

# Facts about Mental Health and Suicide Among Veterinarians

Suicide is generally caused by the convergence of multiple risk factors, the most common being untreated or inadequately managed mental health conditions, and access to (and knowledge regarding) lethal means.

Culture and beliefs also play a role in suicide risk; regional variations in culture are linked with suicide risk: the populations that have lower stigma related to mental health problems and help-seeking behaviors, have lower rates of suicide than those populations with higher stigma.<sup>1</sup>

Suicide is more common in veterinarians than in the general population. This may be due to heightened barriers to care and greater access to lethal means among the veterinarian population. Other facts include:

- 39 percent of suicide deaths among veterinarians over a 36-year study period were the result of pharmaceutical poisoning, a rate nearly 2.5 times that for individuals in the general U.S. population who died by suicide in 2016.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2014, a convenience sample survey of 11,627 US veterinarians found 9 percent had current serious psychological distress, 31 percent had experienced depressive episodes, and 17 percent had experienced suicidal ideation since leaving veterinary school; each of these is a risk factor for suicide and each was more prevalent than in the general population.<sup>3</sup>
- Male veterinarians were 2.1 times and female veterinarians were 3.5 times as likely as the general US population to die by suicide.<sup>4</sup>
- Additionally, veterinarians are trained to view euthanasia as an acceptable method to relieve suffering in animals, which can affect the way veterinarians view human life, including a reduced fear about death, especially among those experiencing suicidal ideation.<sup>4</sup>

Suicide statistics are released each year from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. More information about statistics can be found at [afsp.org/statistics](https://afsp.org/statistics)

## References

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3. Nett R.J., Witte T.K., Holzbauer S.M., et al. (2015) Risk factors for suicide, attitudes toward mental illness, and practice-related stressors among US veterinarians. *J Am Vet Med Assoc*: 247: 945: 955.
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