

Suicide is a public health problem

Like other public health problems, suicide can often be prevented. Science and statistics can help us see who may be at risk for certain diseases like lung cancer or diabetes. Behaviors like smoking or being obese can heighten your risk of lung cancer or diabetes. Other behaviors or lifestyle choices can serve as protective factors – for example, not smoking or discontinuing smoking can protect you against lung cancer, and exercising regularly along with good nutritional habits can serve as protection from some forms of diabetes. For these diseases there are also warning signs that signal great concern – for instance, a “smoker’s cough” or coughing up blood can signal a problem in the lungs; and unusual thirst or frequent urination can mean the development of diabetes.

Suicide can be viewed from a similar perspective. Science and statistics have taught us that some factors can protect us from suicide while others can place us at increased risk for suicide. We also know there are often warning signs of suicide that should trigger action to keep the suicidal person safe.