

If someone were heading toward thin ice, would you call out to them before they broke through? If they went through the ice, would you help them? If you fell through, would you yell to someone nearby for help? What if someone you know acted depressed? Would you reach out to them? What if you were feeling hopeless? Would you call for help?

We hope you would.

Suicide is an issue that reaches every corner of Alaska and it's 100 percent preventable. There were 1,369 confirmed suicides, in 176 separate communities, between 2000 and 2009 in our state. If you're willing to call for help, for yourself or someone else, you can help change the future of suicide in our state – prevention is possible.

While there are many causes of suicide, there are also many things we can do to help someone at risk. The Suicide Prevention Resource Center reports that 60-90 percent of suicide victims have a diagnosable mental illness and/or a substance use disorder. Those conditions are all treatable health problems, like diabetes or high blood pressure.

But like many worthwhile things in life, suicide prevention takes a little effort on everyone's part. We thank Iron Dog racers Chris Olds and Tyler Huntington for making suicide prevention part of their race this year. We also thank Cynthia Erickson, a mom, shopkeeper and Iron Dog volunteer from Tanana, for recruiting them – and us – to help. We hope that every Alaskan will join them in their efforts. Here are seven things you can do to join the team and prevent suicide:

- Take a suicide prevention or mental health first aid training. The state and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium offer many kinds of trainings. You can find a calendar of trainings on [StopSuicideAlaska.org](http://StopSuicideAlaska.org), a website for people who work on suicide prevention.
- Contact someone on your school board and tell them you'd like to see a suicide prevention program in your local schools. This is something our kids want, too – the Alaska Association of Student Government passed a resolution at their Fall 2010 conference in Bethel that all high schools should provide suicide prevention training or awareness events. For details go to [aasg.org](http://aasg.org).
- Protect your own mental health. Researchers found five simple things that work to keep people resilient – to keep them able to handle rough times when they come:
  - o Connect – with family & friends, online, with a card, a phone call or radio shout out – however!
  - o Learn – keep your mind active learning new things, or brushing up on old skills.
  - o Help – someone in need – share your catch, volunteer, shovel a neighbor's walkway.
  - o Move – stay active.
  - o Reflect – be mindful of the world around and how you experience it.

- Lock up your guns; 66 percent of suicides in Alaska between 2004 and 2008 were committed with a firearm.
- If someone you know talks about feeling really down, take it seriously. Tell them you care, and give them the Careline number to call. If they won't call, you call and ask for ideas on how to help them. If a friend of yours seems down, let the person know you care and are concerned, and tell an adult you trust so he or she can get help.
- If you need help, get help. Other risk factors for suicide — like having been abused as a child, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, medical or financial problems, problems with the law – these are big things, without easy fixes. But there is help out there. If you feel helpless or hopeless, please call Careline at 1-877-266-HELP (4357), go to [CarelineAlaska.com](http://CarelineAlaska.com) and chat online, or text 907-2-LISTEN (547836).

We need to talk about suicide, because not talking about it hasn't worked. Spread the word to the kids in your community: We love you! You can talk to us! Adults can do the same thing for each other too.

Together, we can stop suicide. Life's a team effort!

If you have any questions or want to learn about more ways you can get involved in suicide prevention efforts, please visit the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council website at [www.hss.state.ak.us/suicideprevention](http://www.hss.state.ak.us/suicideprevention), call the Council at 465-6518, or call the Alaska Dept. of Health & Social Services at 269-8041.

- Kate Burkhart, executive director, Statewide Suicide Prevention Council
- Commissioner William Streur, Alaska Dept. of Health & Social Services
- Commissioner Joe Masters, Alaska Dept. of Public Safety
- Barbara Franks, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium