

POLICY BRIEF

THE NEED FOR A REGIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION IN WALLONIA

Why suicide prevention is key – BELHEALTH results

Suicide is a critical societal and public health concern, with far-reaching impacts on individuals and their loved ones, and society as a whole^[1,2]. Evidence from cross-sectional data of the Belgian Health and Well-being Cohort (BELHEALTH)¹ shows 13% of people living in Wallonia reported having had suicide ideations in 2023. This requires urgent attention and the creation of a regional action plan for suicide prevention in Wallonia, focussing on evidence-based universal, selective and indicated suicide prevention.



BELHEALTH data shows **risk factors for suicide** include:

1. socioeconomic factors like unemployment, having difficulty making ends meet
2. suffering from anxiety, depression or both

Evidence from BELHEALTH



13% of people living in Wallonia reported having had **suicidal thoughts** in the twelve months preceding November 2023.²



More than one third (36%) of people that were **unemployed** reported having had suicide ideations in the 12 months before November 2023.



18-29 year olds was the group that reported most suicide thoughts in 2023 (20%) compared to other age groups.



18% of people with **difficulty making ends meet** reported suicide ideations in the 12 months before November 2023.

¹ <https://www.sciensano.be/en/projects/belgian-health-and-well-being-cohort>

² BELHEALTH data presented here are weighted, see the methodological document [here](#) for more information.

How to prevent suicide: some recommendations

Suicide is a complex topic and there never is one simple way to prevent it. Evidence-based practices like the Universal Selective Indicated (USI) Model³ already in place in Flanders, shows prevention of suicide is most effective when it is applied in the following three domains simultaneously:

1. Universal: strengthen healthcare professional's training and keep investing in telehealth services.



- Continue to promote expertise among healthcare professionals who regularly come into contact with individuals at potential risk of suicide to foster better knowledge, attitudes and skills for effective suicide prevention⁴.
- Continue to invest in telehealth services⁵, like *Télé Accueil* or *Un pass dans l'impasse*.
- Support the deployment of a network of sentinels, made up of members of the public, trained professionals and local players to identify and refer people at risk.

2. Selective: support people experiencing mental health challenges and people in vulnerable positions by better detection, treatment and follow-up.



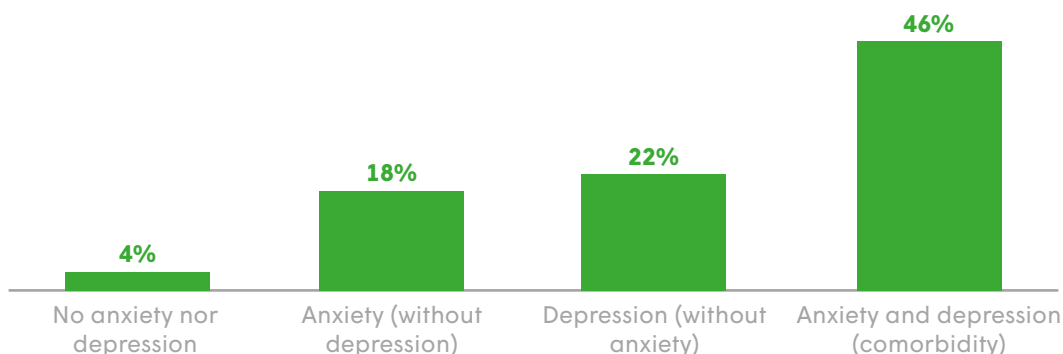
- Provide people that suffer from both anxiety and depression^[3] additional professional evidence-based support.
- Organise an awareness-raising campaign to mediators from Forem⁶ to detect signs of suicidality and respond appropriately.
- Pay special attention to people that are self-employed, are young or go through a life transition. Prevent psychosomatic disorders linked to sensitive life stages and raise awareness among young people in schools.

3. Indicated: support someone who survived a suicide attempt, as well as next-of-kin.



- Follow up with a mental health professional who can support a person who tried to take their own life. Attempting suicide is a risk factor for trying to take one's life again^[4,5].
- Support and step up help for family members and those bereaved by suicide. Strengthening social support is vital in recovering from a mental health crisis^[6].

Evidence from BELHEALTH February 2023 Almost half of people who suffered from both anxiety and depression reported suicidal ideations



³ Universal, Selective, Indicative (USI) model of suicide prevention^[7,8].

⁴ Examples of trainings already in place are the trainings offered by *Un Pas Dans l'Impasse*. An example in Flanders' is the online e-learning platform SP-Reflex tailored at healthcare providers^[9], with evidence-based guidelines, e-learning modules and tools for health and social care professionals.

⁵ Evidence of the effectiveness of telehealth interventions in suicide prevention can be found here^[10].

⁶ This is currently in place in Flanders^[9], where all *Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling (VDAB)* employees are offered a digital suicide prevention module, available during training days and on intranet.

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The latest [BELHEALTH](#) results on suicide can be found here, as well as on the [HealthyBelgium](#) website.

Anyone with questions around suicide can contact the freephone number 107. To make an appointment or ask any questions, you can call *Un pass dans L'impasse* on the single number for the whole of Wallonia: 081/777.150. The helpline of the *Centre de Prévention du Suicide* can be reached on 0800 32 123.

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