

*SUICIDE AMONGST DRUG USERS:  
A CHALLENGE FOR  
DRUG TREATMENT AGENCIES*

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# *What is suicide?*

- ▣ *Completed suicide*
  - Deliberate self-harm, with the intention of causing death, resulting in death
  - 3:1 males to females
  
- ▣ *Attempted suicide*
  - Deliberate self-harm with the intention of causing death not resulting in death
  - 3:1 females to males
  
- ▣ 10-20 attempts for every completion
  
- ▣ Distinct from self-harm

# *How common is suicide?*

## ▣ *Completions*

- >2,000 per year in Australia (7x homicides)
- Males approximately 1600 per year
- Females approximately 500 per year

## ▣ *Attempts*

- Lifetime: 3%-5%
- Past year: 0.5%

# *Drug users and suicide*

- ▣ High general mortality
  - 1% drug users die per year
  
- ▣ Suicide as a cause of death: 5-10%
  
- ▣ Lifetime attempts: 30-50%
  - ▣ ATOS: 34%
  - ▣ WHOS: 36%

# *Drug users and suicide*

- ▣ Past year: 5-15%
  - ATOS: 11%
  - WHOS: 15%
  
- ▣ An attempt heightens risk of further attempts
  - ATOS: attempt 5 times more likely if previous attempt
  - 1/4 those with suicidal ideation made an attempt across 3 years

# *Risk factors*

- ▣ Same as general population, but prevalence far greater
  
- ▣ *Gender*
  - Attempts: females 3 times more likely
  - Completions: males 3 times more likely
  
- ▣ *Previous attempts*
  - Predicts later attempts and completions
  - Suicidal ideation and plans
  
- ▣ *“Shattered childhood”*
  - Sex abuse
  - Physical abuse

# *Risk factors*

- ▣ *Psychopathology*
  - Depression
  - PTSD
  - Borderline Personality Disorder
  
- ▣ *Social disadvantage*
  - Unemployment
  - Homelessness
  - Social isolation
  - Imprisonment
  
- ▣ *Drug use*
  - Dependence
  - More extensive polydrug use

# *Can drug treatment reduce suicide rates? YES*

