Suicide is now the third leading cause of death amongst people aged 15-29 years worldwide, according to key facts on suicide the World Health Organization just released on 29 August 2024. This raises suicide from the fourth leading cause of death for this age cohort in 2019.

We also see in the WHO key facts that 73% of global suicides occur in low-and middle-income countries. These are the same countries that are home for 90% of the world's adolescents. We also know that over half (58%) of those who die by suicide globally are under 50 years of age.

In some countries, the situation is even more concerning: in Australia suicide is the leading cause of death for people aged under 29 years; the same is the case in Japan. In the USA, between 2007 and 2017, the suicide rate for Black Youth almost doubled from 2.55 to 4.82, a rise that was greater than any other racial/ethnic group in that period. In India, in 2019, youth suicides accounted for 35% to 40% of all suicides in that country, with young women overrepresented in these deaths.

A tragedy is unfolding before our eyes. It seems we are going backwards in our attempts to prevent suicides amongst younger people, despite the lofty target to reduce suicides by 30% by 2030 in the Sustainable Development Goals.

These are young lives lost – people who otherwise would have been expected to live much longer. They are sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, loved and lost to their families, local towns and cultural communities.

One thing that can be done is to reach and respond to young people in distress and offer help. We can offer that help immediately, easily and in a low-cost way through digital crisis support services such as telephone crisis lines, online chat and crisis text.

Young people use the internet and mobile technologies so these are mediums through which we can encourage their help-seeking in times of difficulty and despair, or during a mental health crisis. A systematic review of research studies has concluded: *"Approaches to improving help-seeking by young people should consider the role of the internet and online resources as an adjunct to offline help-seeking."*

Digital crisis support services can prevent youth suicide. We have known this for more than 20 years, as shown in an Australian study of a national youth hotline that revealed decreased suicidal ideation and urgency at the end of calls. Text based crisis services have been found to be effective in reaching highly distressed young people, particularly females, including individuals from culturally diverse and minority populations who do not necessarily seek help elsewhere. One study of a crisis text service found 90% of contacts reported the conversation as helpful and almost half stated that they were less suicidal at the end of the text interaction.

The challenge is to find ways to promote and provide digital crisis support services in every country so that young people see these services are relevant, safe and helpful. Refinements and improvements to the existing digital crisis support services can be made, with the guidance and involvement of young people. Most of the existing services are in western countries and they may not suit the preferences of young people in low and middle income countries. The cultural and social settings in each country and community will need to be addressed. This can be done through the civil society organizations in these countries. They just need investment and support to do so.