

Suicide Risk among Medicaid-Eligible Philadelphians with Housing Instability

The Epidemiology of Suicide Team

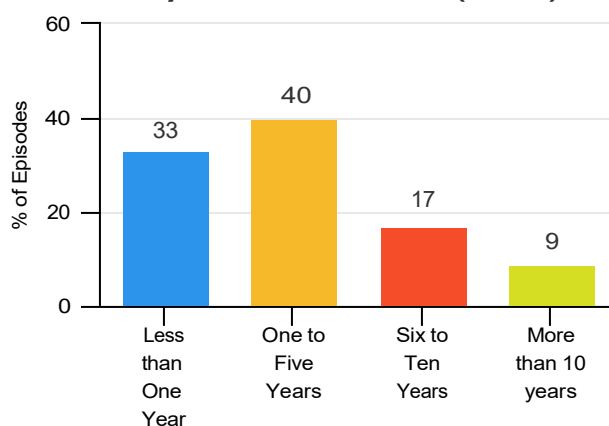
Background & Study Goals

Numerous studies have pointed to housing instability as an important risk factor for suicide. Using case records from the Medical Examiner's Office and emergency housing episodes from the Office of Homeless Services, we examined emergency shelter use among suicide decedents in the Philadelphia Medicaid population. We compared differences in characteristics using pairwise t-tests, examined the timing of emergency shelter use prior to suicide death, and the cause of suicide death in this population.

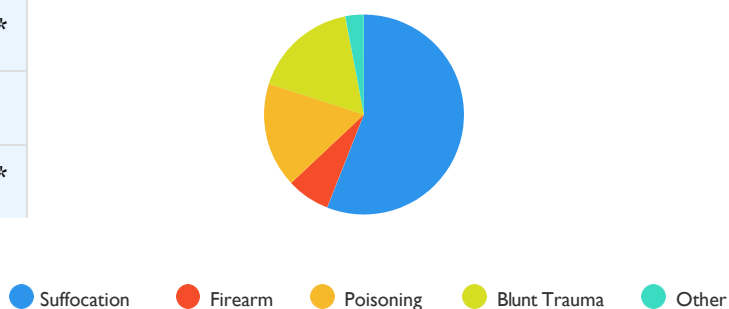
Characteristics of ever-Medicaid-eligible Philadelphians with 1+ emergency shelter stay who did and did not die by suicide, 2003-2018

	Died by suicide (n=100)	Did not die by suicide (n=75,769)	p-value
Number of Stays	4.0	4.1	0.948
Age at Initial Stay	35.6	28.6	<0.001*
Age<18 at Initial Stay	4%	26%	<0.001*
Female	25%	47%	<0.001*
Asian	0.0%	0.4%	0.530
Black	56%	80%	<0.001*
Hispanic	7%	8%	0.804
White	30%	11%	<0.001*

Time in Years Between Last Emergency Shelter Stay and Suicide Death (n=100)



Cause of Suicide Death among Medicaid-eligible Philadelphians with an Emergency Shelter Stay (n=100)



Practice & Policy Implications

Nearly 10% of ever-Medicaid-eligible Philadelphians who died by suicide between 2003 and 2018 had at least one emergency shelter stay prior to their death. Individuals who died by suicide were nearly seven years older at their initial stay in an emergency shelter compared to those who did not die by suicide, suggesting that their housing instability is related to economic shocks occurring later in life; these individuals may warrant more targeted prevention efforts. Suffocation, which includes hanging and asphyxiation, accounted for over half of suicide deaths in this population. These findings suggest that emergency shelters could benefit from suicide prevention efforts, such as 988 placards and basic gatekeeper training for staff and volunteers.