



# Area of Focus: Suicide Prevention

## Area of Focus: Suicide Prevention

Individuals, families, communities, and governments take ownership to prevent suicide and self-harm in Alaska.

**Objective 5.1:** Coordinate prevention efforts to ensure that Alaskans have access to a comprehensive suicide prevention system.

**Objective 5.2:** Support and improve the system to assist individuals in crisis.

### RESILIENCE:

Is the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands.

*American Psychological Association — Resilience<sup>1</sup>*

Suicide is a devastating public health concern that impacts all Alaskans, and it is preventable. Prevention, early intervention, and postvention services could reduce the incidence of suicide in Alaska. Alaskans and our communities are resilient. However, the unique sociodemographic circumstances experienced by Alaskans, and particularly Alaskans from underserved populations and living in rural areas, can increase the risk for suicide. This goal highlights a comprehensive and integrated approach to suicide prevention that includes the continuum of wellness promotion, suicide prevention, crisis intervention, and postvention.

While each suicide or attempted suicide can be as unique as the person who experiences it, there are ways to address the “web of causation,” the social, emotional, environmental, and health factors involved.

Alaska has some of the highest rates of suicide in the nation, and this is particularly true for Alaska’s youth. Alaska’s age-adjusted suicide mortality rate in 2023 was 27.8 per 100,000 population; for Alaskan’s aged 15-24 the 2023 age-specific suicide mortality rate was 42.3 per 100,000 population.<sup>2</sup> This means that Alaskan adolescents are dying by suicide at a rate that is almost 17% higher than Alaskan adults. Furthermore, in 2019, 19.7% of Alaskan youth reported having attempted suicide within the last year and

38.1% reported feeling sad or hopeless, while less than half reported markers of social supports and connectedness. To effectively address suicide within Alaska requires an approach that includes the unique factors associated with adolescence.

Equally critical to addressing Alaska’s suicide rate is ensuring that Alaskans experiencing a suicidal crisis have access to needed supports. Crisis service infrastructure is expanding throughout Alaska and is poised to dramatically improve the system of care. This includes 24/7 crisis call services, crisis mobile response, and crisis receiving and stabilization, as well as best practice suicide care and supported care transitions. In July 2022, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline launched, ensuring that crisis call services are easily accessible through a three-digit number. Alaska’s crisis call center received over 32,000 calls (including 988) in FY24<sup>3</sup>, providing needed crisis services throughout the state.

The healthcare system is uniquely situated to intervene with those experiencing suicide risk. On average, **45% of people who died by suicide had contact with their primary care provider within the month prior to their death<sup>4</sup>**. The State of Alaska is currently working toward best practices for suicide care in healthcare settings, including integrating comprehensive screening and suicide specific psychotherapy into our healthcare system.

“Messages of Hope”<sup>5</sup>, Alaska’s 2023-2027 Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan, challenges local communities and regional and state governments to work individually and collectively to prevent suicide. Messages of Hope includes six goals: address upstream factors that impact suicide; implement a broad-based public health response

### POSTVENTION:

Involves a series of planned interventions that occur after a suicide has taken place with the intention to support those affected by a suicide:

- Facilitate the grieving or adjustment process
- Stabilize the environment
- Prevent further suicides for those who may be at risk.

*Suicide Prevention Resource — Postvention: A Guide for Response to Suicide on College Campuses<sup>6</sup>*

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to suicide; reduce access to lethal means; enhance Alaska’s crisis continuum of care; address special considerations for Alaskan youth, seniors, elders, veterans, and military families; and improve the quality of data and research for suicide prevention efforts. The comprehensive integrated mental health program plan strives to align with the goals of the statewide suicide prevention plan.

**Objective 5.1:** Coordinate prevention efforts to ensure that Alaskans have access to a comprehensive suicide prevention system.

- a. **Strategy:** Recognize the connection between suicide, substance misuse, mental illness, and adverse life events.
- b. **Strategy:** Establish consistent communication and coordination across suicide prevention stakeholders.
- c. **Strategy:** Promote best practices in lethal means safety.
- d. **Strategy:** State agencies/providers have guidance and training on suicide prevention approaches and available services and supports.
- e. **Strategy:** Provide financial and technical support for implementation of practice-informed and suicide prevention strategies.
- f. **Strategy:** Provide coordinated postvention planning and supports.
- g. **Strategy:** Provide safe and effective messaging for suicide prevention that is consistent with Suicide Prevention Resource Center Guidelines.
- h. **Strategy:** Utilize data to identify high-risk populations and communities and develop targeted interventions.

**Objective 5.2:** Support and improve the system to assist individuals in crisis.

- a. **Strategy:** Improve and support 988 interoperability.
- b. **Strategy:** Increase access to comprehensive suicide care in healthcare settings.

- c. **Strategy:** Assist Alaskans who encounter the continuum of care by screening at every encounter for behavioral health conditions and suicidal ideation.
- d. **Strategy:** Develop a continuum of community-based crisis intervention services to support Trust beneficiaries in community settings whenever possible.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 American Psychological Association — Resilience. <https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience>
- 2 Alaska Division of Public Health, Health Analytics and Vital Records Section. Last updated on 08/01/2024.
- 3 32,000 calls (including 988) in FY24. Data reported to the Division of Behavioral Health by Careline Crisis Services.
- 4 45% of people who died by suicide had contact with their primary care provider within the month prior to their death. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12042175/>
- 5 “Messages of Hope”, Alaska’s 2023-2027 Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan. [https://health.alaska.gov/SuicidePrevention/Documents/230301\\_StatePlan\\_SuicidePrevention.pdf](https://health.alaska.gov/SuicidePrevention/Documents/230301_StatePlan_SuicidePrevention.pdf)
- 6 Suicide Prevention Resource — Postvention: A Guide for Response to Suicide on College Campuses. <https://sprc.org/online-library/postvention-a-guide-for-response-to-suicide-on-college-campuses/>