



## COLORADO'S EFFORTS TO ADDRESS SUICIDE

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Colorado was tied for the fifth highest suicide rate in the nation in 2014, the most recent year of nationally available data. In 2015, there were 1,093 suicides among Colorado residents, which is the highest number of suicides in the state's history. This *issue brief* outlines legislative actions taken in recent years to address Colorado's high suicide rate and resources for those in need of assistance and support.

### Office of Suicide Prevention

The mission of the Office of Suicide Prevention in the Department of Public Health and Environment is to serve as the lead entity for suicide prevention and intervention efforts in Colorado and to collaborate with communities statewide to reduce the number of suicide deaths and attempts in Colorado. The office emphasizes using state funding to address strategic priority areas at the state and local levels. These priority areas include funding local initiatives, focusing initiatives on high-risk populations and highly impacted parts of the state, implementing primary prevention strategies designed to reach individuals prior to the escalation of a crisis, training individuals to recognize and respond to suicidal crisis, and leading collaborative partnerships.

The office submits an annual report to the General Assembly that lists the suicide prevention programs in the state and describes the effectiveness of the department as the coordinator for suicide prevention programs.

Additional information about the Office of Suicide Prevention can be found at: <http://bit.ly/2fAjCsp>.

### Suicide Prevention Commission of Colorado

The Suicide Prevention Commission of Colorado was established in 2014. The commission has 26 members representing a variety of stakeholders, including state and local government agencies, service providers, nonprofit organizations, and members of the public. The purposes of the commission include setting statewide, data-driven, evidence-based, and clinically informed suicide prevention priorities in Colorado; serving as an advisor and making recommendations to the Office of Suicide Prevention; and expanding local and national partnerships and resources for statewide suicide prevention activities. The Office of Suicide Prevention must include the recommendations of the commission in its annual report to the General Assembly.

Additional information about the Suicide Prevention Commission of Colorado can be found at: <http://bit.ly/2fByoO2>.

### Colorado Suicide Prevention Plan

In 2016, the General Assembly created the Colorado Suicide Prevention Plan, referred to as the Colorado Plan. The goal of the plan is to reduce suicide rates in Colorado through a system-level implementation of the Colorado

Plan in criminal justice and health care systems. The Colorado Plan is based on a Suicide Prevention Commission of Colorado recommendation concerning the adoption of the Zero Suicide initiative. The Zero Suicide initiative is built on the belief that suicide deaths of people under the care of physical health and behavioral health systems are preventable, and is being promoted by several national organizations.

Under the Colorado Plan, the Suicide Prevention Commission of Colorado, Office of Suicide Prevention, Department of Public Health and Environment, Office of Behavioral Health in the Department of Human Services, and Department of Health Care Policy and Financing are encouraged to collaborate with criminal justice and health care systems, mental health and behavioral health systems, primary care providers, physical and mental health clinics in educational institutions, community mental health centers, and other entities to develop and implement:

- a plan to improve training to identify indicators of suicidal thoughts and behavior across criminal justice and health care systems;
- a plan to improve training on emergency procedures for 72-hour mental health holds, the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, and other relevant patient privacy procedures; and
- professional development resources and training opportunities regarding indicators of suicidal thoughts and behavior, risk assessment, and management.

The Office of Suicide Prevention must include a summary of the Colorado Plan in its annual presentation to the General Assembly.

### **Colorado Higher Education Student Suicide Prevention Act**

In 2006, the General Assembly passed the Colorado Higher Education Student Suicide Prevention Act requiring the Colorado Commission of Higher Education to select one or more willing institutions of higher education to participate in a two-year pilot program to create a campus-wide program to allow all

students the option to fill out a consent form containing the contact information of a person who could be notified if the student exhibited suicidal behaviors. After the conclusion of the pilot program, the commission issued a report to the General Assembly with responses from the three institutions that participated in the pilot program, but the commission did not provide specific findings or recommendations in the report. The Colorado Higher Education Student Suicide Prevention Act repealed in 2010.

### **Other State Entities Addressing Suicide**

In addition to the efforts discussed above, the following entities are also charged with addressing suicide prevention.

**Colorado Youth Advisory Council.** The Colorado Youth Advisory Council (COYAC) was established in 2009 in the legislative branch to examine, evaluate, and discuss issues, interests, and needs affecting Colorado youth and to formally advise and make recommendations to elected officials regarding those issues. The issues that COYAC is charged with studying include behavioral and physical health, including suicide prevention.

**Task Force Concerning Mental Illness in the Criminal and Juvenile Justice Systems.** The Task Force Concerning Mental Illness in the Criminal and Juvenile Justice Systems (MICJS) examines issues related to the identification, diagnosis, and treatment of persons with mental illness who are involved in the state criminal and juvenile justice systems. The MICJS Task Force's current areas of study include best practices for suicide prevention, within and outside of correctional facilities. The MICJS Task Force reports its findings and recommendations to the MICJS Legislative Oversight Committee.

### **Resources**

Persons who are experiencing suicidal thoughts or are concerned about a loved one should call either the:

- Suicide Prevention Lifeline  
1-800-273-TALK (8255); or
- Colorado Crisis & Support Line  
1-844-493-TALK(8255).