

# Rates of suicide in N.S. wont decrease unless we have a plan: doctor

Nova Scotia has the quickest growing suicide rate in Canada

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Roughly every 72 hours, someone in Nova Scotia dies by suicide.

Dr. Simon Sherry, professor of psychology and neuroscience at Dalhousie University, says these victims are usually members of our most vulnerable populations.

"Suicide may be one of the last frontiers when it comes to stigma, but it should be a conversation we're having in Canada," Sherry tells NEWS 95.7's The Todd Veinotte Show.

Last month, Gregory Hiles, a patient at the Nova Scotia Forensic Hospital, died. Investigators rules Hiles' death a suicide. "It's more than just a choice that a person makes," explains Sherry. "Oftentimes suicide is embedded in much wider problems."

The doctor explains that this could mean a longstanding history of depression, or socio-economic reasons.

"We'll see our suicide rate go up when economic times turn hard. We'll see our suicide rate go up when families fall apart," he adds.

Sherry says that Nova Scotia has the quickest growing suicide rate in Canada. He chalks this up to our outdated plan for public education.

"Our current suicide prevention strategy dates back to 2006," says Sherry.

He says we need to use the resources and new science that have emerged since that strategy was published, to update the suicide prevention plan in the province.

"We don't have a coordinated, funded, government-led initiative to prevent suicide," adds Sherry. "Until we have that type of a prevention strategy in place, suicide will continue to be a major problem."

Doctor Sherry thinks Nova Scotia could model our strategy off Quebec, which modernized their strategy in recent years.

They put together a reasonable suicide prevention plan, and within five years saw a 30 per cent drop in suicide rates," he adds, noting that the rate particularly dropped among young people.

Young people are also most likely to be influenced by media that mentions suicide. Sherry notes that the TV show 13 Reasons Why has been linked to multiple suicide attempts.

"That's an example of the dark side of media when it comes to suicide," he explains.

But Sherry says media attention can also have a positive affect.

"There's nothing harmful about discussing suicide," he says. "It's only if you discuss suicide in a reckless and irresponsible way that somehow encourages imitation, or glamorizes or romanticises."

For those who are close to someone who dies by suicide, there are also long-term impacts.

"An estimated 110 people are impacted by every death by suicide," Sherry adds. "The immediate family members of people who die by suicide are changed for the rest of their life by that loss."

Sherry hopes that the province will update its prevention strategy surrounding suicide, and says it's a myth that these deaths are unpreventable.

"We have a moral responsibility in a place like Nova Scotia, to look after some of our most vulnerable citizens."