



Statewide Suicide Prevention Council

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Statewide Suicide Prevention Council

The State of Alaska's Statewide Suicide Prevention Council was established by the Alaska State Legislature in 2001 (AS 44.29.350) and serves as an advisory council to the Legislature and Governor regarding suicide awareness and prevention.

The duties of the Council are to:

- improve health and wellness throughout the State by reducing suicide and its effect on individuals, families, and communities;
- broaden the public's awareness of suicide and the risk factors related to suicide;
- enhance suicide prevention services and programs throughout the state;
- develop healthy communities through comprehensive, collaborative, community-based, and faith-based approaches;
- develop and implement a statewide suicide prevention plan; and,
- strengthen existing and build new partnerships between public and private entities that will advance suicide prevention efforts in the State.

The Council is located within the Department of Health and Social Services and includes 17 council members; 13 voting members, 2 non-voting members representing the Alaska State House of Representatives and 2 representing the Alaska State Senate. The Governor appoints the 13 voting members from designated stakeholder groups.

Most of the Council's activities involve collaboration between stakeholders, supporting various outreach and educational programs, and providing technical assistance as needed. While there are other governmental and private sector agencies with a common goal in the prevention of suicide, no other organization performs the statewide coordinator function.

In accordance with AS 44.66.010(a)(7), the council is scheduled to terminate on June 30, 2019. The Division of Legislative Audit has recommend that the legislature extend the Council's termination date to June 30, 2027.

A 2018 legislative audit found the council operated in the public's interest by actively broadening the public's awareness of suicide prevention, and coordinating the efforts of other suicide prevention entities including State agencies, regional groups, coalitions, and local communities. Additionally, the Council fulfilled its statutory duty by issuing the 2018-2022 Suicide Prevention Plan and working closely with stakeholders to add and refine the plan's strategies, resources, and indicators.

Suicide Statistics in Alaska

While deaths by suicide and suicide rates in Alaska fluctuate from year to year, the figures have remained relatively consistent over the past decade. Experts are unsure specifically what caused the increase in rates and deaths by suicide due to the complexity of the issue and the many factors involved in why people experience suicidal ideation. The Council uses the term "The Web of Causality" to describe the many factors involved in suicide in Alaska, including alcohol and substance abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault and abuse, poverty, lack of economic opportunities, historical trauma, climate, and more.

- 1,701 Alaskans died by suicide between 2008 and 2017.
- The rate of suicide in Alaska in 2017 was 26.9 per 100,000, compared to 14 per 100,000 in the United States.

- Between 2008 and 2017, the median rate of suicide in Alaska was 23.4 per 100,000, compared to 12.7 per 100,000 in the United States.
- Alaska Natives continue to have the highest rate of suicide in Alaska. In 2017, the rate of suicide of Alaska Natives and American Indians was 51.9 per 100,000, compared to 43.5 per 100,000 in 2016.
- The rate of non-Alaska Natives and non-American Indians in 2017 was 20.4 per 100,000, compared to 20.2 per 100,000 in 2016.
- Rural Alaska continues to have the highest rates of suicide in in the state. Between 2008 and 2017, the Nome region had the highest rate in Alaska, with 72.8 per 100,000, compared to the statewide rate of 23.4 per 100,000.
- The highest number of deaths by suicide between 2008 and 2017 was in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and Municipality of Anchorage, where 915 of the 1,701 deaths by suicide..
- Males are more likely to die by suicide in Alaska than females. Between 2008 and 2017, 79%, or 1,348 of 1,701 deaths by suicide in Alaska were by males. During that same time period, 21%, or 353 of 1,701 deaths by suicide in Alaska were by females.
- Firearms are the most common method used in deaths by suicide in Alaska. Between 2008 and 2017, 64%, or 1,081 of 1,701 deaths by suicide in Alaska by firearms.

Source: Alaska Health Analytics and Vital Records-2019

Statewide Suicide Prevention Council Activities July 2014 through March 2018

Support Services:

- Advocated for funding for the Careline suicide prevention hotline.
- Coordinated and provided technical assistance to community coalitions located in both rural villages and urban communities to collaborate on suicide awareness and prevention efforts. Also advocated for coalition funding, and other supports. .
- Provided funding for competitive grants for the Suicide Awareness, Prevention, and Postvention program, which is managed by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) and provides direct service for at-risk youth in the school districts. .
- Provided technical assistance and advocated for funds from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to DEED for mental health counselors to provide immediate access to mental health assessment, services, and referrals for students at risk.
- Provided educational presentations at the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) convention, School Counselors Association Conference, School Health and Wellness Initiative Conference, Garrett Lee Smith Grantee Conference, Alaska Statewide Special Education Conference, and the Statewide Independent Living Council.

Outreach:

- Coordinated with the Alaska Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention to host suicide awareness walks/runs in communities across the state.
- Created or provided technical assistance for public service announcements.
- Coordinated the distribution of suicide prevention materials along the route of the Iron Dog race.
- Coordinated and provided technical assistance for developing images and videos that were distributed on various social media platforms at the AFN convention. Also, hosted a booth at the convention since 2015 giving away printed materials and Careline magnets.
- Provided coordination and technical assistance between the Juneau Suicide Prevention Coalition and the University of Alaska Southeast for a two-day summit in June of 2016. Also, provided printed materials and information.

Training:

- Coordinated and provided technical assistance to the Forget-Me-Not Coalition during FY 16 for suicide prevention training for active duty military, law enforcement, and community organizations focused on supporting service members, veterans, and families.
- Coordinated, funded, and provided technical assistance to DEED to assist in creating and revising online eLearning modules for educators, social workers, and nurses.
- Coordinated with the Division of Behavioral Health to provide in-person training offered through “Connect Training” designed by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) in New Hampshire. Connect Training provides customized training and interaction with experts in the field of suicide prevention and postvention.

Collaboration:

- Advocated for funding for a five-year grant from the National Institute of Mental Health for Alaska Native Research helping Native communities share knowledge, guide research, and identify culturally-relevant suicide prevention strategies in rural areas.
- Participated in and provided technical assistance as a member of the Governor’s suicide prevention work group.
- Coordinated with clergy leaders and provided technical assistance to the Arctic Resource Center for Suicide Prevention, which developed a faith-based suicide prevention curriculum for ministers.
- Provided technical assistance and support to the Alaska Community Foundation and Alaska Children’s Trust to establish and maintain an annual grant program funded by GCI to promote mental wellness and reduce the rates of suicide in Alaska.

For more information please contact Statewide Suicide Prevention Council assistant Eric Morrison at eric.morrison@alaska.gov or (907) 465-6518.