

# STATE OF COLORADO

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Colorado Department  
of Public Health  
and Environment

## **Suicide Prevention in Colorado Programs and Activities**

Submitted to the Colorado Joint Budget Committee,  
the Health and Human Services Committee of the House of Representatives,  
and the Health and Human Services Committee of the Senate  
by the Prevention Services Division  
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Office of Suicide Prevention Annual Legislative Report

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Pursuant to 25-1-107, C.R.S., the Office of Suicide Prevention at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment is required to report annually on or before the first day of November on the status of the program's efforts to coordinate statewide suicide prevention services. The goal of this report is to consolidate in-depth knowledge about current suicide prevention activities at the state and local level, private and public partnerships and statewide programs that address prevention and intervention to reduce suicidal behavior.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Coloradans ages 10 to 34. In 2005, 795 Coloradans of all ages died by suicide, more than the number of Coloradans who died in motor vehicle crashes (662 deaths). In 2004, 2,696 Coloradans were hospitalized for a suicide attempt (hospitalization data for 2005 will be available by November 2006).<sup>1</sup> Each suicide death in Colorado is estimated to cost an average of \$3,327 in medical costs and an average of \$1,356,828 dollars in work-loss costs. Each suicide attempt in Colorado is estimated to cost an average of \$10,790 in medical costs and \$13,323 in work-loss costs.<sup>2</sup>

The mission of the Office of Suicide Prevention is to reduce suicidal behavior among Coloradans of all ages. Serving as the lead agency coordinating suicide prevention programs, the Office of Suicide Prevention achieved the following:

- 1) limited duplication of suicide prevention efforts by serving as an information and resource clearinghouse;
- 2) provided information, resources and technical assistance for suicide prevention programming at the local level;
- 3) maintained a network of trainers in suicide intervention/prevention skills who collaborate with one another to provide effective prevention training programs throughout the state;
- 4) partnered with the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Colorado, a statewide organization with representation from public/private entities;
- 5) ensured the 1-800-SUICIDE and 1-800-273-TALK crisis hotline numbers are operational 24 hours per day, seven days per week;
- 6) increased public awareness by disseminating suicide prevention information, materials and resources statewide.

## **Public and Private Partnerships**

In an effort to strengthen Colorado's capacity to evaluate suicide prevention programs and to build evidence for effective programs, the Office of Suicide Prevention formed a critical partnership with the University of Denver, the Suicide Prevention Resource Center and the Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Program. This partnership will evaluate the Yellow Ribbon Youth Suicide Prevention Program, a program widely used in Colorado and nationally. The evaluation will measure help-seeking behavior change related to the program.

The Office of Suicide Prevention collaborated with The Colorado Trust on its Preventing Suicide in Colorado Initiative to ensure coordination of suicide prevention activities in the 10 communities

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<sup>1</sup> Colorado Health Information Dataset. Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.  
<http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/cohid>.

<sup>2</sup> Suicide Prevention Resource Center. *Colorado Suicide Prevention Fact Sheet*.  
[http://www.sprc.org/stateinformation/PDF/statedatasheets/co\\_datasheet.pdf](http://www.sprc.org/stateinformation/PDF/statedatasheets/co_datasheet.pdf).

receiving funding through this initiative. The Office of Suicide Prevention is working to provide ongoing and seamless support and technical assistance to communities, as well as meeting with The Colorado Trust to discuss next steps for when the initiative ends in 2007.

The Office of Suicide Prevention serves on the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Steering Committee, which provides consultation on the utilization and evaluation of the national 24-hour suicide crisis support lines. The crisis lines are part of a nationwide network with a mission to provide immediate assistance to individuals in suicidal crisis. Calls that generate in Colorado are answered within the state by the Pueblo Suicide Prevention Center, an American Association of Suicidology certified center. The Office of Suicide Prevention provides support to this state level operation of the 1-800-SUICIDE and 1-800-273-TALK crisis hotline numbers, which includes stipends for volunteers and data collection to measure call volume related to the Office of Suicide Prevention public education outreach efforts. The hotlines are staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week with volunteers trained to respond to crisis calls. The Office of Suicide Prevention ensures that staff has current knowledge of resources in every county of the state in order to effectively refer callers to appropriate local resources.

The Office of Suicide Prevention strengthened key private and public partnerships through participation on statewide committees, including the Colorado Child Fatality Prevention Team, the Injury Community Planning Group, the Colorado Violent Death Reporting System Advisory Committee, the Youth Violence Prevention Advisory Group, the Interagency School Health Team, the Problem Gambling Coalition of Colorado and the Prevention Leadership Council. These partnerships resulted in the coordination of prevention recommendations, data collection and service delivery.

## **Local and Regional Suicide Prevention Efforts**

The Office of Suicide Prevention partnered with the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Colorado to foster strong collaborative and coordinated relationships with local suicide prevention efforts by holding regional town hall meetings. In the past year, three town hall meetings were held in Pueblo, Vail and Glenwood Springs. Each town hall meeting was jointly hosted with a local suicide prevention coalition and featured presentations by the Office of Suicide Prevention, the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Colorado and the local coalition. Outcomes of the meetings, attended by an average of 50 community participants, included, a) identifying local needs; b) creating valuable connections between local service providers and state agencies; c) and, planning solutions to improve communication and resource sharing between state and local organizations. Solutions included list-serves, newsletters, web-conferences and more regional meetings.

The Suicide Prevention and Education Services Grant Program awarded 10 grants providing up to \$8,000 each to local organizations for suicide prevention and education services. The grant program is designed to support efforts in Colorado communities that 1) develop suicide prevention expertise, 2) provide community-specific training or public awareness programs, and 3) conduct evaluations of best practice programs or services that can be replicated in other communities. Grantees were selected from across the state, including the western slope, the central mountains, the front-range, the southwestern region of the state and the metro area. Grant programs provided training, interventions and resources to a variety of populations, including at-risk youth and adults, survivors of suicide, individuals with Depression and Bi-Polar Disorder, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning university students, and other traditionally underserved populations. Gatekeeper trainings, designed to raise

awareness about suicide and related risk factors and to educate participants about connecting suicidal individuals to appropriate resources, were an important and emphasized component of programs.

Additionally, the Office of Suicide Prevention funded the Suicide Resource Center of Larimer County to enhance the curriculum for its school-based Raising Awareness of Personal Power (RAPP) program, and to create a standardized manual outlining implementation of the program. The enhancement and manual provide Colorado communities with another option for school-based gatekeeper training.

## **Statewide Public Awareness and Education**

The Office of Suicide Prevention presented on suicide prevention and related issues at the Colorado Public Health Association conference, the Senate Bill 94 Conference, the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center Grand Rounds and the Denver chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness. The Office of Suicide Prevention also was featured, along with other suicide prevention partners, on Channel 9 News during Suicide Prevention Week in September 2006. Channel 9 News dedicated the entirety of its morning show to suicide prevention and conducted live interviews with representatives from the Office of Suicide Prevention and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. A crisis and informational call in feature, "Crisis Line 9," was part of the broadcast. The Office of Suicide Prevention also provided expertise and information to radio broadcasts, newspaper articles and Channel 2 News throughout the course of the year.

The Office of Suicide Prevention worked in conjunction with representatives from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention for the dissemination of public service announcements focusing on teen suicide prevention. The campaign had two main goals: 1) increase awareness and use of the 1-800-SUICIDE hotline by teens, and 2) reduce the secret-keeping behavior common among adolescents who are suicidal or have friends who are suicidal. A marketing firm provided expertise for marketing the spots to major media outlets in six Colorado communities: Denver, Larimer, Montezuma, Pitkin, Pueblo and Weld. The marketing firm will provide a report on where and when spots were aired. This information will be compared against general demographic phone call data gathered from the Pueblo Suicide Prevention Program operating the hotline in order to see if the goals of this outreach effort were met.

More than 24,000 public awareness materials were distributed to people and organizations from every region of the state regarding suicide, suicide prevention and Colorado's suicide prevention efforts. Materials included "community toolkits" which provided a sample suicide awareness presentation, outreach materials, current suicide data with information on how to access suicide data, an elderly depression booklet, guidelines for media reporting on suicide and a resource book targeted to family members of individuals who have attempted suicide. Materials were distributed to Colorado colleges and universities, school executives, school nurses, high schools, county health departments, hospitals, Colorado clergy, faith-based communities and mental health centers across the state.

The Office of Suicide Prevention distributed informational packets targeting every school district in Colorado, assisted-living facilities, Meals On Wheels providers, media outlets, survivors of suicide and Employee Assistance Program providers throughout the state.

The Office of Suicide Prevention produced and created informational bookmarks in Spanish and distributed them statewide to schools, at county fairs, to faith-based organizations and at community events.

The Office of Suicide Prevention funded several key coordination and public education activities of the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Colorado including an educational website, a quarterly newsletter with a distribution to 1,400 Coloradans, speaker's bureau trainings and statewide distribution of suicide prevention information.

## **Grants, Gifts, and Donations**

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention hosted the second annual Out of the Darkness Community Walk to raise awareness and money for suicide prevention efforts. Half of the proceeds from the walk were donated to the Office of Suicide Prevention. In the coming year, up to \$30,000 will be used to develop, create and disseminate public service announcements targeting males ages 35 to 54, who account for the highest number of suicide deaths in Colorado each year. The goal of the campaign is to reduce the stigma associated with depression and suicidality, and to increase help-seeking calls from men to the suicide crisis hotlines.

In September 2006, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration awarded the Office of Suicide Prevention \$400,000 per year for three years to conduct youth suicide prevention efforts in five Colorado counties and at the University of Colorado at Boulder. The Office of Suicide Prevention will train adult gatekeepers working with youth in the juvenile justice and child and family welfare systems in Mesa, El Paso, Pueblo, Larimer and Weld counties. Youth in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems are at heightened risk for suicidality. A gatekeeper is defined as any individual who may interact with a youth at risk for suicide and can serve as a "gatekeeper" to help. At the University of Colorado, gatekeepers will be trained campus wide to recognize suicide risk in students ages 18-21. Agencies serving high-risk youth in the selected communities and on the college campus will be required to develop cross-system referral protocols and implement public awareness campaigns.