

**HB**

**1 2 3**

<target><bill>HB 123</bill><subject>HB  
123</subject><comm>HFIN26</comm></target>



# Alaska State Legislature

## Representative Anna Fairclough — House District 17

### House Bill 123

"An Act extending the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council; and providing for an effective date."

House Bill 123 extends the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council to June 30, 2013. Suicide is a very serious public health concern in Alaska, particularly among young males and the Alaska native population. Extension of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council is important in curtailing this avoidable loss of life. The mission of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council is to advise the governor and the legislature on issues relating to suicide. In collaboration with communities, faith-based organizations, and public-private entities, the Council works to improve the health and wellness of Alaskans by reducing suicide and its effect on individuals and communities.

By statute the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council consists of 15 members, 11 appointed by the governor and four by the Legislature. The governor appoints two executive branch state employees; one member of the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse; one member of the Alaska Mental Health Board; a designee from the Alaska Federation of Natives, Inc.; a counselor in a secondary school; an adult active in a statewide youth organization; a person who has experienced a family member's death by suicide; one person who resides in a rural community not connected by a road or Alaska marine highway to the state's main road system; a member of the clergy; and a youth under 18. The senate president appoints one majority member of the Senate; the speaker of the House appoints one majority member and one minority member of the House.

The council serves in an advisory capacity to the Legislature and governor with respect to what actions can and should be taken 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 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.

I urge your support on this important piece of legislation.

*Session:* Alaska State Capitol • Juneau, AK 99801 • 907-465-3777 • Fax 907-465-2819

*Interim:* 10928 Eagle River Road, Suite 238 • Eagle River, AK 99577 • 907-694-8944 • Fax 907-694-8945

[Representative\\_Anna\\_Fairclough@legis.state.ak.us](mailto:Representative_Anna_Fairclough@legis.state.ak.us)



# Alaska State Legislature

**Representative Anna Fairclough** — House District 17

## **CS for House Bill 123 (STA)**

"An Act extending the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council; and providing for an effective date."

### **Explanation of Changes**

**Section 1.** This section explains the composition of the council. The House State Affairs Committee decided instead of having both a majority and minority member from both bodies reside on the council that they would not designated and just have two members from each body on the council.

---

*Session:* Alaska State Capitol • Juneau, AK 99801 • 907-465-3777 • Fax 907-465-2819  
*Interim:* 10928 Eagle River Road, Suite 238 • Eagle River, AK 99577 • 907-694-8944 • Fax 907-694-8945  
[Representative Anna Fairclough@legis.state.ak.us](mailto:Representative_Anna_Fairclough@legis.state.ak.us)



# Alaska State Legislature

## Representative Anna Fairclough — House District 17

### CS House Bill 123

"An Act extending the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council; and providing for an effective date."

#### Sectional Analysis

##### Section 1. Amends AS 44.29.300

Changes the composition of the council by increasing the number of members from 15 to 16.

States that two members from each body of the legislature sit on the council.

Adds two members one of which shall represent the Department of Health and Social Services and one who shall represent the Department of Education and Early Development.

Changes the classification of the person in a secondary school from a counselor to an employee of a secondary school.

Adds one person who is enrolled in grades 9-12 of a secondary school in the state.

Changes the classification of a member under the age of 18 to a public member.

##### Section 2. Amends AS 44.29.300

Adds a new subsection that classifies the two members from each body of the legislature that sit on the council are nonvoting members.

##### Section 3. Amends AS 44.29.330(a)

States that the voting membership shall elect officers.

##### Section 4. Amends AS 44.29.340

Adds new subsection that changes the quorum requirement to seven voting members

##### Section 5. Amends AS 44.66.010(a)(8)

Extends the sunset date from June 30, 2009 until June 30, 2013.

##### Section 6. Amends AS 01.10.070(c)

Immediate effective date clause

P

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

## LEGISLATIVE BUDGET AND AUDIT COMMITTEE



Division of Legislative Audit

P.O. Box 113300  
Juneau, AK 99811-3300  
(907) 465-3830  
FAX (907) 465-2347  
legaudit@legis.state.ak.us

November 4, 2008

Members of the Legislative Budget  
and Audit Committee:

In accordance with the provisions of Title 24 and Title 44 of the Alaska Statutes (sunset legislation), the attached report is submitted for your review.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES  
STATEWIDE SUICIDE PREVENTION COUNCIL  
SUNSET REVIEW  
November 4, 2008

Audit Control Number  
06-20055-08

The review was conducted as required by AS 44.66.050 and under the authority of AS 24.20.271(1). Currently, under AS 44.66.010(a)(8), the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (council) is scheduled to terminate on June 30, 2009. We recommend the legislature extend the termination date of the council until June 30, 2013.

Four of the fifteen voting members of the council are legislators. Since the Legislative Audit Division is part of the legislative branch, our agency does not meet the independence standard required by generally accepted government auditing standards. Therefore, we are disclosing our lack of adherence to the independence auditing standard.

Except for the independence standard discussed above, the audit was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. Fieldwork procedures utilized in the course of developing the findings and discussion presented in this report are discussed in the Objectives, Scope, and Methodology.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pat Davidson".  
Pat Davidson, CPA  
Legislative Auditor

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Objectives, Scope, and Methodology .....	1
Organization and Function .....	3
Report Conclusions.....	5
Findings and Recommendations.....	7
Analysis of Public Need .....	11
Agency Response	
Department of Health and Social Services .....	19
Statewide Suicide Prevention Council.....	23

## OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

In accordance with Titles 24 and 44 of the Alaska Statutes, we have reviewed the activities of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC or council) to determine if there is a demonstrated public need for its continued existence and if it has been operating in an efficient and effective manner.

As required by AS 44.66.050(a), the legislative committee of reference shall consider this report as part of the oversight process in determining if the termination date of the council should be extended. State law currently specifies SSPC will terminate on June 30, 2009. If no action is taken by the legislature, the council will have one year from that date to conclude its administrative operations.

### Objectives

The three central, interrelated objectives of our report are:

1. To determine if the termination date of the council should be extended.
2. To determine if the council is operating in the public interest.
3. To provide a current status on the recommendations made in the prior report.

Our assessment of the operations and performance of the council was based on criteria set out in AS 44.66.050(c). Criteria set out in this statute relate to the determination of a demonstrated public need for the council.

### Scope and Methodology

Auditors and audit organizations are required to be independent in both fact and appearance to the entities being audited. Audit organizations are presumed to be organizationally independent per generally accepted government auditing standards under various situations. One of those situations, which is applicable to the Division of Legislative Audit, is when the,

*... audit organization is in a different branch of government within the same level of government as the audited entity; for example, legislative auditors auditing an executive branch program.*

The Division of Legislative Audit does not meet the organizational independence requirements because four of the fifteen voting members of SSPC are members of the Alaska State Legislature. Readers of this report may not view the conclusions, findings, and

recommendations as impartial because of the lack of organizational independence. Nevertheless, we conducted the audit of SSPC as required by AS 24.20.271 and AS 44.66.050.

Our audit reviewed the operations and activities of the council from FY 05 through FY 08.

During the course of our examination, we reviewed and evaluated the following:

- Applicable statutes and regulations.
- Budget documents, session laws, and other legislative information related to the council's operations.
- Council meeting minutes, bi-laws, and website.
- Annual reports to the legislature and governor.
- Financial reports from the State Accounting System.
- The *Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan*.
- Alaska Injury Prevention Center's follow-back studies to the council.
- Other documents related to the council's operations and mission, as necessary.

In addition, we interviewed:

- Various SSPC members, SSPC coordinators, and staff under the Department of Health and Social Services.
- Board members, executive directors and other staff of the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHTA), Alaska Mental Health Board (AMHB) and Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (ABADA).

We also attended the following meetings:

- May 5-6, 2008 meeting of SSPC.
- June 13, 2008 meeting of representatives from SSPC, Division of Behavioral Health, Division of Senior and Disability Services, the Alaska Commission on Aging, AMHTA, ABADA, AMHB, and the Governor's Council on Disability and Special Education.
- June 17, 2008 SSPC teleconference for a working session on the revision of the Suicide Prevention Plan.

## ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTION

Under AS 44.29.350, the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC or council) is charged with advising the legislature and the governor on,

*...actions that can and should be taken to improve health and wellness throughout the state by reducing suicide and its effect on individuals, families, and communities.*

In addition to this advisory role, the council's activities include planning, coordinating, educating, training, and providing technical support on the prevention of suicide.

The council consists of 15 members. There are two senators, two representatives, two executive branch employees, and nine public members. The senate seats and the representative seats are appointed by the president of the senate and the speaker of the house, respectively. The executive branch and public seats are appointed by the governor.

Alaska Statute 44.29.300 specifies the public seats be filled by,

*...one member of the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse; one member of the Alaska Mental Health Board; one person recommended by the Alaska Federation of Natives, Inc.; one person who is a counselor in a secondary school; one adult who is active in a statewide youth organization; one person who has experienced the death by suicide of a member of the person's family; one person who resides in a rural community in the state that is not connected by road or the Alaska marine highway to the main road system of the state; one person who is a member of the clergy; and one person who is under the age of 18.*

Except for the members of the House of Representatives who serve two years, council members serve staggered four-year terms.

The council is staffed by a coordinator, who, by statute, is employed by the council and directly responsible to the council. As of July 1, 2008, the coordinator is the project manager for the Prevention and Early Intervention section. The coordinator is employed for the council on a part-time basis and is assisted by a project coordinator from the same division.

### **Exhibit 1**

#### Council Members

As of September 30, 2008

##### Officers:

Brenda Moore, Public, Chair  
Pat Donelson, Public, Chair-Elect  
Renee Gayhart, DHSS, Treasurer

##### Other Members:

Charles Jones, Public  
Celena Powder, Public  
William Martin, Public  
Bernard Gatewood, Public  
Vacant, Public  
Vacant, Public  
Vacant, Public  
Bill Hogan, DHSS  
Johnny Ellis, Senate  
Kim Elton, Senate  
Woodie Salmon, House  
Reggie Joule, House

The council receives administrative assistance from the Department of Health and Social Services.

## REPORT CONCLUSIONS

Under AS 44.66.010(a)(8), the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC or council) will terminate on June 30, 2009. If the legislature does not take action to extend the termination date, the council will have one year to administratively conclude its affairs.

Alaska Statute 44.29.350 defines the purpose of the council.

*The council shall serve in an advisory capacity to the legislature and the governor with respect to what actions can and should be taken to...*

The statute continues, listing the six areas where the council should advise the legislature and the governor. In addition to advising the legislature through testimony to the House and Senate Committees, the council has taken on a direct role in various areas. These areas include broadening the public awareness of suicide and the related risk factors, the development of a statewide suicide prevention plan, and other examples which are discussed in more detail in the Analysis of Public Need section of this report.

Suicide remains a major public health problem in Alaska. Over the last seven years, the crude rate<sup>1</sup> for suicide has ranged from over 16 to 23, while the national average crude rate for suicide was 11 in 2005<sup>2</sup>.

### Exhibit 2

Suicides of Alaska Residents By Year*							
	-----Year of Death-----						
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Deaths	103	131	123	154	127	132	146
Crude Rate	16.3	20.5	19	23.4	19.1	19.7	21.6

\*2006 and 2007 data is still provisional and subject to change.  
Source: Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics

In addition to the rate of suicide being significantly higher than the national average, the profile of those committing suicide is also substantially different. In national statistics, elderly individuals are more likely to commit suicide; in Alaska, suicide is most commonly committed by individuals in their 20s. Suicide rates in Alaska are also disproportionately high in the native population.

<sup>1</sup> Crude rate is the number of suicides per 100,000 population.

<sup>2</sup> USA Suicide: 2005 Official Final Data, from American Association of Suicidology on its website, <http://www.suicidology.org>.

In developing our conclusion on whether SSPC's termination date should be extended, we evaluated SSPC's operations using the 11 factors set out in AS 44.66.050(c) to determine if the council has demonstrated a public need for its continued operation.

We found no direct correlation between the activities of the council and the change in the suicide rate for any particular year. However, given that the council's role is primarily advisory and suicide is a public health concern that is often linked with mental illness and substance abuse, both which are long term health issues, it is unlikely that a direct identifiable correlation will ever be clearly visible.

However, through the efforts of the council we have seen a broader and more public acknowledgement of the problem of suicide in Alaska. We saw the council responding to communities by working to revise the statewide suicide prevention plan, making it less clinical and more user-friendly. The council and the Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Behavioral Health (DHSS, DBH) have proposed an initiative to develop a cross-disciplinary, community-driven, and research-based approach to reducing the number of deaths by suicide in Alaska. A Suicide Prevention Strategy and Implementation Plan will be available to the legislature by December 15, 2008.

Overall, we found that the council is operating in the public interest and spearheading efforts that are necessary to address the public health concern of suicide. Therefore, we recommend the legislature extend the termination date of the council to June 30, 2013.

The four year extension is recommended because of the following issues:

- At the end of FY 08, the council was organizationally aligned with the Prevention and Early Intervention section, Division of Behavioral Health. A key to enhancing the effectiveness of the council is a good working relationship between the council and DBH, each focused on its own mission – coordinating but not duplicating. A limited extension will allow for a reevaluation of whether the closer alignment with DBH has impeded the independent voice of the council.
- Secondly, the membership requirements for appointment to the council make it difficult to fill all the seats and to ensure sufficient participation to meet quorum requirements. Again, a limited extension will allow a timely reexamination of this problem.

These issues are more fully discussed in the Findings and Recommendations section of this report.

## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommendation No. 1

The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC or council) should, in accordance with statutes, appoint its own coordinator and perform annual performance reviews.

Effective July 1, 2008, the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) assigned SSPC coordinator responsibilities to the Prevention and Early Intervention section<sup>3</sup> manager in the Division of Behavioral Health (DBH). This SSPC coordinator appointment was not made in accordance with the statutes and appears to diminish SSPC's autonomy and independent voice with the governor and legislature. Also, the coordinator may be placed in a position with potentially conflicting responsibilities between the council and DBH.

DHSS' decision was based on department personnel resource needs and a desire to align the activities of the council and the section.

The hiring, supervision, and evaluation of the SSPC coordinator are part of the council's rights and responsibilities per the statutes.<sup>4</sup> DHSS has traditionally assisted the council with the coordinator's selection. However, SSPC was not involved in the latest selection. Also, the council has not annually evaluated the coordinator's performance for at least the past four years. Neglecting these statutory requirements may have diminished the council's ability to maintain an independence voice.

We recommend the council either accept the current coordinator through a formal vote or initiate actions to hire a new coordinator. In addition, it is critical that the council conduct annual performance evaluations as required by statute, particularly if the coordinator is a DBH employee. Only through the council's interest in remaining autonomous can its independent voice be assured.

### Recommendation No. 2

The legislature should consider modifying the composition of council membership.

During FY 05 – FY 08, there were excessive vacancies on the council and significant absences by council members at its meetings. Additionally, those being appointed to the

<sup>3</sup> Prevention and Early Intervention is the section responsible for DHSS programs that address suicide prevention.

<sup>4</sup> Alaska Statute 44.29.330(b) states,

*The council may employ a coordinator to assist the council. The coordinator is in the partially exempt service. The coordinator shall be directly responsible to the council in the performance of the coordinator's duties. The council shall annually review the performance of the coordinator.*

council did not always meet the statutory qualifications for the position. Exhibit 3 illustrates the extent of vacancies and absences over the last four years.

**Exhibit 3**

Statutory Qualifications	Do incumbents meet the qualifications	Rate of attendance at SSPC meeting FY 05 – FY 08
Four legislator seats: Senate majority member Senate minority member House majority member House minority member	Yes No No Yes	Overall 15%
Two persons employed by the executive branch of state government	Yes	Overall 73%
A member of the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse	Yes	60%
A member of the Alaska Mental Health Board	Yes	100%
A person recommended by the Alaska Federation of Natives, Inc.	Yes	100%
A person who is a secondary school counselor	No <sup>5</sup>	80%
A person who is an adult and active in statewide youth organizations	Yes	73%
A person whose family has experienced death by suicide	Vacant <sup>6</sup>	33%
A person who lives in a rural community – not connected by either the road system or the marine highway	Vacant <sup>7</sup>	0%
A member of the clergy	Yes	93%
A person under the age of 18	Yes	33%
<b>Overall Average<sup>8</sup></b>		<b>54%</b>

The composition of the council's membership is established in AS 44.29.300 and includes very specific qualifications which have created difficulties in filling the positions. Vacancies combined with low attendance rates make it difficult for the council to establish a quorum at its meetings.

The legislature should consider changes to AS 44.29.300 to broaden the qualifications of council members to ensure that appointees are interested in the work of the council and can

<sup>5</sup> The current incumbent is a secondary school principal.

<sup>6</sup> This position has been vacant since November 2005.

<sup>7</sup> This position has been vacant for more than 3 of the 4 years between FY 05 and FY 08.

<sup>8</sup> This average includes one member appointed to the council that does not meet any of the statutory criteria. This member's attendance over the last 4 years has been at 87%.

make the time commitment necessary to serve. Additionally, consideration should be given to making legislative members non-voting to prevent potential quorum issues.

### Current Status of Prior Audit Recommendations

#### Prior Recommendation No. 1

The Division of Behavioral Health Community-based Suicide Prevention Program coordinator should ensure prevention programs conform to the statewide suicide prevention plan.

#### Current Status

This recommendation is no longer an issue. Starting in FY 06, the State has followed a national trend to provide grants on a more comprehensive programmatic basis. Grant funds are awarded in a way that allows communities to focus the funds according to local priorities, rather than awarding separate grants for mental health, substance abuse, or suicide programs.

Additionally, the council has undertaken a rewrite of the statewide suicide prevention plan to make it more user-friendly, so Alaskan communities can better use the plan in developing their grant activities and community plans.

#### Prior Recommendation No. 2

The administrative manager for Department of Health and Social Services Boards and Commission and the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council coordinator should develop a more formalized information system of reporting financial information to the council.

#### Current Status

This recommendation has been resolved. Council members are receiving budget and financial reports as part of their meeting packets.

#### Prior Recommendation No. 3

The council should ensure it provides public notice of all council meetings as required by Alaska Statute 44.62.310.

#### Current Status

This recommendation has been resolved.

#### Prior Recommendation No. 4

The Office of the Governor should make appointments to the council in a timely manner.

#### Current Status

Appointments to the council continue to be a problem. See current Recommendation No. 2.

(Intentionally left blank)

## A NALYSIS OF PUBLIC NEE D

The following analysis of commission activities relates to the public need factors defined in the sunset law, AS 44.66.050. This analysis was not intended to be comprehensive, but to address those areas we were able to cover within the scope of our review.

*Determine the extent to which the board, commission, or program has operated in the public interest.*

To assess whether the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC or council) has operated in the public interest, we measured the council's activities against objectives set out by the legislature for SSPC in state law, at AS 44.29.350.<sup>9</sup> From our review of council activities, we conclude SSPC has reasonably addressed its statutory objectives.

The council, as an advisory body, has made presentations to the House and Senate Committees on Health, Education and Social Services. Additionally, they provide the legislature and the governor with the council's annual report.

The council also actively participates in the six areas in which they are intended to advise the legislature and the governor. The following discussion describes the council's areas of active participation:

1. Actions to be taken to improve health and wellness by reducing suicide.

During FY 08, the council, in partnership with Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Behavioral Health (DHSS, DBH), proposed the Alaska Suicide Prevention Initiative to the governor and the legislature. The initiative proposed developing a cross-disciplinary, community-driven and research-based approach to reduce the number of deaths by suicide in Alaska. The initiative addressed potential activities from FY 09 through FY 13. The FY 09 budget included an increment dedicated to the development of the Suicide Prevention Strategy and Implementation Plan, which is to be completed by December 15, 2008.

---

<sup>9</sup> Alaska Statute 44.29.350 states,

*The council shall serve in an advisory capacity to the legislature and the governor with respect to what actions can and should be taken to (1) improve health and wellness throughout the state by reducing suicide and its effects on individuals, families, and communities; (2) broaden the public's awareness of suicide and the risk factors related to suicide; (3) enhance suicide prevention services and programs throughout the state; (4) develop healthy communities through comprehensive, collaborative, community-based and faith-based approaches; (5) develop and implement a statewide suicide prevention plan; and (6) strengthen existing and build new partnerships between public and private entities that will advance suicide prevention efforts in the state.*

2. Increasing public awareness of suicide and the related risk factors.

The council has become increasingly diligent in this area. The council continues to maintain a website<sup>10</sup> that provides suicide statistics, risk factors, and prevention. Additionally, the website provides links to resources such as the council's annual reports and statewide suicide prevention plan.

The council participated in many conferences and workshops during FY 05 through FY 08, making presentations or providing information displays. The council also purchased and distributed items such as pens, pencils, magnets, and posters to those needing support for suicide prevention related functions.

In 2006 the council initiated the "Live Your Dream" bracelet campaign which targets the State's youth population. This has been viewed as particularly popular and successful in spreading suicide awareness.

The council has contributed to the "YOU KNOW ME" media campaign which focuses on suicide prevention awareness. The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHTA) has sponsored the council in this endeavor since 2005.

3. Enhance suicide prevention services and programs throughout the State.

Overall, the council enhances suicide prevention services and programs by directly providing information or providing direction to other knowledgeable sources. Throughout the year, the council receives two to three requests per week for information or technical assistance. Their web site generates questions from the public and other organizations who then request informational materials from the council. As appropriate, they also provide studies, DVDs, books, and other materials on suicide and suicide prevention.

Other examples of SSPC's enhancement of suicide prevention services include:

- Involvement in the certification of Careline<sup>11</sup> and DBH's targeted gatekeeper training.<sup>12</sup>
- Having the Careline phone number placed in phone books across the State.

<sup>10</sup> <http://health.hss.state.ak.us/suicideprevention/default.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Careline is Alaska's statewide toll-free crisis intervention and assistance hotline.

<sup>12</sup> DBH has contracted for the development of a training curriculum specific to Alaska. Gatekeepers are individuals who have face-to-face contact with large numbers of people in their community. The council's role in the initiative is to review the developed curriculum and provide feedback.

- Sponsoring travel for communities that needed assistance to attend gatekeeper training.
  - Providing funds which allowed the Careline project manager, the Boys & Girls Club representative, and the Survivor Group representative to attend the American Association of Suicidology Conference in 2006.
4. Develop healthy communities through comprehensive, collaborative, community-based and faith-based approaches.

The council has maintained faith-based partnerships through some SSPC members' participation in faith-based organizations. Other community approaches have included:

- Sponsoring an Alaska State Council on the Arts workshop in Bethel to orient artists and arts organizations to programs, resources, and grant opportunities.
  - Providing a liaison to assist grassroots community members as they researched and established a nonprofit organization whose mission is suicide prevention, awareness, and support of the survivors.
  - Providing technical support to community programs providing suicide prevention services via research, best practices updates, referral resources, training, and conference opportunities.
  - Recommending the Boys & Girls Clubs' staff development director receive training and certification as a gatekeeper<sup>13</sup> trainer.
5. Develop and implement a statewide suicide prevention plan.

SSPC completed its first statewide plan in 2004, and it followed the format of the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention and existing plans from other states. However, communities did not find the plan user-friendly in providing guidance in aligning their grant activities and community plans with the statewide plan. The council is now revising the statewide plan to make it more relevant to the granting process for the Comprehensive Behavioral Health Prevention and Early Intervention Services grants.

6. Collaborating on planning activities with other related agencies.

In 2005 SSPC established a memorandum of agreement (MOA) with the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (ABADA), the Alaska Mental Health Board (AMHB), and DHSS. In 2006 an MOA was established with AMHTA. The purpose of the MOAs is coordination and collaboration to achieve the best outcomes for their targeted

---

<sup>13</sup> See footnote 12 for more information about gatekeepers.

beneficiaries. Their websites are interlinked and these entities participate in reciprocal reporting.

Other boards that SSPC collaborates with include Alaska Commission on Aging, Alaska Brain Injury Network, Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education, Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, and Division of Behavioral Health. While there is reciprocal reporting between these boards, MOAs have not yet been established.

*Determine the extent to which the operation of the board, commission, or agency program has been impeded or enhanced by existing statutes, procedures, and practices that it has adopted, and any other matter, including budgetary, resource, and personnel matters.*

SSPC has not operated in strict compliance with the statutes in regards to the composition of the council and some personnel matters. Specifically:

1. SSPC was not involved in hiring its latest coordinator, a position directly responsible to the council; nor has the council reviewed the coordinator's performance for any of the past four years. These are requirements stated in AS 44.29.330. At least in appearance, these moves could impede the council's independence and autonomy when advising the legislature and the governor. (See Recommendation No. 1)
2. Some council members either do not meet the positions' requirements as presented in the statutes or have excessive absences from the board meetings and other SSPC activities. (See Recommendation No. 2)

**Exhibit 4**

<b>Schedule of Operating Expenditure and Funding Sources</b>				
<b>(Unaudited)</b>				
	<u>FY 05</u>	<u>FY 06</u>	<u>FY 07</u>	<u>FY 08</u>
<b>Expenditures</b>				
Personal Services	\$ 18,300	\$ 26,028	\$ 22,307	\$ 35,915
Travel	23,847	32,636	41,155	51,072
Services	33,335	37,515	19,821	18,205
Commodities	<u>14,383</u>	<u>6,336</u>	<u>8,461</u>	<u>2,142</u>
<b>Total Operating Expenditures</b>	<b>\$ 89,865</b>	<b>\$ 102,515</b>	<b>\$ 91,744</b>	<b>\$ 107,334</b>
<b>Funding Sources</b>				
General Fund Appropriations	<u>\$ 89,865</u>	<u>\$ 102,515</u>	<u>\$ 91,744</u>	<u>\$ 107,334</u>
<b>Total Funding</b>	<b>\$ 89,865</b>	<b>\$ 102,515</b>	<b>\$ 91,744</b>	<b>\$ 107,334</b>

*Determine the extent to which the board, commission, or agency has recommended statutory changes that are generally of benefit to the public interest.*

The council has not pursued any statutory changes.

***Determine the extent to which the board, commission, or agency has encouraged interested persons to report to it concerning the effect of its regulations and decisions on the effectiveness of service, economy of service, and availability of service that it has provided.***

The council provided public notices to all but one of their meetings. However, public comment periods occurred during all of the meetings. The council has conscientiously made efforts to conduct at least one of their four meetings in a remote location such as Bethel, Kotzebue, and Sitka. They have held three town hall meetings, usually following one of their regularly scheduled meetings. Additionally, the public has the opportunity to contact the council, through its website, to offer feedback and request information.

***Determine the extent to which the board, commission, or agency has encouraged public participation in the making of its regulations and decisions.***

Under AS 44.29.350, the council has developed and implemented a statewide suicide prevention plan. The existing plan is currently under major revision to increase its usability. The council has requested input from participants outside the council such as the grantees, gatekeepers,<sup>14</sup> and members of other boards. Once the plan has been approved by the council, it will be sent out for public testimony. Further revisions, as a result of public testimony, may be made before its release.

***Determine the efficiency with which public inquiries or complaints regarding the activities of the board, commission, or agency filed with it, with the department to which a board or commission is administratively assigned, or with the office of victims' rights or the office of the ombudsman have been processed and resolved.***

Neither the Office of the Ombudsman nor the Office of Victim's Rights reported any complaints filed with them regarding SSPC.

***Determine the extent to which a board or commission that regulates entry into an occupation or profession has presented qualified applicants to serve the public.***

This criterion is not applicable since SSPC does not regulate any occupations or professions.

***Determine the extent to which state personnel practices, including affirmative action requirements, have been complied with by the board, commission, or agency to its own activities and the area of activity or interest.***

Nothing in our review of the council indicated that there were any complaints involving SSPC personnel practices.

---

<sup>14</sup> See footnote 12 for more information about gatekeepers.

***Determine the extent to which statutory, regulatory, budgeting, or other changes are necessary to enable the agency, board, or commission to better serve the interests of the public and to comply with the factors enumerated in this subsection.***

As discussed in Report Conclusions, we recommend the council be continued. However, in Recommendation No. 1, we also suggest that the appointment of the council's coordinator be approved by the council and annual performance reviews of the coordinator's performance should be conducted as set out in statute. This is important for SSPC to maintain its autonomy in the future for advising the legislature and governor. Due to personnel resource concerns and the desire for closer alignment between the council and DBH, DHSS has organizationally moved the administration of the council to DBH, specifically the Prevention and Early Intervention section. It is essential that DHSS and the council develop means to assure the council maintains an independent voice.

As discussed in Recommendation No. 2, the council should ensure that appointed members meet the qualifications of AS 44.29.300. We suggest the legislature consider broadening the qualifications for membership to ensure sufficient qualified and interested individuals are available and willing to serve on the council.

***Determine the extent to which the board, commission, or agency has effectively attained its objectives and purposes and the efficiency with which the board, commission, or agency has operated.***

The council established performance measures which are detailed in the annual reports to the legislature. For the FY 08 annual report, the measures were:

- Reduction of the three-year average rate of Alaska suicides.

SSPC has been unable to achieve this objective at this time. During FY 08, the council has partnered with DHSS, DBH in an initiative, attempting to accomplish this by FY 13.

- Review and update the statewide suicide prevention plan.

SSPC members are currently reviewing the plan with the objective of making it more relevant to the granting process for the Comprehensive Behavioral Health Prevention and Early Intervention Services grants.

- Consistently review data to identify trends, make analyses, and provide recommendations regarding suicide prevention, education and services needed in the State.

The Follow-Back Study, which presented Alaska suicide data and analysis for the period from September 1, 2003 through August 31, 2006, was received by SSPC in February 2007. The council has and continues to use this study to make recommendations to the legislature, executive branch agencies, and the public.

- Support and assist Alaskans in starting a state Suicide Prevention Awareness Network (Network).

The council supported the Alaska Suicide Prevention Action Coalition (ASPAC) in its research into becoming a Network affiliate. Although the Coalition decided to incorporate and maintain its autonomy, its goals are similar to the Network and further the goals of the council.

- Increase the number of communities that can recognize the warning signs of suicide through increasing the number of community-based suicide prevention grantees who align their community funding with the statewide suicide prevention plan.

The Prevention and Early Intervention section gave comprehensive prevention grants to communities for the FY 06 - FY 08 three-year grant cycle. A comprehensive prevention grant can be used to address any alcohol, drug, mental health, or suicide related issue. Since none of the grants during this grant cycle were specifically for suicide prevention, no tracking was done to determine whether grantees aligned their funding with the statewide plan. As comprehensive prevention grants continue to be made by DBH, the council should revise this performance measure.

***Determine the extent to which the board, commission, or agency duplicates the activities of another governmental agency or the private sector.***

The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council mission overlaps with other state entities such as the Alaska Mental Health Board, the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority. However, the council was established to bring attention and focus, specifically, to the suicide issue in Alaska, so overlapping missions are to be expected.

While the council actively collaborates with various other boards and commissions with related missions, there does not appear to be any duplication of activities between the council and these other governmental agencies or in the private sector.

(Intentionally left blank)

# STATE OF ALASKA

DEPT. OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES  
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

SARAH PALIN, GOVERNOR

P.O. BOX 110601  
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99811-0601  
PHONE: (907) 465-3030  
FAX: (907) 465-3068

December 1, 2008

Pat Davidson  
Legislative Auditor  
Alaska State Legislature, Division of Legislative Audit  
PO Box 113300  
Juneau, AK 99811-3300

RECEIVED  
DEC 01 2008  
LEGISLATIVE AUDIT

Dear Ms. Davidson:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide a written response to the *Preliminary Audit Report on the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, Sunset Review, November 4, 2008*. I have reviewed the report and offer the following comments.

First, we appreciate your staff's careful attention to detail and the thorough nature of the audit process, including the many interviews and opportunities for individuals to be heard and to voice their opinions. Suicide is a critical social issue for the State of Alaska and the Statewide Suicide prevention Council (SSPC) has a significant responsibility to find strategies and solutions to begin reducing the rate of suicide throughout our state.

As stated in the audit report, the SSPC has recently undergone a significant change in location within the department and in their staff coordination. Beginning July 1, 2008, the SSPC is now under the direction of the Division of Behavioral Health, section of Prevention & Early Intervention Services. The reason for this change of location was to allow for better coordination of statewide suicide prevention efforts between the SSPC and Behavioral Health and to promote a more seamless and coordinated approach to suicide prevention in Alaska. While this transition is complete, the SSPC members and Behavioral Health staff are continuing to define and develop their relationship and structure. We are confident this change will accomplish its intended purpose and provide for better statewide alignment in issues related to suicide prevention.

The Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) supports and agrees with the audit findings and recommendations. We are pleased with the recommendation to extend the SSPC for four more years, with a new sunset date of June 30, 2013. We believe the DHSS and the SSPC are at a critical juncture to make significant progress in reducing and preventing suicide in Alaska. DHSS, in partnership with the council and others, recently received a 3-year federal Garrett Lee Smith Youth Suicide Prevention grant to focus on developing regional strategies to 'turn the corner' on suicide data. In addition, with one-time funding from the FY08 Legislature, we are offering regional suicide prevention planning grants focusing on those regions of Alaska with the highest rates of suicide. It is our intent that these planning grants will become the foundation of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Initiative, a joint effort of the DHSS and the Council. The four (4) year extension will allow these projects to become embedded in our statewide strategy and to develop sustainability of community/regional efforts.

Pat Davidson  
Alaska State Legislature, Division of Legislative Audit  
December 1, 2008  
Page 2

In response to the other two recommendations, again we are in agreement with the findings and recommendation, with the following comments and suggestions.

Recommendation No. 1:

*The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council should, in accordance with statutes, appoint its own coordinator and perform annual performance reviews.*

With the change in location of the SSPC to the Division of Behavioral Health, and the departure of Kathryn Craft as Coordinator, interim decisions were made with minimal input from the council. One decision was to have two current Behavioral Health staff share the role of providing support to the council. L. Diane Casto, Section Manager and James Gallanos, Project Coordinator, are currently sharing the task of providing staff support to the council. It was never the intent that these two staff would be the Council Coordinator, but would be available to provide support and guidance as requested from Council Chairperson Brenda Moore.

Due to limited funding, there are not enough funds for a full-time coordinator, and in fact, Ms. Craft provided approximately .25 FTE services to the council. At the most recent SSPC meeting in September, and again during a November telephonic executive work session of the council, it was decided that the personnel money available in the SSPC budget will be used to hire a .50 FTE Project Assistant, hired by the council, to provide day-to-day support. We are beginning the process to reclass the current Position Control Number (PCN) previously assigned to Ms. Craft. Once completed, we will begin the solicitation and hiring process, with input and direction from the council. The position will be located in the Juneau offices of the Division of Behavioral Health.

We also support the audit recommendation for the council to conduct annual evaluations of the council staff person and will provide assistance as requested.

Recommendation No. 2:

*The legislature should consider modifying the composition of council membership.*

As stated in the audit, there have been "excessive vacancies on the council and significant absences by council members at its meetings. "In addition, it is noted that "those being appointed to the council did not always meet the statutory qualifications for the position." We agree with both of these conclusions and support the recommendation to consider modifying the composition of the council membership.

In July, when the SSPC came into the Division of Behavioral Health, section of Prevention & Early Intervention Services, Ms. Casto began a dialogue with the Director of Boards and Commissions about the current vacancies and how best to recruit and/or encourage applications to fill these positions. Through this process, it became evident that the current membership did not directly meet the statutory qualifications for council membership. Discussions with the office of Boards and Commissions continue with DBH staff to make sure vacant positions are

Pat Davidson  
Alaska State Legislature, Division of Legislative Audit  
December 1, 2008  
Page 3

filled in a timely manner and that applicants meet the statutory requirements. The office of Boards and Commissions is currently reviewing a number of applications for SSPC membership.

In addition, at the September meeting of the SSPC, there was a discussion about these current qualifications or categories of representation, and the council agrees that some modifying of the council composition would be beneficial. Providing more flexibility and broader definitions (i.e. expanding a secondary school counselor to a school counselor or K-12 school personnel) would allow for a larger pool of potential candidates.


Another area that has concerned the council is the large number of legislators required as council members. While the council is not concerned with having legislative representation and in fact supports their membership, it is difficult for legislators to be available for meetings, creating difficulty having a quorum for conducting council business. As reported in the audit, legislative members have attended meeting 15% of the time over the last 4 years.

With the challenges the current statutory qualifications have created, the DHSS supports the recommendation to modify the membership and, upon request, will work with the council to develop broader and more flexible categories of representation for possible legislative action.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to review and respond to the preliminary audit report. We support the work of the Legislative Audit team, and believe your recommendations will strengthen the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, the collaboration with Behavioral Health, and the council outcomes.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions or would like additional information.

Sincerely,



William H. Hogan  
Commissioner

cc: Melissa Stone, Director, Division of Behavioral Health

(Intentionally left blank)

**To:** Legislative Budget and Audit Committee  
Division of Legislative Audit

**From:** Statewide Suicide Prevention Council  
Brenda Moore, Chair

**Re:** Department of Health and Social Services  
Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, Sunset Review, November 4, 2008

RECEIVED  
NOV 30 2008  
LEGISLATIVE AUDIT

November 28, 2008

**Recommendation No. 1**

The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC or council) should, in accordance with statutes appoint its own coordinator and perform annual performance reviews.

During an executive session, Nov. 24, 2008, the council discussed hiring a part-time coordinator to work in conjunction with the Division of Behavioral Health, Office of Prevention and Early Intervention manager and prevention specialist that currently provides administrative support to the council. There was consensus among council members that it could develop its own goals and implementation plans with input and assistance from its current administrative support staff. A coordinator is needed to organize and carry out operational activities necessary to support the council in achieving its goals. The council determined to form a committee to review the budget and job classification in order to hire a coordinator. A performance review schedule and procedure will also be established.

**Recommendation No. 2**

The legislature should consider modifying the composition of council membership.

The council is in agreement with the recommendation to broaden the qualifications of council members to ensure that appointees are interested in the work of the council and can make the time commitment necessary to serve. In addition the council agrees to the recommendation that consideration should be made to making legislative members non-voting to prevent potential quorum issues.

travel back in  
live in  
sister,  
velled to  
s release  
d so hap-  
express  
ohamed's  
l be pros-  
abuse al-  
istan and  
or Amer-  
re known  
any mis-  
or crim-  
d in Pak-  
to return  
port and  
months,  
d he was  
is from a  
ed by at  
ay 2008  
S. apart-  
nd blow  
said he  
ore than  
ropped  
October  
e prose-  
ary trial  
govern-  
vidence.  
lawsuit  
ret U.S.  
hey said  
ice was  
ave re-  
ain's at-  
tigating  
riminal  
f Britain  
errogat-

or stay and fight.  
Just two sheds, were de-  
stroyed in the Melbourne suburb  
of Belgrave South before the fire  
threat eased Monday, but the par-  
tic showed how jittery Australians

dropped.  
The confirmed death toll was  
increased to 210 early today, and  
was expected to rise as more re-  
mains were identified from the  
ruins.

we have enacted the Black  
wind (of violence) and have  
started the reconstruction  
process," al-Maliki told hun-  
dreds of officials as Iraqi soldiers  
with red berets stood guard

Like too many Alaskans,  
we lost a son to suicide.

# KNOW

He was home from college for the summer.  
He had a wide network of friends. He was  
so loved. But in retrospect, we realized he  
had battled depression since high school.

Our loss has led us to suicide prevention  
efforts. We don't want other parents, or  
anyone, to feel this wrenching heartbreak.  
We've joined our community task force  
([alaska-suicideprevention.org](http://alaska-suicideprevention.org)), to get out  
the word: signs someone's considering  
suicide, risk factors, how to talk to them,  
where to get help.

The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council  
website has even more information.

[www.hhs.state.ak.us/suicideprevention](http://www.hhs.state.ak.us/suicideprevention) or  
call the 24-hour hotline:  
Alaska's Caroline  
1-877-288-HELP (4357)

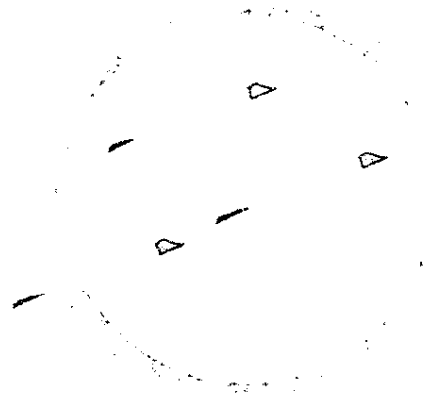


THE TRUST

The Alaska Medical Health Trust Authority  
[www.mhtrust.org](http://www.mhtrust.org)

Sam and Gayle Irwate, advocates for long time Alaskans  
retired public employees.

A message from the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services



# Statewide Suicide Prevention Council



Sarah Palin GOVERNOR

Karleen K. Jackson COMMISSIONER

[www.hss.state.ak.us/suicideprevention](http://www.hss.state.ak.us/suicideprevention)

## Alaska needs:

- A committed person to take initiative, a core leadership group and active volunteers
- A partnership involving multiple levels of the community
- Support from school district administrations
- A foundation of mental health, substance abuse and emergency/crisis services
- Training, knowledge of best practices and materials
- A plan with realistic goals and strategies
- Appropriate funding
- Media focus on the issue

(adapted from June 2004 Group Health Community Foundation Evaluation)

*“Suicide prevention work must come from (and out of) the community.”*

*Bethel Town Hall meeting participant, May 2005*

## Council — Historical Overview

By statute the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council consists of 15 members, 11 appointed by the governor and four by the Legislature. The governor appoints two executive branch state employees; one member of the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse; one member of the Alaska Mental Health Board; a designee from the Alaska Federation of Natives, Inc.; a counselor in a secondary school; an adult active in a statewide youth organization; a person who has experienced a family member's death by suicide; one person who resides in a rural community not connected by a road or Alaska marine highway to the state's main road system; a member of the clergy; and a youth under 18. The senate president appoints one majority member of the Senate; the speaker of the House appoints one majority member and one minority member of the House.

The council serves in an advisory capacity to the Legislature and governor with respect to what actions can and should be taken 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 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.

## RISK FACTORS THAT A PERSON MIGHT BE SUICIDAL

- Talks about suicide — seriously or “just kidding.”
- Has attempted suicide before.
- Has trouble eating or sleeping.
- Prepares for death — makes out a will and final arrangements.
- Gives away prized possessions.
- Has had recent severe losses; lost someone to suicide
- Drastic changes in behavior.
- Withdraws from friends, social activities.
- Loses interest in hobbies, work, school.
- Takes unnecessary risks.
- Loses interest or dramatic change in personal appearance.
- Increases use of alcohol or drugs.

WAYS YOU CAN HELP

Be willing to listen.  
Allow expression of feelings.  
Accept the feelings.

Be nonjudgmental.  
Don't lecture the value of life.

Don't dare someone to do it.

Don't be sworn to secrecy.  
Connect with services specializing in crisis intervention.  
Offer to accompany the person in need.

Pay attention when a person "just kids" about ending it all.

Offer hope that alternatives are available, but don't offer glib reassurances.

Take action. Remove means, such as guns or stockpiled pills.

# Statewide Suicide Prevention Council

Performance Measures	3
Alaska Suicides per Region	6-7
Alaska Suicide Follow Back Study	14
Alaska Suicide Information and Data	15
Council Members	back cover

*Prevention works!*

*Strong communities  
are an essential part  
of a successful  
prevention  
network.*

## Statewide Suicide Prevention Council Performance Measures — Fiscal Year 2007 Report on Activities

In response to the 2005 legislative Suicide Prevention Council sunset extension hearings, Council members drafted the following performance measures to guide their work over the next several years. These measures were chosen to respond directly to the legislative audit findings and, more important, to reflect the Council's concern with Alaska's high suicide rate.

**1** In an effort to get Alaska off the national list of the "top ten" states with the highest suicide rates for the first time since 1991, the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council will partner with the Division of Behavioral Health to reduce the three-year average rate of Alaska suicides from 21 deaths per 100,000 population to 15 per 100,000, representing a 29 percent decrease from the current rate, over a seven-year period.

The three-year average rate for 2002–2004 = 21.1/100,000

2006	21.1	x	5%	=	1.05	=	20.1	/100,000
2007	20.1	x	5%	=	1.01	=	19.1	/100,000
2008	19.1	x	5%	=	0.95	=	18.14	/100,000
2009	18.14	x	5%	=	.91	=	17.23	/100,000
2010	17.23	x	5%	=	.86	=	16.37	/100,000
2011	16.37	x	5%	=	.82	=	15.55	/100,000
2012	15.55	x	5%	=	.78	=	14.78	/100,000

**Progress.** The current three-year average Alaska suicide rate for 2003–2005 is 20.86/100,000. This is a decrease from the previous three-year average of 21.1/100,000. There were 131 suicides in 2005, giving Alaska a fatality rate of 19.7/100,000. This rate is well ahead of our scheduled decreases, but it is more accurate to rely on the three-year averages due to the annual fluctuation in rates.

**2** On a yearly basis, review and update the Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan as indicated by community feedback and Council members' recommendations.

**Progress.** Council members are currently reviewing the Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan for revisions to be made during FY07. The FY07 version will include an introductory letter from William Martin, Council chair.

3 Through the Follow-Back Study and other data sources, consistently review data and information in an effort to identify trends, make analysis and forward recommendations to the department regarding prevention, education and services needed statewide. This information may assist in:

- a understanding the suicidal mind more clearly;
- b understanding who decedents thought of as "gatekeepers," (i.e., who they confided in or who may have been able to recognize the ideation);
- c designing new intervention and prevention programs to help suicidal individuals and suicide survivors;
- d bringing new money into the state to combat suicide;
- e providing a better understanding of the age groups and racial groups involved;
- f discovering and providing information on risk and protective factors that can be prevented or enhanced;
- g access and use of behavioral health services;
- h ideation communicated to others;
- i prescription medication being used; and,
- j recent encounters with law enforcement or medical staff.

**Progress.** The Alaska Injury Prevention Center (AIPC) and our research partners (American Association of Suicidology and the Critical Illness and Trauma Foundation) have collected data on suicides in Alaska from Sept. 1, 2003, through Dec. 31, 2006. A preliminary analysis of data from this three-year period has been completed and submitted to the Alaska Suicide Prevention Council. The final analysis and report of the Follow-Back Study (personal interviews) should be completed in February 2007.

The Alaska Injury Prevention Center presented the suicide data at an international suicide prevention conference in Durban, South Africa (September 2005); at the Alaska Health Summit (December 2005); for the Alaska Native Medical Center, Southcentral Foundation; and to several other small groups. The Follow-Back Study and data were instrumental in the formation of the Mat-Su Valley survivors group. Limited data from the study have been made available to Native health corporations for grant requests, to police chaplains, and to other groups to assist in suicide prevention or coping program design.

- 4 Support and assist Alaskans in starting a SPAN-Alaska (Suicide Prevention Awareness Network) affiliate. This grassroots community effort enlists the support of individuals to:
- a establish a group that will oversee the SPAN-Alaska affiliate by becoming a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit; draft Articles of Incorporation and bylaws;
  - b sign up a minimum of 150 new members; and
  - c develop a Survivor Support Group list, gather baseline data on the number of Survivor Support Groups, and track the increase of Survivor Support Groups.

**Progress.** While the grassroots community members researching the feasibility of becoming a SPAN affiliate decided not to proceed, they have continued to be active in their work toward suicide prevention and awareness and, more important, as support to other survivors of suicide. Statewide Suicide Prevention Council member Stan Tucker volunteered as liaison between the Council and these community members.

**5** Support the Division of Behavioral Health in its efforts to increase the number of communities that can recognize the warning signs of suicide by tracking the number of community-based Suicide Prevention grantees that align their community suicide prevention funding with the Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan by:

- a** conducting eight community trainings on the use of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan; and
- b** tracking the number of trainings provided from July 1, 2005–June 30, 2006.

**Progress.** The Division of Behavioral Health Request for Proposals required all grantees to align their suicide prevention efforts with the Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan. At the statewide meeting for prevention grantees (September 2006), the division created a presentation on community-based planning for implementing effective strategies aligned with the statewide plan. The Council with the division has provided two trainings on use of the statewide plan and assessing community readiness for decreasing suicide and non-lethal suicidal behaviors. These trainings took place at the Full Lives Conference (April 2006) and the Rural Behavioral Health Providers Conference (June 2006).

**6** Assist the Division of Behavioral Health in its SAMHSA Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act youth suicide prevention application, and if awarded, in its implementation.

**Progress.** The Council supported the state's Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act youth suicide prevention application. Alaska's application was not awarded funding; however, some of the activities that were included in the response, such as Gatekeeper training and extending the Follow-Back Study, will continue to be funded through other avenues. It is planned to apply again at the next opportunity.

**7** Provide technical assistance to Boys & Girls Clubs of Alaska statewide youth suicide prevention initiative, Project LEAD (Leadership, Education, Acceptance and Determination). Project LEAD builds protective factors in youth through academic and leadership programming, along with alcohol and substance abuse prevention programming.

**Progress.** Project LEAD empowers Boys & Girls Clubs Instructors to network with mental health and medical providers, school counselors, cultural leaders, churches and parents to identify and serve at-risk and in-crisis youth. In 2005, due to a lapse in essential grant funding, Project LEAD sites fell from 22 communities to 16. Prevention specialists in these communities intervened with 43 youth in crisis and tracked another 301 youth who exhibited one or more risk factors. Staff continue to seek partnership and grant support for suicide prevention efforts and continue to train front-line professionals in first-response intervention skills. Ninety-five current front-line employees are trained in suicide intervention and prevention.

The Suicide Prevention Council provides technical support to the program via research and best practice updates and referral resources, and training and conference opportunities. In April 2005, the Council sponsored the Project LEAD Coordinator's travel and registration to the National Suicide Prevention and Awareness Conference in Seattle, Wash.; and at the Council's recommendation, Boys & Girls Clubs Director of Staff Development received training and certification as a Gatekeeper Trainer.

**8** Gather data from the Division of Behavioral Health on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services-funded Gatekeeper Training:

- a** number of trainings held; and
- b** number of attendees.

*(continued on page 8)*

Suicides per 100,000 per Region  
for the last ten years

RATE	REGION
More than 70	Northwest Arctic Nome Census area
50-70	Wade Hampton Bethel Census area
30-50	North Slope Borough Dillingham Bristol Bay Lake Borough Peninsula Borough
Less than 30	Kodiak Island Aleutians Mat-Su Borough Anchorage Kenai Peninsula Valdez-Cordova Census area Fairbanks Southeast Fairbanks Denali Yukon-Koyukuk Census area Southeast

71.7  
(65)

55.3  
(126)

10.9  
(10)

KEY TO NUMBERS ON THE MAP

00.0 RATE PER 100,000  
(0) REGIONAL COUNT

# Suicides (and numbers) per Region

1996-2005

44.8

(33)

STATEWIDE TOTALS

20.5

(1256) TOTAL COUNT

71.5

(50)

21.5

(202)

17.3

(616)

16.4

(19)

13.7

(98)

31.3

(21)

12.3

(16)

[www.hss.state.ak.us/suicideprevention](http://www.hss.state.ak.us/suicideprevention)

## SSPC Performance Measures *(continued from page 5)*

**Progress.** From Oct. 1, 2005, to Sept. 30, 2006, implementation of Targeted Gatekeeper Training of Trainers (TOT) was completed. Phase II was completed in July 2006. Following the regional TOT's there was a follow-up meeting for all gatekeeper trainers in August to allow them to meet each other, share what is working, and discuss ideas for further expansion of the gatekeeper training program. The trainers have a listserv that enhances their ability to share and support one another.

TABLE ONE Targeted Gatekeeper Testing of Trainers Sessions

SCHEDULED FOR 2007	LOCATION	TARGET AUDIENCE	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
April 21	Anchorage	Northern	7
April 21	Anchorage	Southcentral	8
April 21	Anchorage	Southeastern	8
April 21	Anchorage	Statewide	18

The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council Board members set performance measures for themselves to help them stay involved in spreading the word about the work of the Council. Some of the effort is represented above. The Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan was presented at numerous conferences, health fairs, and health entity gatherings. Board members also participated in talking to their legislators, chairing committee meetings, submitting letters to the editor and participating in suicide awareness efforts in a variety of settings. See Table Two.

TABLE TWO Council Members' Performance Measures

SCHEDULED TASKS	ACCOMPLISHED TASKS
1 Present statewide suicide prevention plan in two public venues.	★★★★★★★ ★★★★★★★ ★★★★★
2 Submit two digital photographs and one written article of member or constituent activity relevant to suicide prevention awareness of activities for the legislative report.	★★★★
3 Arrange and attend at least two meetings with legislators, other than council members who are legislators, to discuss the Council's mission, activities and performance measures.	★★★★★★★
4 Submit one Letter to the Editor to a newspaper of member choice addressing suicide prevention awareness and Council activities.	★★★★
5 Demonstrate meaningful participation in a statewide or worldwide suicide prevention effort (i.e., Worldwide Suicide Prevention Awareness Day, Sept.10).	★★★★
6 The above items may be substituted for leadership on a significant Council priority/project that impacts the visibility, longevity and/or financial sustainability of the Council.	★★

The Council has various suicide prevention material available free of charge. Please contact Kathy Craft at

[Kathryn\\_Craft@health.state.ak.us](mailto:Kathryn_Craft@health.state.ak.us)

if you would like to receive items that are available.

Posters

Pens

Magnets

Statewide Suicide Prevention Plans

Annual Reports

You KNOW Me Posters

Ramy Brooks trading cards

Statewide Resource Guides

Radio Public Service Announcements on CD

Ramy Brooks DVD with Study Guide

McDowell Report on the Economic Costs of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse in Alaska, 2005 Update.

“You KNOW Me,” The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority’s coordinated communication campaign, has used print, radio, and television announcements to reduce stigma and increase awareness that treatment works. The Trust also provided the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council with funds to continue statewide suicide prevention and awareness focus through their coordinated communications and advocacy work.

The Trust’s daily Web site activity has significantly increased from the year prior to the campaign. Average daily visits are up 50 percent, and page views up 31 percent.

Calls to the Statewide Suicide Prevention toll-free Careline (877-266-HELP) increase when the number appears in print ads. In some months, calls have gone up from 300 to 400, coming from all over the state.

We suspect that there is similar activity on local 24-hour hotlines. (Because the lines are run by volunteers, reports are sporadic.)

## Fiscal 2007 Statewide Suicide Prevention Council Highlights and Accomplishments

### “Live Your Dream”— Youth Prevention Focus

As part of the Live Your Dream campaign, silicone bracelets with the message “Live Your Dream” have been distributed free of charge to Alaska middle and high school youth. The positive outer message links to a resource on the inside — “To talk, call 1-877-266-HELP.” The bracelets are given to schools accompanied by a letter giving ideas of prevention activities such as:

#### 1 Government/Tribal

- a) Declare a Suicide Prevention Awareness Day or Week; the national Yellow Ribbon Week is in September each year.
  - o Host a communitywide scavenger hunt for protective factors (i.e., Youth embark with a “Prevention Passport” and receive stamps from elders, health professionals, coaches, school officials, clergy and businesses).
- b) Encourage local businesses, schools and community agencies to give discounts or free items to youth wearing their bracelets during that week/day.

- o Hold a “Life” cereal-eating contest for the younger students.
- o Organize a “Life” board game tournament.
- o Create a banner “Celebrating Life” with pictures of friends/families involved in healthy activities/hobbies.

#### 2 Schools/Youth Agencies

- a) Ask the high school students to arrange activities or an assembly to discuss suicide prevention.

#### 3 Parents/Clergy

- a) Coordinate a “Celebration of Life” event with musicians/bands, dance, art, poetry readings/slams, or photography exhibits that support prevention.
- b) Hold a community/family night with activities and information about prevention and have bracelets available.

## Signs of Suicide Curriculum Evidenced-Based Model Program

The Signs of Suicide (SOS) curriculum is rated by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration as an evidence-based Model Program. The goal of the SOS program is to teach students the action steps — ACT (Acknowledge, Care and Tell). ACT helps students develop instinctual and familiar skills to respond to signs of suicide. SOS is a school-based program that offers a curriculum to raise awareness of suicide and its related issues combined with a brief screening for depression and other risk factors. This enables students to recognize depression and suicidal thoughts and behaviors in themselves and others, and prompts them to seek assistance.

The Council has 10 copies of the SOS curriculum, five for middle-school and five for high-school ages, available for distribution to selected communities that can demonstrate they are open to the issue of suicide prevention. This is assessed by a community readiness survey, through a planning team supporting this strategy, and through letters of support from key community members who will be able to continue to offer their support through the first two years of implementation.

Because ACT enables students to better recognize depression and suicidal thoughts, each applicant must also document the availability of an on-site referral system for students who need and ask for assistance.

### Where Do We Go From Here?

**We believe that every Alaskan** should understand that while suicide is a problem, there is something that can be done about it.

**To enhance public awareness...** children as young as sixth grade should be taught to recognize the warning signs for depression and suicide. They need to know how to help a friend who is exhibiting signs, and the resources for help.

**Parents** need to know about community resources and should be encouraged to push through obstacles to asking for help.

**Clergy, community leaders, first responders, teachers and school personnel** need to develop crisis plans that encourage staff to respond to suicidal behavior.

**To enhance skills and knowledge of gatekeepers...** all educators, physicians and health care providers need to be trained to ask directly about suicidal thoughts.

**To enhance community-based safety nets...** community members need to address the stigma associated with mental illness, substance use disorders and increase the accessibility of crisis resources. Communities should also support funding for community day and evening programs that provide meaningful activities.

## Division of Behavioral Health Corner

The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC), in partnership with the DBH Section of Prevention & Early Intervention Services, has targeted the reduction of suicide and non-lethal suicidal behaviors in Alaska's communities as one of its long-term outcomes. In FY06, DBH offered a three-year funding opportunity, which combined the Community-Based Suicide Prevention Program with Substance Abuse Prevention funds, FASD funding, and Youth Resiliency funds to reflect an integrated approach to these services. In all, 25 communities received funding under the umbrella of suicide prevention programming. The overall goal for all grantees is "To Promote a Healthy Community Utilizing Effective Practices and Partnerships." Grantee communities receive ongoing technical assistance in implementing effective practices and outcomes measurements to achieve one of three long-term community impacts by:

reducing the harmful effects of substance abuse in one or more communities;  
reducing incidents of suicide and nonlethal suicidal behaviors in one or more communities; and/or  
increasing community members' connectedness, resiliency and life skills in one or more communities.

Together, the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council and DBH trained grantees on the Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan, which they incorporated in their programmatic goals, and provided an update of the Gatekeeper Suicide Prevention Training (to be completed by September 2006).

During fiscal year 2006, a total of 65,268 contacts were made through our community-based suicide prevention grantees. Nineteen of the programs delivered activities at the universal level of prevention (focusing on the entire population) and six programs focused activities at a selective level (focusing on populations indicated at high risk).

Using the federal Center for Substance Abuse Prevention's six prevention strategies, DBH suicide prevention grantees employed the following strategies:

- five used dissemination of information;
- 14 used prevention education;
- 19 used alternative activities;
- 12 used community-based practices;
- two used environmental approaches; and
- five used identification and referral.

We celebrate our program's success with our grantees in their community:

*"Alternative activities with the coordinator/mentor have taken place, resulting in increased sobriety and outdoor cultural skills acquisition (men and boys are learning trapping and other related skills). Participants are in a positive, alcohol- and drug-free setting and are mutually supporting each other at the same time."*

*"The verbal feedback from Council members, community members, participants of the activities and the elders have all been positive and they are happy that there is a place to go to do these important cultural and community enhancing activities."*

## Partners in Prevention

### ADVISORY BOARD ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ABUSE

AND

### THE ALASKA MENTAL HEALTH BOARD

In helping Alaskans stay healthy and free from self-harm, the State Suicide Prevention Council has a partnership with other behavioral health agencies — including the Alaska Mental Health Board (AMHB) and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse (ABADA).

#### *Why are AMHB and ABADA partners in suicide prevention?*

According to an October 2006 report by the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 90 percent of all individuals with completed suicides also had depression, schizophrenia, or alcoholism — or some combination of mental health and substance abuse problems. The WHO looked at completed suicide in 14 countries and found that, in the most rural countries (or, as in Alaska, the most rural regions of a state or country), around 80 percent of individuals with serious behavioral health challenges had not received treatment in the year before the suicide. The WHO Acting Director, Anders Nordstrom, said, “All too often, suicide represents a tragic consequence of failing to diagnose and treat serious mental illness.”

The mission of both the AMHB and ABADA is to plan, educate, coordinate, evaluate, and advocate for adequate mental health and substance abuse services for all Alaskans. These services should include early intervention and effective treatments for individuals with depression and alcohol abuse, particularly with the most vulnerable Alaskans, who are often our youth in rural areas.

The WHO report on suicide worldwide points to the same challenges the SSPC, AMHB, and ABADA face — although a great deal is known about how to effectively help individuals with depression and substance abuse, there are gaps in treatment availability and resources. But through partnerships, such as the SSPC has with AMHB and ABADA, Alaskans can strive to reduce rates of suicide, a preventable form of death, by improving mental health and substance abuse services to vulnerable Alaskans.

# Alaska Suicide Follow-Back Study — Alaska Injury Prevention Center

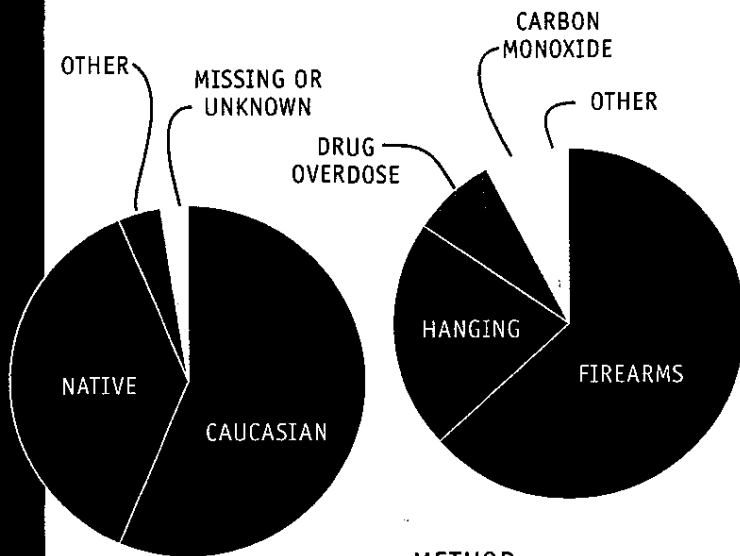
September 1, 2003 through August 31, 2006

In three years of collected data, there were 426 suicide deaths in Alaska as reported by the state Medical Examiners Office for an annual average of 142 deaths. Of those 426 suicides:

- 88 were female, 338 were male;
- 58 were younger than 20;
- 120 were in their 20s;
- 77 were in their 30s;
- 86 were in their 40s;
- 50 in their 50s; and
- 35 were 60 or older.

To date, 70 follow-back interviews have been completed with some still in process. Analysis of all the interview data will be completed in Spring of 2007, and the richer research information from the interviews will be analyzed and available.

The three years of suicide data that we have compiled for deaths taking place between Sept. 2003–Aug. 2006 in Alaska include (not all data are finalized):



## ETHNIC DEMOGRAPHICS

241 Caucasian  
158 Native  
17 Other  
10 Missing or Unknown

## METHOD OF SUICIDE

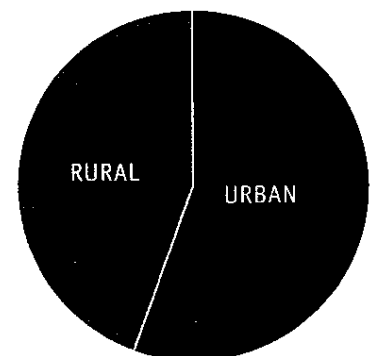
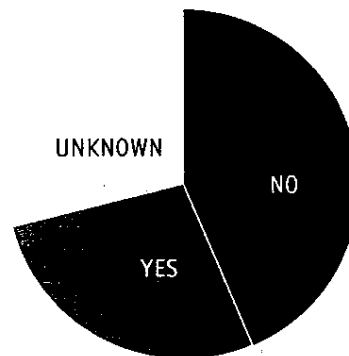
270 Firearms  
90 Hanging  
34 Drug Overdose  
12 Carbon Monoxide  
20 Other methods

## ALCOHOL OR DRUGS INVOLVED

122 No  
186 Yes  
118 Unknown

## LOCATION OF DEATH

237 Urban  
55% of cases and 54% of population  
189 Rural  
45% of cases and 46% of population

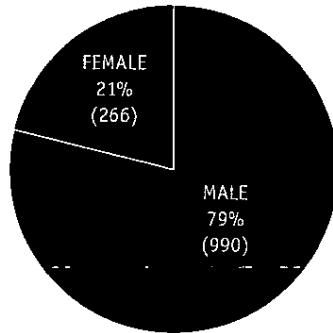


# Alaska Suicide Information and Data

From the Department of Health and Human Service's Bureau of Vital Statistics

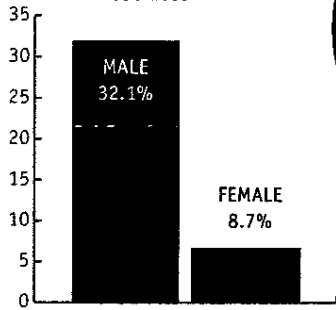
## ALASKA SUICIDE BY SEX

1996-2005



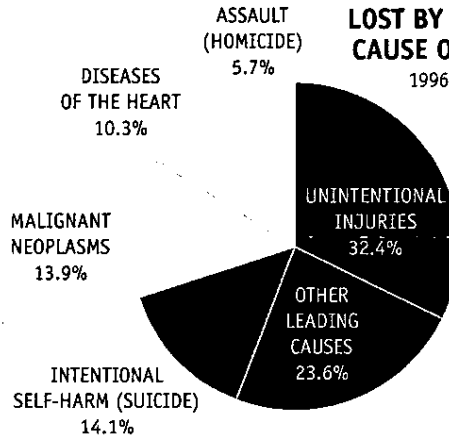
## ALASKA AGE-ADJUSTED SUICIDE RATES BY SEX

1996-2005



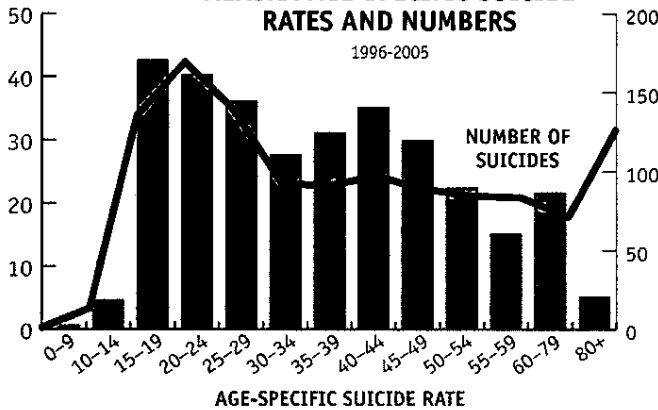
## ALASKAN YEARS OF POTENTIAL LIFE LOST BY LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH

1996-2005

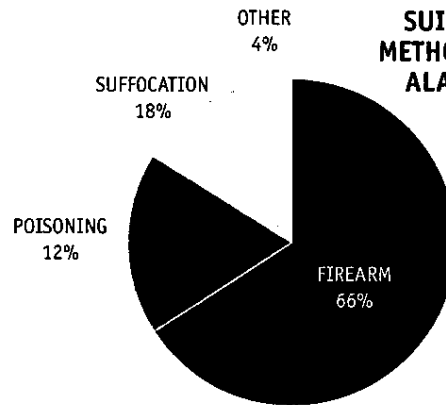


## ALASKA AGE-SPECIFIC SUICIDE RATES AND NUMBERS

1996-2005

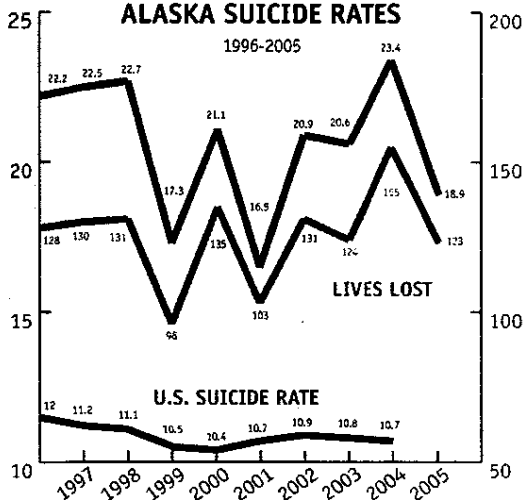


## SUICIDE METHODS IN ALASKA



## ALASKA SUICIDE RATES

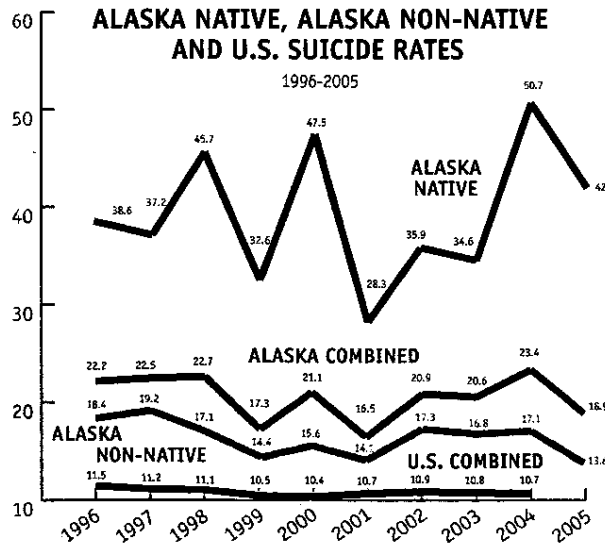
1996-2005



Rates are age-adjusted per 100,000 population  
 \* The Alaska rate and lives lost rate for 2005 are preliminary.  
 \*\* US rate for 2004 is preliminary and the US rate for 2005 is unavailable at the time of publication.

## ALASKA NATIVE, ALASKA NON-NATIVE AND U.S. SUICIDE RATES

1996-2005



Rates are age-adjusted per 100,000 population  
 \* The Alaska rate for 2005 is preliminary.  
 \*\* US rate for 2004 is preliminary and the US rate for 2005 is unavailable at the time of publication.

## Suicide Prevention Council Fiscal Year 2007

William Martin	Chair, Alaska Federation of Natives
Mario Gatto	Chair-Elect, Secondary School
Noelle Hardt	Secretary/Treasurer, Statewide Youth Organization
Stan Tucker	Member-at-Large, Clergy
Charles Jones	Public
Brenda Moore	Alaska Mental Health Board
Arthur Hansen, DDS	Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse
Bill Hogan	Department of Health and Social Services, Deputy Commissioner
Renee Gayhart	Department of Health and Social Services, Tribal Health Manager
Sen. Ben Stevens	State Senate
Sen. Kim Elton	State Senate
Rep. Nancy Dahlstrom	State House of Representatives
Rep. Woodie Salmon	State House of Representatives
Mandee Collins	Youth
Hilma Kameroff	Public

Kathy Craft    Department of Health and Social Services Office of the Commissioner  
Statewide Suicide Prevention Council Coordinator  
907-451-2017, Kathryn.Craft@health.state.ak.us

## Scheduled Meetings Fiscal Year 2007

September 20, 2006	Statewide Teleconference
November 6-7, 2006	Anchorage
February 12-13, 2007	Juneau
April 30-May 1, 2007	Kotzebue

Alaska (Statewide)	Suicide Prevention <b>Careline</b> 1-877-266-HELP (4357)
Fairbanks	Suicide Prevention <b>Careline</b> 452-4357
National	<b>Lifeline</b> 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

[www.hss.state.ak.us/suicideprevention](http://www.hss.state.ak.us/suicideprevention)

*This publication is released by the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council through the Department of Health and Social Services and is intended to provide data and information to the public about suicide prevention and awareness. It was produced at a cost of \$2.69 per copy and printed in Anchorage, Alaska. A portion of this document was funded through the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority.*