
FACT SHEET

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF

Mental Health

FEBRUARY 2008

OFFICE OF SUICIDE PREVENTION

In 2008, the Department of Mental Health (DMH) established the Office of Suicide Prevention. Assembly Member Mary Hayashi, a prominent leader in the suicide prevention movement, introduced AB 509 in 2007 heightening awareness for the need of an Office of Suicide Prevention. Some of the Office's activities include:

- Coordinating implementation of a statewide suicide prevention strategy;
- Collecting, analyzing, and disseminating suicide data and best practices for suicide prevention; and
- Developing service and training standards on suicide prevention.

Fast Facts:

- No State General Funds are used to establish or maintain responsibilities of the Office of Suicide Prevention.
- Funding for the Office is generated through the Mental Health Services Act (Proposition 63).
- The Office will be an extension of the Prevention and Early Intervention division within the Department of Mental Health.

Suicide Trends

- Nationally, suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death among youth between 10-24 years.ⁱ
- More Californians died by suicide in 2004 than by homicide.ⁱⁱ
- In 2004, a reported 3,364 individuals died by suicide in California. This is equivalent to nine lives every day – nearly as many as the eleven lives claimed daily in traffic collisions.
- As many as 90% of individuals who die by suicide had a diagnosable mental illness or substance abuse disorder at the time of their death.
- Older adults, particularly men over the age of 75, have the highest rate of suicide (42.8 per 100,000).ⁱⁱ

California Strategic Plan for Suicide Prevention

DMH is currently working with an advisory group of diverse experts to develop a statewide Strategic Plan for Suicide Prevention. The advisory group is responsible for making recommendations for the strategic plan that the Department of Mental Health will deliver to the Governor in May of 2008.

Suicide Prevention Hot Lines

There are many different kinds of phone lines that handle crisis calls; some are specifically for suicide prevention. The national suicide hotline is **1-800-273-TALK**, administered by the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Callers are routed to one of over 120 accredited crisis lines, eight of which are located in California. Veterans calling the hotline can select a prompt that will route them to a Veteran Affairs suicide prevention call center.

When to Seek Help: Suicide Warning Signs

According to the American Association of Suicidology, suicide warning signs include:

- Threatening to hurt or kill him or herself, or talking of wanting to hurt or kill him/herself;
- Looking for ways to kill him/herself by seeking access to firearms, available pills, or other means;
- Talking, writing about death, dying, or suicide;
- Increased alcohol or drug use;
- Feeling hopeless;
- Seeing no reason to live or no purpose in life;
- Anxiety, agitation, troubled/constant sleeping;
- Feeling trapped, as if there is no way out;
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and society;
- Rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge;
- Acting reckless, engaging in risky activities; and
- Dramatic mood changes.

ⁱ Center for Disease Control, 2007

ⁱⁱ California Department of Public Health