

It's World Suicide Prevention Day

Dr. Simon Sherry says it's critically important to be talking about this issue right now.

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One person dies by suicide every 72 hours in Nova Scotia.

In Canada, around 11 people die by suicide every day, which is approximately 4,000 a year.

Today is World Suicide Prevention Day and a clinical psychologist at Dalhousie University says it's critically important to be talking about this issue right now.

"Across a number of studies we're seeing that the level of suicidal thinking -- which researchers would call suicide ideation -- has actually gone up four-or-fivefold during the pandemic, such that now about 10 per cent of Canadians, as compared to two per cent of Canadians, are now thinking about death by suicide," Dr. Simon Sherry said.

Sherry said for years the topic was taboo but research shows that general conversations about suicide are not harmful, especially if when dispelling myths and providing helpful information

"For too long suicide was something that was not discussed despite the staggering numbers," he told NEWS 95.7's The Sheldon MacLeod Show.

"It's very important to put out positive messaging and help people realize there are alternatives to suicide, and that being depressed doesn't inevitably result in death by suicide."

Sherry said suicide is a preventable epidemic.

He said Israel, England, Scotland and Australia have all been able to lower their suicide rates and preventative efforts in Quebec have resulted in a 30 per cent reduction.

However here in Nova Scotia, Sherry said between the years 2000 and 2012, our rate of death by suicide grew faster than any other province in the country.

In order to change that, he would like to see the province implement a coordinated prevention plan.

"We need to really focus on what's called 'means reduction' in our province," Sherry explained. "That's taking guns out of the hands of people who are suicidal, it's changing around ligature points that represent opportunities to die by hanging in jails and hospitals, it's building more bridge barriers, it's being thoughtful about the prescription of medications to people who might overdose."

"When you take the means out of the hands of people who might die by suicide, you really start to see suicide rates go down."

Sherry said if you suspect someone you know is thinking about suicide take it seriously.

"Do not discount what somebody is saying, even if you're concerned that it might be manipulative," he said. "All suicidal behaviour is concerning."

Sherry recommends offering care and support and trying to steer that person towards someone who is trained to deal with the situation.

The Canada Suicide Prevention Service can help you make a plan and get additional resources for the individual. It can be reached at any time by calling 1-833-456-4566.

"Oftentimes when someone is giving voice to suicidal thoughts or making threats, you have to realize that their soul, their brain and their body is aching so much," Sherry said. "They're hurting and they just want out."

"So anyone who is feeling that should seek help because there is help available."

The Mental Health Provincial Crisis Line is available 24/7 to anyone experiencing a mental health or addictions crisis, or to anyone concerned about someone else. It can be reached by calling 1-888-429-8167.

Kids Help Phone is also available 24/7 by calling 1-800-668-6868.

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