detracts from future GDP. Based on a New Brunswick study, we estimate that the 447 suicides in 2003 would have direct costs (medical and other) to society of \$2.5 million, plus indirect societal costs of \$379 million in lost productivity, a total of \$382 million (1998\$).

## Alberta’s Suicide Index: Where are we today?



## Suicide Among Alberta Men and Women, 1961 to 2003



Source: Office of Chief Medical Examiner, Alberta Justice

As an index, suicide in Alberta in 2003 scored 59 on a scale of 0 to 100, where 100 is the lowest suicide rate for men and women that occurred between 1961 and 2003.

The estimated cost of suicide in Alberta in 2003 totaled \$382 million (1998\$). That is equal to 0.3% of provincial GDP in 2003.

