



September 28, 2000

## FIRST NATIONS SUICIDE RATE

### Background

*There is no recent information on suicide in First Nations people at the national level; the most recently published data is for the 1979-1993 period. It shows that:*

### Rates

- Suicide rates among First Nations men are 2.6 times higher than for Canadian men in general; among First Nations women, they are 4 times higher than average.
- The differences are most extreme in the younger age groups. For example, among First Nations youth age 15-24, rates were from 4-8 times the national average over the 1989-1993 period. At older ages, the gap between the two populations narrows.
- In 1993, the suicide rate for First Nations men was 53 per 100,000, and for women 21 per 100,000. This translates into roughly 160 suicides per year.
- In the First Nations population, suicide accounts for about ¼ of all deaths by injury and violence – about as many deaths as are caused by motor vehicle accidents. Suicide and motor vehicle accidents are by far the two biggest causes of death by injury.

### Trend

- The annual suicide rate tends to fluctuate greatly, and there is no clear sign that suicide rates changed over the 1979-93 period, either upwards or downwards.

### Regional variation

- The national trend conceals a lot of regional variation. Although the suicide rate may be stable for the First Nations population as a whole, specific communities and areas may experience “clusters” of suicides in a given year or over a period of several years, while other areas have few or no suicides.

### Method

- Suicide is sometimes linked to discussions about the availability of lethal means such as firearms. The most common method of suicide in First Nations people of both sexes is hanging – almost half of all suicides. Firearms are used in about 1/3 of all male suicides, while women are more likely to choose drug overdose as a method.

### Current Issue(s)

- September 2000: The Federal Government does not have a formal Framework for First Nations Mental Health programming activities.

### Other potential sources of information

- These statistics are drawn from the publication Trends in First Nations Mortality, written by Laurel Lemchuk-Favel for Health Canada.

