

STATE OF COLORADO



Colorado Department
of Public Health
and Environment

Suicide Prevention in Colorado Programs and Activities

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Office of Suicide Prevention Annual Legislative Report

Principal Authors: Jarrod Hindman, M.S., Program Manager
Office of Suicide Prevention

Shannon A. Breitzman, M.A., Unit Director
Injury, Suicide and Violence Prevention
Prevention Services Division

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For additional information or copies of this report:

Jarrold Hindman, M.S., Program Manager
Office of Suicide Prevention
Prevention Services Division
Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
4300 Cherry Creek Drive South
Denver, Colorado 80246-1530
303.692.2539
jarrod.hindman@state.co.us

Executive Summary

The mission of the Office of Suicide Prevention (OSP) is to reduce suicide and suicidal behavior among Coloradans of all ages. The OSP has identified the following strategic priorities to achieve this mission:

- Build community capacity to prevent suicide and promote help-seeking behavior.
- Develop key partnerships to enhance and expand statewide prevention and intervention efforts.
- Create initiatives that are data-driven.
- Increase statewide awareness about the problem of suicide and strategies for prevention.

In alignment with the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention and Governor Ritter's *Colorado Promise*, the OSP's key accomplishments in 2008 focused on advancing suicide prevention efforts statewide. Highlights include:

- "Project Safety Net", an OSP initiative funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) promotes suicide prevention for children and adolescents in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. Project Safety Net utilizes training and referral protocols designed to ensure that youth at risk for suicide are identified, assessed and referred to appropriate services.
- Developing a suicide prevention training specifically designed for emergency medical service providers in Colorado. The training will teach first responders how to better support suicidal individuals and their families, suicidal co-workers, and themselves.
- Awarding 10 grants to communities across the state to enhance local suicide prevention efforts. Successes include the development of the "Working Minds" website promoting mental health and suicide prevention in the workplace, suicide prevention training targeting older adults in northeast Colorado, and suicide prevention training for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth.
- Sponsoring a suicide prevention conference in partnership with Regis University attended by more than 300 people.
- Revising the *Colorado Suicide Prevention and Intervention Plan*, written in 1998. More than 300 suicide prevention stakeholders throughout Colorado contributed to a new data-driven plan via regional stakeholder meetings.
- Evaluating a widely used school-based suicide prevention program (Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Program) which demonstrated that students at risk for suicide sought assistance from others after participating in the Yellow Ribbon Program.
- Initiating a statewide public awareness campaign to enhance help-seeking behavior in men ages 25 to 54, who account for the highest number of suicide deaths in Colorado.

By identifying and addressing strategic priorities, the OSP made strides in enhancing community capacity for suicide prevention and in increasing public awareness. Unfortunately, suicide continues to be the second leading cause of death for young people ages ten to 34 in Colorado. The state has the sixth highest suicide rate in the United States and more people in Colorado die by suicide than in motor vehicle crashes.¹ Estimates from the Suicide Prevention Resource Center suggest that each suicide

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

death costs an average of \$3,327 in direct costs and \$1,356,828 in indirect costs,² illustrating that suicide is both a serious and costly public health problem.

The OSP remains well positioned to continue strategic efforts to promote optimal mental health and reduce the tragedy of suicide across all populations in Colorado. The burden of suicide in Colorado demands that prevention and intervention efforts are maintained and expanded, and the OSP is committed to initiating and sustaining innovative prevention programs, collaborating with partners statewide, and advancing the science of suicide prevention in Colorado.

² Suicide Prevention Resource Center. *Colorado Suicide Prevention Fact Sheet*.
http://www.sprc.org/stateinformation/PDF/statedatasheets/co_datasheet.pdf.

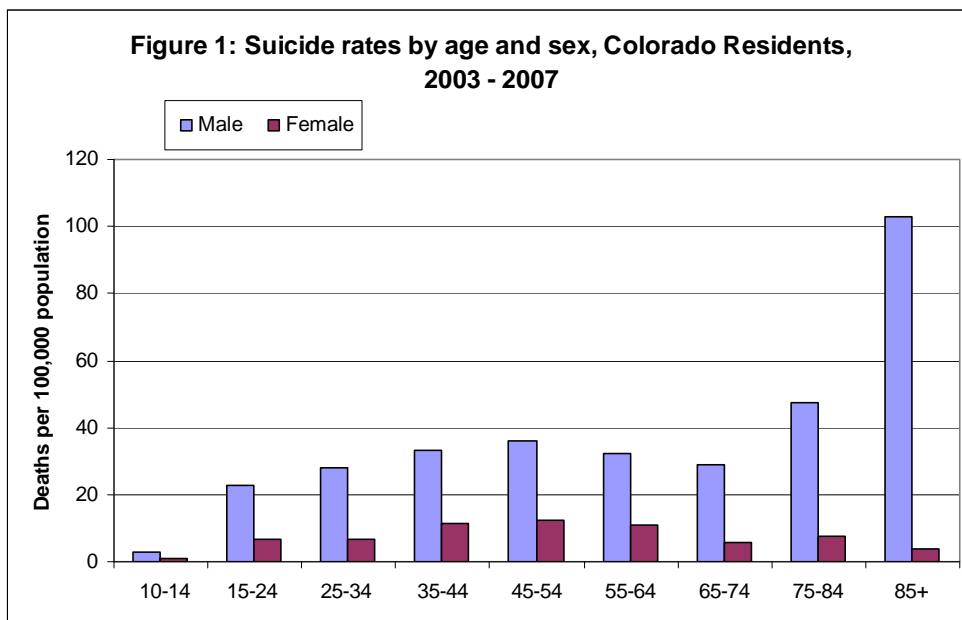
Introduction

The mission of the Office of Suicide Prevention (OSP) at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment is to reduce suicide and suicidal behavior. To achieve this mission, the OSP:

- Builds community capacity to prevent suicide and promote help-seeking behavior.
- Develops key partnerships to enhance and expand statewide prevention and intervention efforts.
- Creates new initiatives that are data-driven.
- Increases statewide awareness about suicide and strategies for its prevention.

Suicide is a public health problem that impacts all Coloradans, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender, religion or sexuality. There were 805 deaths by suicide in 2007.³ This number outranked the 170 deaths due to homicide, the 580 deaths due to pneumonia, and the 705 deaths due to diabetes in 2007. Men ages 35 to 54 years old accounted for the highest number of suicide deaths. As a result of the high number of deaths by suicide, suicide was the seventh leading cause of death in Colorado in 2007. For young people ages 10 to 34 years, suicide continued to be the second leading cause of death in Colorado.

Colorado has the sixth highest suicide death rate (17.04 deaths per 100,000 population), compared to other states, according to the most recent year of national data available (2005). As shown in Figure 1, a larger proportion of men, compared to women, die by suicide, for every age group. Men ages 75 years and older have the highest suicide rate in Colorado.



There is also a significant financial burden to the state from suicidal behavior. Each suicide death in Colorado costs an average of \$3,327 in direct costs (health care expenses, autopsies and criminal investigations) and an average of \$1,356,828 in indirect costs (estimate of productive life lost). Each

hospitalization for a suicide attempt costs an average of \$10,790 in direct costs and \$13,323 in indirect costs.³

Pursuant to Colorado Revised Statute 25-1-107, the OSP 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 program efforts to coordinate statewide suicide prevention services. This 2008 report details the suicide prevention initiatives the OSP is leading throughout Colorado. In 2008, the OSP successfully leveraged resources to effectively address strategic priority areas and collaborated with suicide prevention partners.

Building Community Capacity to Prevent Suicide and Promote Help-Seeking Behavior

Project Safety Net

In October 2006, the OSP received \$1.2 million from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), through the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act. This three-year grant, which the OSP entitled Project Safety Net, is being used to build a safety net for adolescents in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems in Mesa, Larimer, Weld, Pueblo, and El Paso counties. Adolescents in these systems are at high risk for suicidal behavior, and Project Safety Net is implementing strategies and trainings designed to ensure that youth at risk for suicide are identified, assessed, and referred to appropriate services.

Project Safety Net focuses on training adults who work with adolescents in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems to function as “gatekeepers.” A gatekeeper is defined as an individual who may interact with a person at risk for suicide and who can serve as an intermediary to life-saving help. To date, 1,760 individuals in the participating counties have been trained as gatekeepers. Thirty-five percent of those trained identified someone who was suicidal within six months of receiving the training and referred them to appropriate services. A three month follow-up survey of trainees showed that of the youth identified as suicidal by trainees, 81 percent were referred for services. Training participants suggested that they would benefit from additional training to refine their skills. This recommendation received by the OSP and the evaluation team from Colorado State University may encourage the developers of this training to create “booster” sessions. This effort may increase the long-term effectiveness of the training.

In addition to the five counties listed above, Project Safety Net is also being implemented at the University of Colorado at Boulder. To date, 229 faculty, student leaders, athletic department staff, residence hall monitors, and representatives from the Greek system have been trained to recognize suicide risk factors among students.

Project Safety Net also developed a bilingual public awareness campaign targeting all adults in the five-county area. The “Start the Conversation – Suicide Prevention is Your Business” campaign reinforces the role that all community members play in suicide prevention. Included in the campaign are radio spots, posters, bumper stickers, buttons, and information brochures. All materials are available in Spanish and English, including specific contact information for each county. Additionally, the OSP is distributing the materials statewide to promote youth suicide prevention that include contact information for the OSP.

³ Suicide Prevention Resource Center. *Colorado Suicide Prevention Fact Sheet*.
http://www.sprc.org/stateinformation/PDF/statedatasheets/co_datasheet.pdf.

Four presentations specific to Project Safety Net were delivered at the 2008 American Association of Suicidology conference in Boston, MA. Two nationally available Webinars were hosted by Project Safety Net – one highlighting suicide among the veteran population and the other focused on positive youth development (both available at the OSP website, www.cdphe.state.co.us/pp/suicide/index.html).

Training for First Responders

The OSP and the Injury Community Planning Group at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment are developing a training for first responders (emergency medical service providers and law enforcement), who are at an increased risk for suicide. With support from Colorado's State Emergency Medical and Trauma Services Advisory Council, training will be delivered to first responders statewide in 2009. Participants will receive information about suicide and its impact in Colorado, properly caring for individuals and their families when called to the scene of a suicide attempt or fatality, recognizing suicidal behavior among their fellow first responders, and taking care of themselves when dealing with their own stress.

Community Grants

The OSP provides community grants to ten agencies totaling \$63,500 per year. Grants were awarded throughout Colorado. The following agencies are currently funded in the third year of a three-year cycle.

Statewide

- ***Carson J Spencer Foundation*** – Denver-based organization and targets working-aged men statewide with online suicide prevention information and resources. One hundred and forty-two people participated in an on-line survey and six key stakeholders completed in-depth interviews to help inform the “Working Minds: Suicide Prevention in the Workplace” website (<http://www.workingminds.org/>).
- ***Parents Surviving Suicide of Metropolitan Denver*** – This group purchased and disseminated seventy-five books on suicide prevention and the aftermath of suicide were disseminated to twelve libraries statewide.

Denver-Metro

- ***Jefferson Center for Mental Health*** – This agency provided training, education and resources to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth in Jefferson, Gilpin and Clear Creek Counties. Five “Safe Talk” suicide prevention trainings were attended by 100 professionals. More than 4,000 written educational materials were also disseminated.
- ***Mental Health America of Colorado*** – This agency targeted older adults, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth, and teens at risk of dropping out of school by providing educational programs and support groups in Denver County. Eleven suicide prevention trainings were delivered, and three ongoing support groups for those living with mental health problems and suicidal ideation and those who have lost a loved one to suicide were maintained.

Denver, Weld, Larimer and Mesa Counties

- ***Catholic Charities and Community Services*** – This agency targeted older adults for depression assessment and suicide prevention training in Denver, Weld, Larimer and Mesa Counties. More than 300 older adults were assessed for suicidality (22 were assessed as being at risk for suicide and referred to follow-up services), and 35 older adults were trained in suicide prevention. Over 5,000 educational brochures were handed out in English and Spanish.

Southeast Colorado

- ***High Plains Community Health Center*** – This agency provided active case management for all patients presenting to primary care providers with symptoms of depression throughout southeastern Colorado. Active case management includes assessment, treatment and follow-up for depression. Over 500 patients were entered into a depression registry, 48 percent of which had a 50 percent reduction in their depression registry score within twelve months.

Montrose and Delta Counties

- ***Midwestern Colorado Mental Health Center*** – This agency targeted men with depression screening and suicide prevention information. Twenty-one participants attended a training at the Colorado National Guard Armory in Montrose, and suicide prevention materials were disseminated at eleven community events. A poster campaign developed to specifically target men was initiated

Montezuma County

- ***The Pinon Project Family Resource Center*** – This agency targeted the Ute Mountain Tribal community and the Cortez-area with suicide prevention training and education. Eight trainings were held in the community, which were attended by 145 people.

Northeast Colorado

- ***Rural Solutions*** – This agency targeted older adults for suicide prevention training, resources and education in Logan, Morgan, Cheyenne, Kit Carson, Lincoln, Phillips, Sedgwick, Washington, and Yuma Counties. Eight trainings were attended by 140 individuals who work directly with older adults. Suicide prevention information was also included in a regular newsletter disseminated to older adults throughout the region.

Mesa County

- ***Western Colorado Suicide Prevention Foundation*** – The effort targeted construction and oil and gas workers through training, resources and education. Eighty men working in the construction and oil and gas industries were trained in suicide prevention, and a suicide prevention presentation was delivered to 300 safety leaders at a quarterly meeting of the Western Slope Safety Council. Posters and informational materials focused on male issues were disseminated throughout Mesa County.

Key Partnerships to Enhance and Expand Statewide Prevention and Intervention Efforts

Bridging the Divide: Suicide Awareness and Prevention Summit

The OSP was integral in planning and sponsoring the *Bridging the Divide: Suicide Awareness and Prevention Summit*, hosted by Regis University May 19-22, 2008. The conference was attended by more than 300 people and national suicide prevention experts participated as speakers. Conference tracks were included for first responders, educators, work place wellness coordinators, health professionals, and those who lost a loved one to suicide. A banquet was held during the conference, where Speaker of the Colorado House of Representatives Andrew Romanoff presented, and First Lady of Colorado Jeanne Ritter and 9 News received awards of recognition for excellence in suicide prevention. A new documentary on men and depression, *Men Get Depression*, was screened and copies of the DVD were provided to all attendees.

Suicide Prevention and Intervention Strategic Plan

The OSP, in collaboration with The Colorado Trust, Mental Health America of Colorado, and the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Colorado, is working with statewide suicide prevention stakeholders to revise the 1998 *Colorado Suicide Prevention and Intervention Plan*. The Colorado Trust is funding the plan and asked the OSP to lead the initiative. During fiscal year 2008, regional stakeholder meetings were held in Greeley, Grand Junction, Cortez, Pueblo, and Denver to gather input from community members. More than 300 people participated in the stakeholder meetings, including mental health and substance abuse advocates and providers, individuals living with mental illness, law enforcement, educators, community members, suicide prevention experts, and family members who lost a loved one to suicide.

Along with statewide stakeholder feedback, the plan included new data. Most notably, the Colorado Violent Death Reporting System, housed at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, is providing more detailed information regarding life circumstances prior to death by suicide. Information not previously available includes financial issues, employment data, history of intimate partner violence, substance abuse, and law enforcement encounters. These data are helping inform the strategies proposed in the state plan. For example, data show that over 40 percent of men who die by suicide in Colorado had a recent intimate partner problem, suggesting that suicide prevention efforts targeting men should include information on coping with intimate partner problems. Upon completion in early 2009, the new plan will be disseminated and marketed statewide.

Crisis Response

The OSP provides funding for statewide crisis lines housed at the Pueblo Suicide Prevention Center. The center operates the 1.800.273.TALK and 1.800.SUICIDE hotlines, which are staffed 24 hours a day with volunteers trained to respond to crisis calls. In 2002, 2,018 Coloradans called the hotline. In 2007, calls increased to 6,089, including callers from every county in Colorado. While the number of calls tripled between 2002 and 2007, the suicide rate remained steady (about 16/100,000 deaths by suicide in 2002 and 2007), implying that statewide education and awareness efforts are directing more people in crisis to life-saving resources.

Suicide Prevention Coalition of Colorado

The OSP partners with the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Colorado to enhance suicide prevention efforts statewide. In 2008, three regional town hall meetings were attended by more than 80 people in Leadville, Montrose and Canon City. At these meetings, local needs were identified, connections were fostered between local service providers and state agencies, and strategies were developed to advance suicide prevention efforts in each community. With resources from the OSP, the Coalition distributed suicide prevention information via targeted mailings to all Safe and Drug Free school counselors, victim advocates, employee assistance program representatives, and coroners throughout Colorado.

Data-Driven Decision Making

Evaluation of the Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Program

The Yellow Ribbon International Suicide Prevention Program is a suicide prevention program implemented throughout Colorado and nationwide that teaches students and school faculty to recognize those at risk for suicide and teaches skills for linking those in crisis to life-saving assistance. In partnership with Dr. Stacey Freedenthal and the University of Denver, the OSP completed a pilot evaluation of the program by interviewing youth and faculty at two Denver area high schools. The goal

was to measure whether help-seeking behavior (asking for help when suicidal) increased among students after receipt of the Yellow Ribbon Program. Results indicate that help-seeking among the student body did not increase after the intervention. However, data also demonstrated that a sizeable proportion of students at risk for suicide used the Yellow Ribbon “Ask4Help” card to seek assistance from others. Limitations of the study included challenges in obtaining parental consent for student participation, which resulted in small number of students participating in the evaluation. Difficulty identifying and obtaining schools to participate fully in the pilot project posed an additional barrier. The OSP is not conducting further evaluation of the program at this time, but results suggest that further research is necessary to ascertain whether the program is effective.

Increase Statewide Awareness

Men’s Campaign

Men ages 35 to 54 account for the highest number of suicide deaths in Colorado. In an effort to address suicide risk within this population, the OSP is partnering with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention to design and implement a statewide public education campaign. The goal is to reduce the stigma associated with seeking help to improve mental and emotional health among men.

In 2008, the OSP worked with a marketing and communications firm to develop a comprehensive marketing plan. A review of existing public awareness campaigns revealed a lack of effort specifically targeting men with suicide prevention messages. To increase the breadth of the project, the OSP convened an advisory board comprised of both Colorado and national suicide prevention experts to guide the development of campaign materials. The campaign will be developed and implemented during fiscal year 2009.

Statewide Public Education and Awareness Efforts

More than 18,000 educational materials were distributed to people and organizations from every region of the state. Materials disseminated included posters and bookmarks in both English and Spanish, suicide prevention resources for families and schools, and information on warning signs, myths and facts related to suicide, local resources, information on older adult suicide, and information on the work of the OSP. Project Safety Net disseminated more than 10,000 posters, stickers, buttons and brochures to project communities through the new “Start the Conversation: Suicide Prevention is Your Business” campaign.

Staff from the OSP presented on suicide prevention at the 41st American Association of Suicidology Annual Conference, the Bridging the Divide: Suicide Awareness and Prevention Summit, the Positive Behavior Support Symposium, the Colorado Organization for Victim Assistance Annual Conference, and at a meeting of the Denver chapter of the National Alliance For the Mentally Ill. In addition, The OSP responded to numerous media requests by appearing on television newscasts and radio broadcasts. The OSP was also featured in newspapers and electronic media.

Several states requested technical assistance and information from the OSP. The North Dakota Department of Health requested the use of posters developed by the OSP to use in a public awareness campaign statewide. The Nevada Department of Public Health discussed the development of a state office specifically designed to address suicide prevention with OSP staff. And, the Chicago, Illinois chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention contacted the OSP for information pertaining to the development of suicide prevention tools for men.

Integrating Suicide Prevention

Suicide prevention is a relatively new field of study, and most suicide prevention programs lack rigorous evaluations demonstrating outcomes. As a result, the OSP has prioritized evaluation of existing suicide prevention programs. The OSP is also committed to examining the relationship between suicidal behavior and other public health issues. Research suggests a relationship between early childhood trauma and suicide risk. Risk for suicide has also been linked to sexual assault, bullying, obesity, tobacco use, chronic disease and pain. This research suggests programs that address other public health issues may have an impact on suicide. This year, the OSP, as part of the Injury, Suicide and Violence Prevention Unit at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, began gathering research and developing a plan to more effectively integrate suicide and interpersonal violence prevention with chronic disease and other public health programs.

Conclusion

The OSP continues to expand the depth and reach of suicide prevention efforts in Colorado. The OSP works throughout the state to assist communities with developing strong suicide prevention efforts. Initiatives include the federally funded Project Safety Net, development of training for first responders, and dissemination of community grants to ten agencies in Colorado. Key statewide partnerships with organizations including the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Colorado, the Pueblo Suicide Prevention Center, and The Colorado Trust enhance statewide suicide prevention and intervention efforts. Evaluating suicide prevention programs like the Yellow Ribbon Program, and striving to better integrate suicide prevention with other public health issues enables the OSP to advance and legitimize suicide prevention efforts statewide. Finally, designing and implementing an innovative marketing campaign targeting men and suicide, distributing educational materials, and participating in and presenting at national conferences contributes to the OSP's ability to increase public education and awareness statewide.

Despite limited funding and a small staff, the OSP remains a leader in developing and implementing innovative and cost-effective initiatives throughout Colorado to help reduce the burden of suicide. By leveraging additional funds and increasing collaborative partnerships, the OSP accomplishes a great deal and remains intent on achieving its mission of reducing the suicide rate in Colorado.