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## CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

### Suicide prevention in Flemish pharmacies

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Barbara Verboven<sup>1</sup>, Hilde Deneyer

1: VAN, Leuven, Belgium

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**Introduction:** In Flanders, the Flemish Pharmacists Network (VAN), in collaboration with the Flemish Centre of Expertise in Suicide Prevention (VLESP), wants to explore how pharmacists and pharmacist assistants in the public pharmacy can play an active role in suicide prevention in collaboration with other health care providers.

**Background:** Mental health is an important area of focus in health care. Numbers from the Care and Health Agency tell us that nearly 1,000 people die of suicide in Flanders every year. By 2030, the Flemish Health objective is to reduce deaths by suicide by 10% compared to 2020. Poisoning is a common method of suicide and medication is used in the majority of suicide attempts. There is strong scientific evidence that when commonly used methods are made less lethal or accessible, the number of suicides using that method as well as other methods decreases. Restricting access to substances for suicide is a very effective prevention method. Pharmacists occupy a crucial role in society regarding the distribution of medication and are among the most trusted professions. Thus, they are pre-eminent key figures who can play a role in suicide prevention.

**Who is it for?** The objective is to assessing and questioning actively the suicide risk of citizens in pharmacy.

**Who did you involve and engage with?** In 2022 VAN launched a project among Flemish pharmacists in collaboration with VLESP and with the support of the Flemish government.

**What did you do?** In the first phase, a literature review was conducted and a large group of experts from different healthcare professions was assembled. A survey was launched and the results are being analyzed by VLESP. These will be used for the further elaboration of the training and the launch of a pilot project in early 2023.

Knowledge improvement within the sector is crucial to take an active role in suicide prevention. Pharmacists should be aware of existing help and support possibilities and referral options to other health care providers. Agreements with other health care providers should be made for this purpose. Pharmacists must be taught the tools to recognize and question signs of suicidal behavior so that they can then raise awareness about medication management, provide appropriate advice, make appropriate delivery and referrals.

**What results did you get?** Around 50 pharmacies will start the pilot project in early 2023, which will be evaluated on a regular basis. Conclusions and recommendations will be written out by the end of 2023.

**What is the learning for the international audience?** For the international audience, it is interesting to know how pharmacies can play an active role and what elements are necessary to promote this. The conclusions and recommendations can serve as a guide for application in other countries. This project can be an important step to a more integrated approach around this topic

**What are the next steps?** After the pilot project, the objective is to extend the active role within all Flemish pharmacies and then within Belgium.