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**STRATE-
GIES TO
REDUCE &
PREVENT
SUICIDE**

Strategies to Reduce and Prevent Suicide in Alaska

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A Presentation to the House Health & Social Services
Committee

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Background of Suicide Prevention in Alaska

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- Alaska has a history of high rates of suicide
- In 1987 Senate Resolution No. 19 established a Senate Special Committee on Suicide Prevention.
- Through these efforts, \$600,000 was appropriated for community-based suicide prevention projects (CBSPP).
- The CBSPP focused primarily on rural and remote community-based programs.

Background of Suicide Prevention in Alaska

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- In FY2006 the CBSPP grant program was integrated into the DBH Comprehensive Prevention & Early Intervention grant programs—with substance abuse prevention, fetal alcohol prevention, youth development & resiliency, connectedness and early mental health.
- This integration was taken to strengthen all behavioral health prevention by promoting comprehensive programming—not separate silos.

Current Suicide Prevention Funding

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- In FY2009 16 community-based programs are funded with blended suicide prevention funds.
- FY2009 general fund dollars for suicide prevention grant programs is \$715,820 (an increase of 20% since 1989).
- Average grant award is \$44,738 per agency: the largest award is \$140,000 to our statewide 24-hour CareLine/Crisis line and the smallest award being \$8,325 to the City of Nulato.

Current Suicide Prevention Funding

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- In addition DBH received a one-time FY09 general fund allocation of \$200,000 to begin planning a coordinated statewide strategy to reduce suicide across all age groups.
- Planning grants to regions with rates of suicide exceeding the state rate of 22 per 100,000 are being awarded—Nome, NW Arctic, Yukon Kuskokwim, Bristol Bay.

DBH Long-term Outcomes

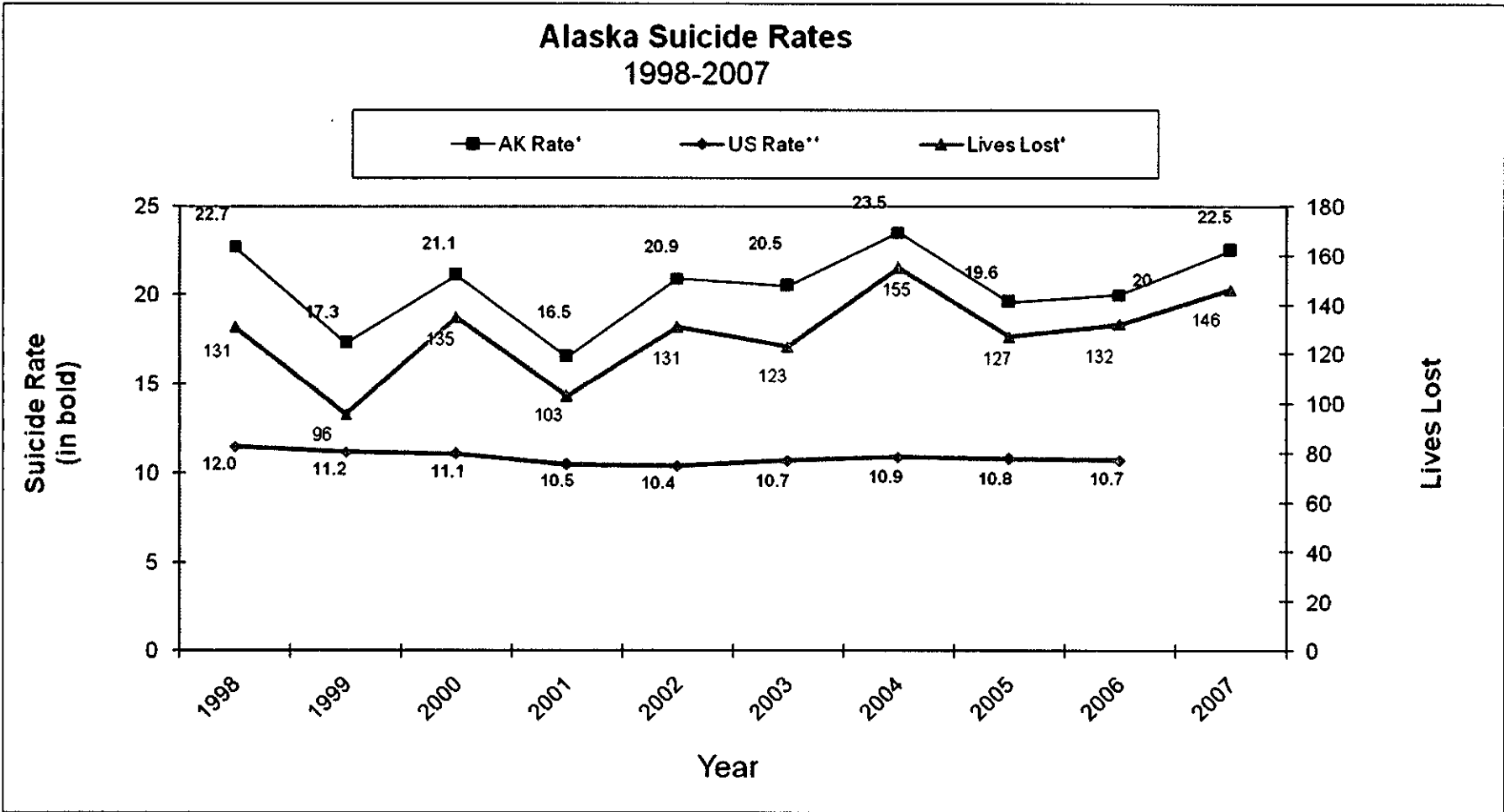
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- All Alaskan communities, families and individuals free from the harmful effects of substance use, dependency and addiction.
- Alaska children, youth and adults are mentally healthy and living successfully.
- All community members' are connected, resilient and have basic life skills.

What the Data Tell Us...

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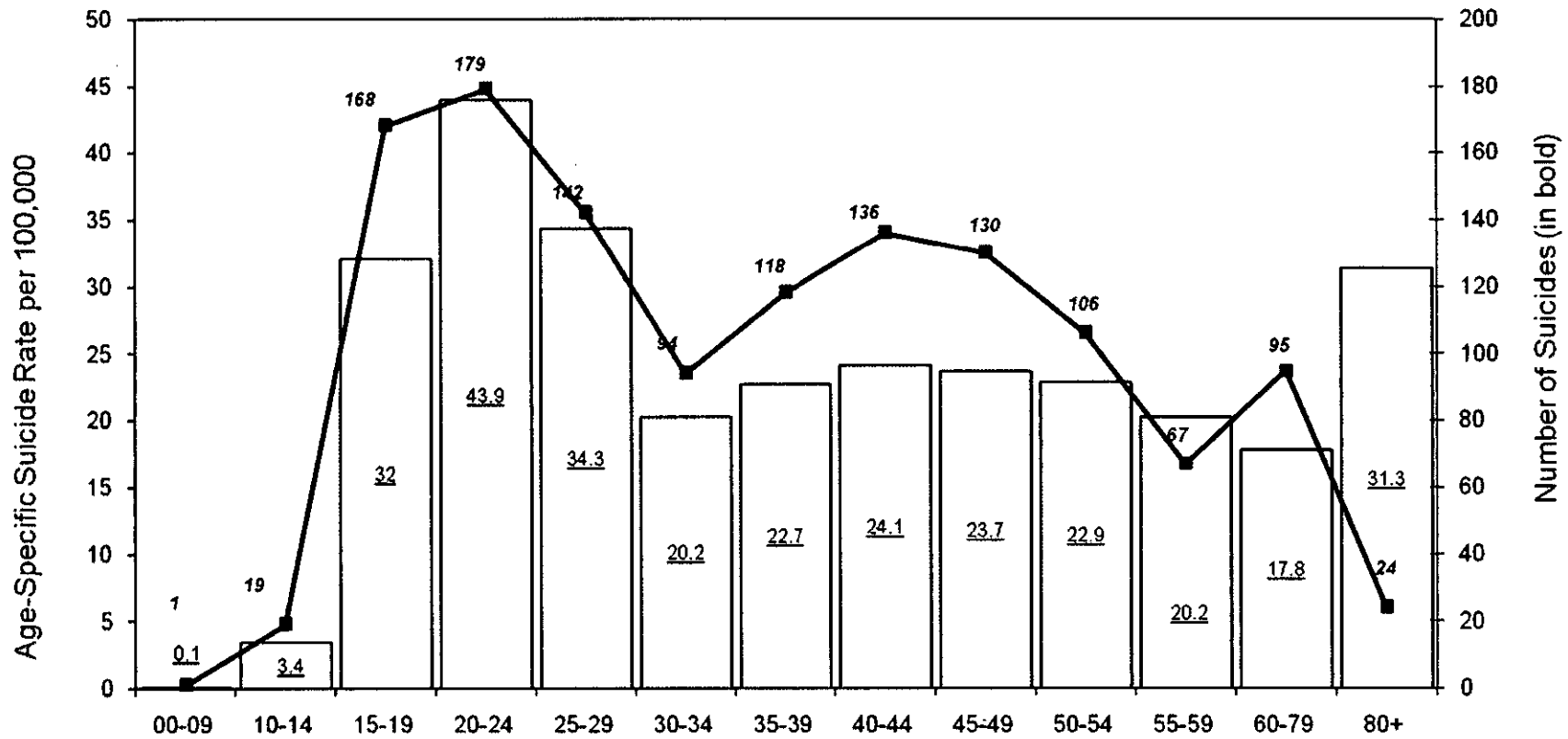
Alaska Suicide Rates 1998-2007



What the Data Tell Us...

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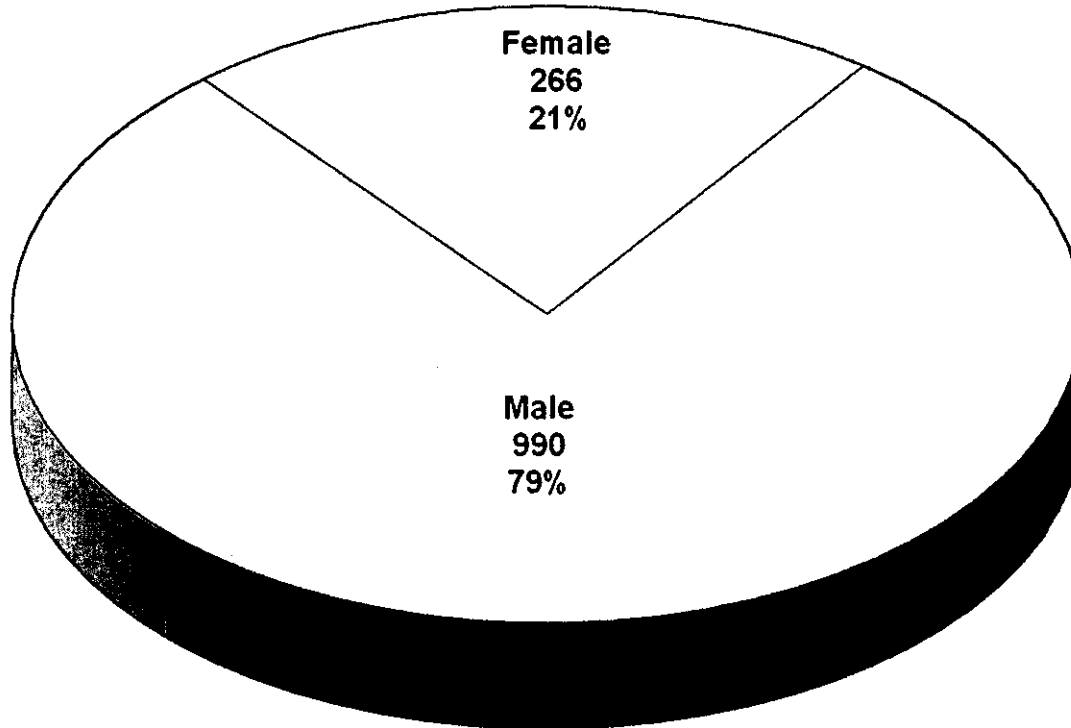
**Alaska Age-Specific Suicide Rates and Numbers
1998-2007**



What the Data Tell Us...

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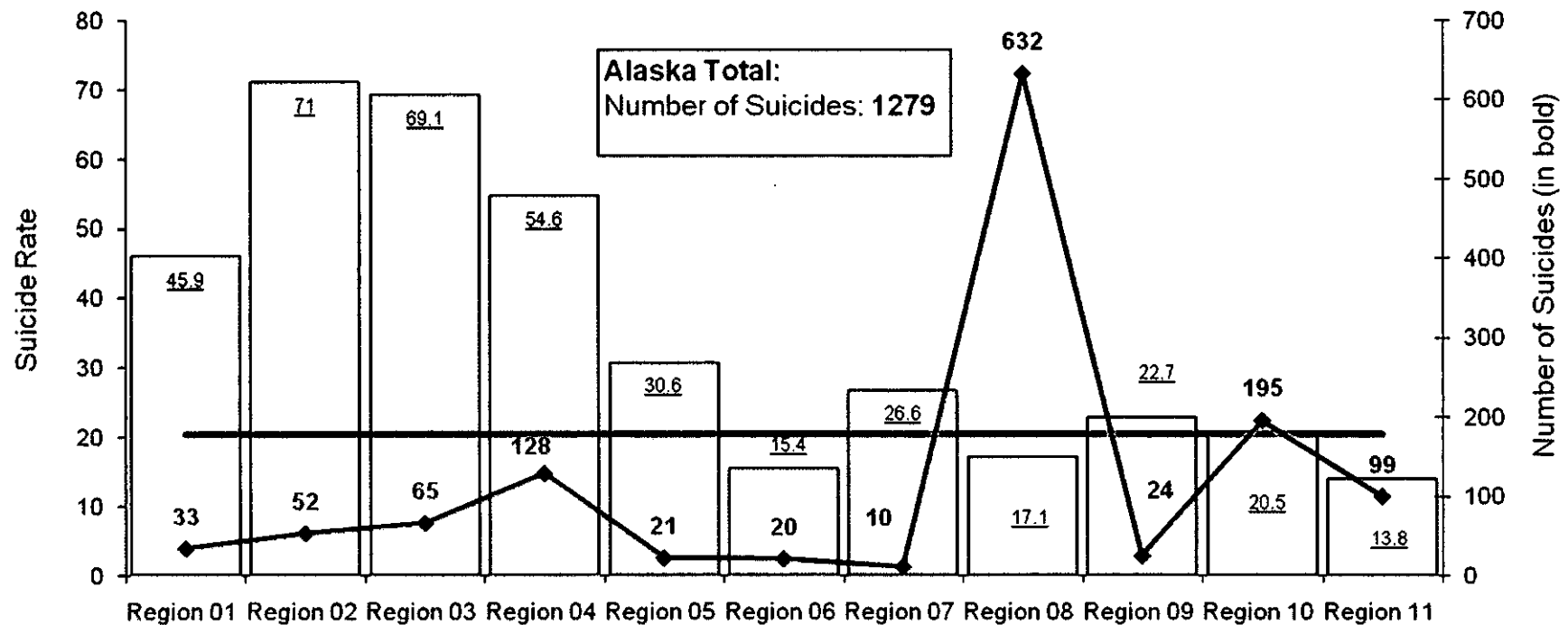
Alaska Suicides by Sex, 1998-2007



What the Data Tell Us...

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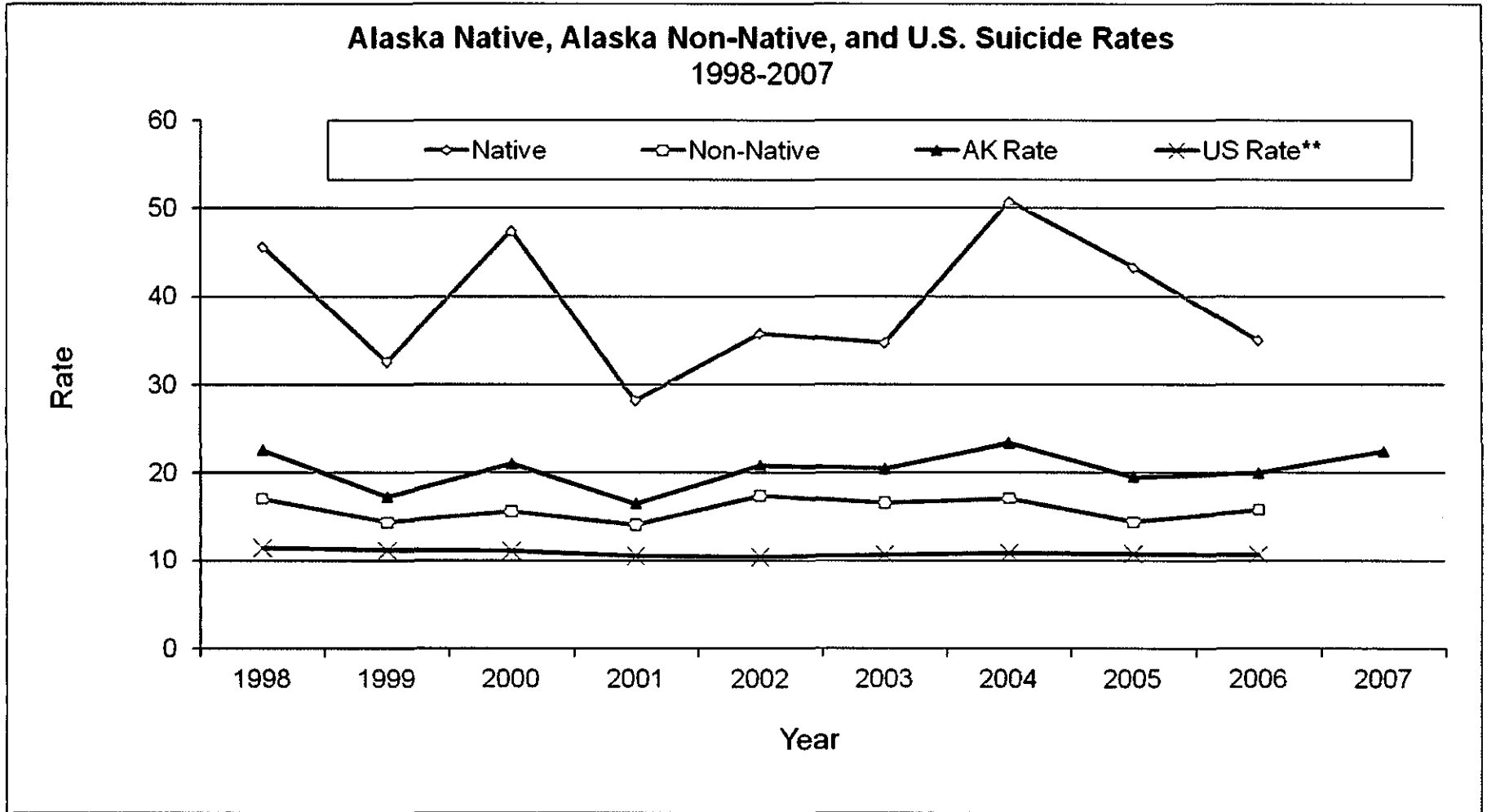
**Alaska Suicide Rates and Numbers by Region
1998-2007**



What the Data Tell Us...

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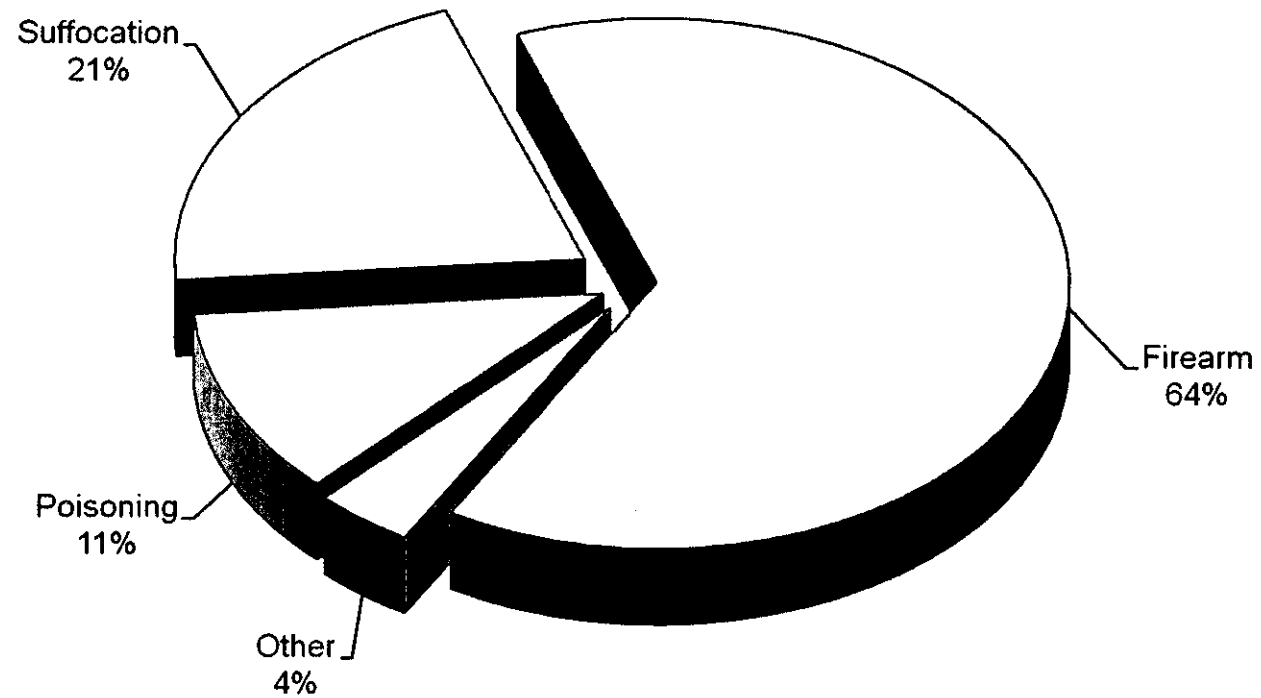
Alaska Native, Alaska Non-Native, and U.S. Suicide Rates
1998-2007



What the Data Tell Us...

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**Suicide Methods in Alaska
1998-2007**



What the Data Tell Us...

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- Alaska continues to rank in the top five states for highest rate of suicide across populations.
- According to a recent report from the AK Bureau of Vital Statistics, Alaska's suicide age-adjusted average rate is 21.2 per 100,000 population.
- This equates to 683 suicides between 2003 and 2007.
- In 2008 suicide accounted for two-thirds (68.6%) of all violent deaths in Alaska.

What the Data Tell Us...

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- The Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) shows an increase in the rate of “suicide attempts” among youth grades 9 through 12 from 7.05% in 1995 to 8.05% in 2003, and 10.7% in 2007.
- 2007 YRBS data also indicate a higher rate of suicide attempts among females (12.7%) in comparison to males (8.3%). Males complete more often, but females attempt more often.
- Alaska Native/American Indians have the highest rate of suicide at 47.2 per 100,000.

What the Data Tell Us...

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- Persons aged 15-24 and 25-29 had the highest rates of suicide (37.6 and 33.6 per 100,000 respectively).
- Between 2003 and 2005 the Anchorage/Mat-Su area had a total of 190 suicides, equaling a rate of 18.3 per 100,000 (low rate/high number).
- In those same years, the Northwest Arctic Borough had a total of 15 suicides, equaling a rate of 43.3 per 100,000 (high rate/lower number).

Current and Recent Activities

Planning & Partnerships

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- In 2007 the Alaska Injury Prevention Center released the *Alaska Suicide Follow Back Study*.
- The study reviewed what specific factors in Alaska influence suicide by interviewing family and friends of decedents. Results show strong correlations between suicide and:
 - Post traumatic stress disorder
 - Abused as children
 - Substance use problems
 - Problems with law enforcement
 - Loss of job

Current and Recent Activities

Prevention & Early Intervention

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- In FY2009 16 communities applied for and received grant funds to address suicide prevention and early intervention. A total of \$715,120 were distributed to the following communities:

Wrangell

Haines

Juneau

Kenai

Mat-Su

Mountain Village

Nulato

Petersburg

Nenana

Shaktoolik

Sitka

Fairbanks

Valdez

Nunam Iqua

Current and Recent Activities

Federal Garrett Lee Smith Youth Suicide Grant

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- In October 2008, DHSS received federal Garrett Lee Smith Youth Suicide Prevention grant award.
- Three-year, \$1.5 million award -- \$500,000 per year.
- 85% of grant funds will be distributed to fund 3-5 Regional Suicide Prevention Teams.
- Focus on Alaska youth ages 10-24 with an emphasis on Alaska Native male teens, pre-teen females, military veterans and youth experiencing mental health disorders/self-destructive behaviors.

Current and Recent Activities

Outreach & Community Engagement

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- FY2009 one-time increment of \$200,000 assisting 5 regional/sub-regional areas to develop a strategy and implementation plan for suicide prevention in their region.
- Plan development will include town hall meetings, focus groups, key informant interviews and community readiness assessments to identify regional, cultural or other factors unique to their region.

Current and Recent Activities

Planning & Partnerships

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- July 1, 2008 the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council moved from the DHSS Office of the Commissioner to Behavioral Health—to better align the work of the Council and Behavioral Health.
- In partnership with the Alaska Mental Health Trust and the Suicide Prevention Council, participate in the *You Know Me* campaign to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness and suicide.
- Working in partnership with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, the YK Community Suicide Prevention Coalition and the Maniilaq *Project Life* (federally funded).

Current and Recent Activities

Outreach & Training

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- *Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper Training*—a gatekeeper is anyone within a community who can act when someone is contemplating suicide.
- 39 individuals have been trained as “*Gatekeeper trainers*,” able to provide training across Alaska.
- Establishing statewide training in Mental Health First Aide, a first responder training for paraprofessionals and community members to be aware of early signs of poor mental health.

Current and Recent Activities

Outreach & Community Engagement

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- The Division of Behavioral Health has a strong network of 105 community agencies providing mental health and substance abuse prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery services through 164 grant programs.
- In addition, we are working in partnership with other community support organizations including faith-based organizations, churches, youth organizations, schools and businesses.

Next Steps

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- Continue working toward *local solutions for local challenges*—partnering with communities and regional suicide prevention coalitions.
- Focus on 4 intermediate outcomes identified for the Alaska suicide prevention initiative:
 - *Reduce the number of attempted and completed suicides;*
 - *Remove the stigmas associated with depression, mental illness, substance use disorders and suicidal tendencies.*
 - *Increase local responsibility and community action to implement suicide prevention strategies; and*
 - *Increase availability and accessibility of early mental health services.*

- **The Division of Behavioral Health is committed to:**
 - working to reduce the impact of suicide in Alaska;
 - better understand the underlying factors and influences contributing to suicide;
 - assist communities in developing solutions at the community level, with community ownership;
 - develop a cross-disciplinary, research-based approach to reducing the number of suicides in Alaska; and
 - ensuring that Alaska's children, youth and adults are mentally healthy, substance free, connected, resilient and living successfully.