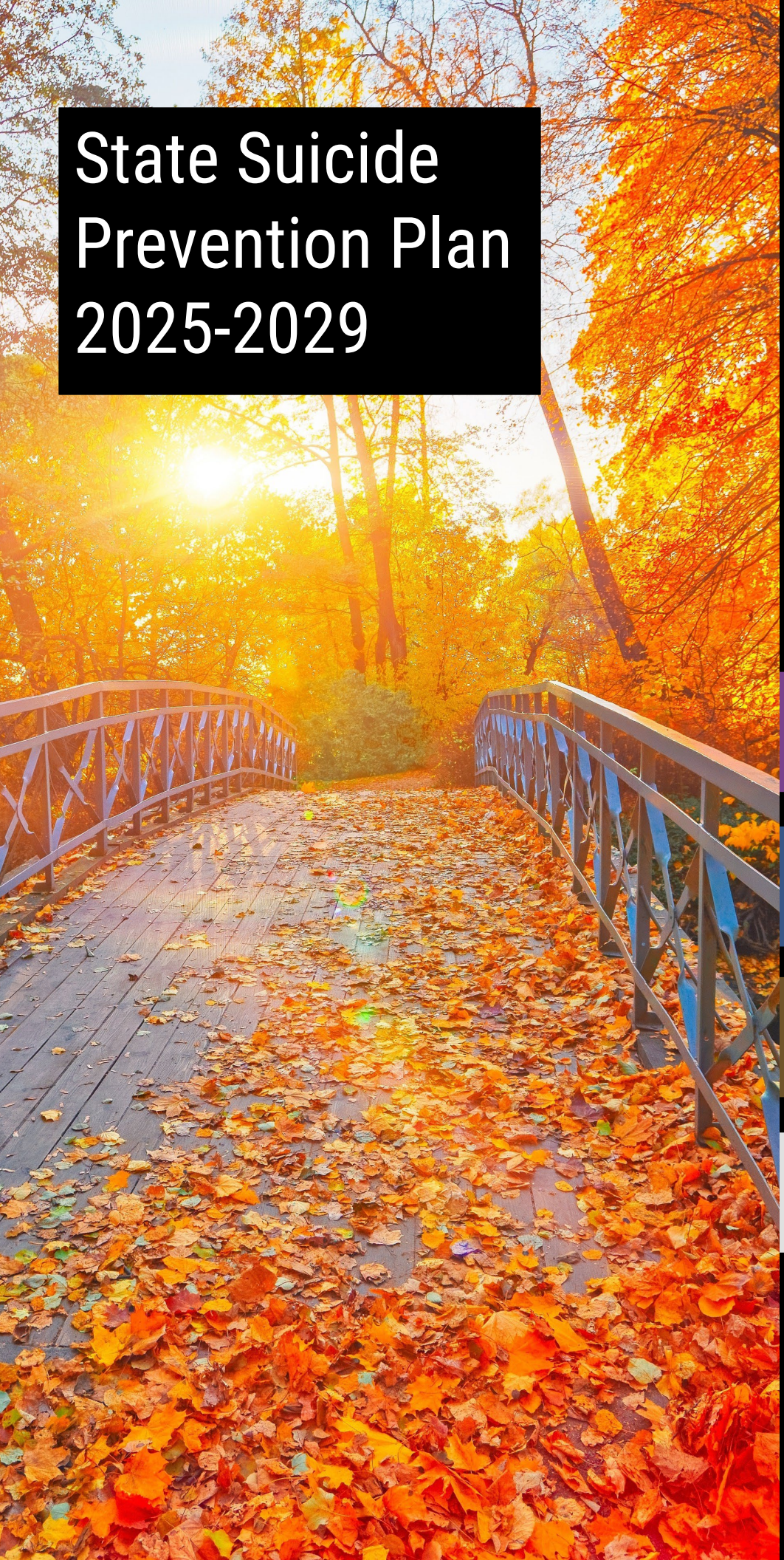

State Suicide Prevention Plan 2025-2029

NH SUICIDE PREVENTION Council

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NEW HAMPSHIRE DHHS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

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Special thank you to those who contributed to this NH Suicide Prevention Plan. Your dedication to improving the lives of individuals and families in New Hampshire is appreciated.

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Report Contact Information

Katherine Cox, Suicide Prevention Coordinator, NH DHHS, Katherine.m.cox@dhhs.nh.gov

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If you or your loved one are contemplating suicide or are having a mental health crisis, you can call or text 988 or chat at https://988lifeline.org/ for help.

You can also access local NH resources by calling or texting the NH Rapid Response Access Point at 1-833-710-6477 or chat at NH988.com.

Dedication

This plan is dedicated to the community of survivors of suicide loss throughout New Hampshire. On their behalf, we would like to express thanks to the many researchers, policymakers, first responders, providers, administrators, and survivors who devoted their time and energy to develop this plan. We especially appreciate the collaborative nature of the various individuals and organizations who work to prevent suicide in the Granite State on a daily basis. This plan will serve as our guide in suicide prevention and will aid us in sending the message to those who struggle: Help is available; it can get better; hope endures.

Survivor of Suicide Loss Committee Members

Steve Boczenowski – Co-chair
Megan Melanson – Co-chair
Al Carbonneau
Alexa Felix
Dawn Johnson
Susan Morrison
Amy Oliva
Bill Stouges
Kimbly Wade

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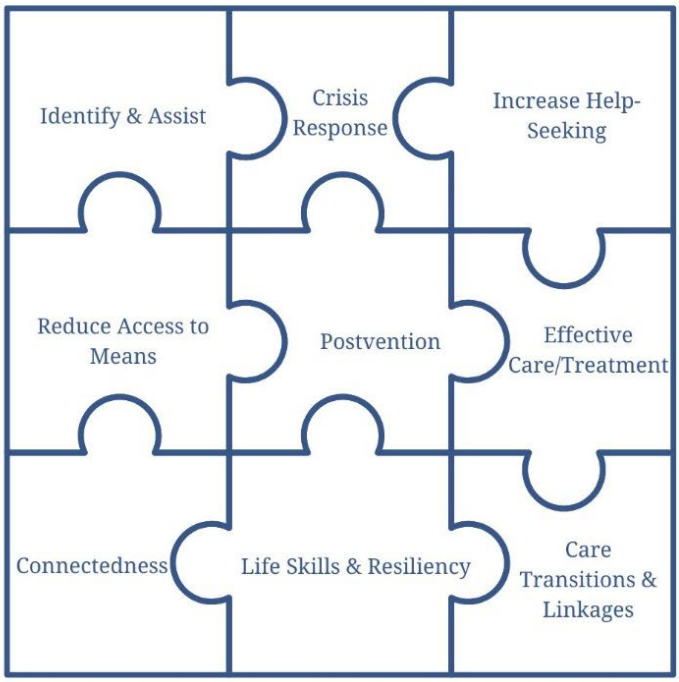
Guiding Principles

Suicide is complex and effective suicide prevention is multifaceted; it necessitates a collaborative approach that tackles various dimensions of the issue, simultaneously.



The Suicide Prevention Resource Center, Jed Foundation, and the U.S. Air Force Suicide Prevention Program developed a model that highlights nine strategies for a holistic approach to suicide prevention. The model above highlights individual strategies that can be pursued through various activities, such as, programs, policies, practices, and services. This strategic plan reflects activities that cut across this comprehensive approach to suicide prevention.[1]

Safe Messaging

The Framework for Successful Messaging is a resource to help people develop messaging about suicide that is strategic, safe, positive, and makes use of relevant guidelines and best practices[2]. The Positive Narrative component of the Framework for Successful Messaging is designed to increase how much public messaging is "promoting the positive" about suicide prevention, including the following:

- Preventing suicide is actionable
- Prevention works
- Resilience and recovery are possible
- Effective programs and services exist
- Help is available

[1] A Comprehensive Approach to Suicide Prevention – Suicide Prevention Resource Center (sprc.org)
[2] Action Alliance Framework for Successful Messaging | Action Alliance Framework for Successful Messaging

Infusing the Voices of Lived Experience and Survivors of Suicide Loss

In order to create a truly effective suicide prevention strategy, it is essential to center the voices of individuals with lived experience of suicidality and those who have survived the loss of a loved one to suicide. People who have personally navigated mental health challenges or have experienced the devastating impact of suicide loss bring invaluable insights that inform both prevention efforts and recovery pathways. Listening to and collaborating with these voices ensures that policies and programs are grounded in real-world experiences, increase accessibility and relevance, and reduce stigma. Incorporating survivors and those with lived experience not only empowers individuals, but it also creates a more compassionate and empathetic approach to suicide prevention that resonates with communities, builds trust, and ultimately saves lives.

Strengthening Suicide Prevention for Every Community

A core principle of this strategic plan is the commitment to ensuring that suicide prevention efforts are responsive and accessible to all communities. We recognize that individuals from various backgrounds, experience suicidality and suicide loss in unique ways. To ensure that all communities are reached and supported, this plan prioritizes responsive approaches that honor the needs and perspectives of all individuals and groups. By embedding responsive approaches into the core of our strategies, we aim to reduce disparities in suicide risk and intervention, expand access to relevant resources, and ensure that all voices are recognized and valued in the development and implementation of prevention efforts.

New Hampshire is committed to implementing comprehensive suicide prevention strategies that address the needs of populations at higher risk, including those with lived experience of suicide and youth.

Suicide affects all people, but suicidal thoughts and behaviors can vary across populations, and risk and protective factors for suicide may also differ.

As we plan suicide prevention efforts for the next five years, it is essential to focus on the strengths and resilience of communities. This approach will help develop more effective strategies that reduce risk and promote well-being across our state.

Development of the Strategic Plan

A suicide prevention planning retreat was held in Summer 2023, bringing together over 50 participants who have a vested interest in suicide prevention in New Hampshire. These participants included prevention advocates and individuals with lived experience. The purpose of the retreat was to gather input and insights from various perspectives to inform the next strategic direction for suicide prevention activities. The retreat included facilitated discussions and interactive sessions to encourage active participation and collaboration among participants.

A key component to developing this strategic plan was to ensure the collection of quality data across the lifespan and within key demographics. Data collection methods included surveys, key informant interviews, and analysis of existing data sources. The data collection aimed to gather comprehensive information on suicide rates, risk factors, and protective factors among different age groups and demographic populations.

In addition, New Hampshire participated in the 2024 Suicide Prevention Resource Centers State Needs Assessment. This assessment helped identify the strengths and opportunities for suicide prevention efforts in the state. The findings from the needs assessment were used to inform the strategic planning process and guide the development of targeted prevention strategies.

Strategic planning sessions were held with the Youth Suicide Prevention Assembly (YSPA), an independent grassroot entity that has been dedicated to youth suicide prevention in New Hampshire for the past 30 years. While separate from the Suicide Prevention Council at the time of these sessions, YSPA's eventual integration into the Council represents a future phase of this work. The focus of these sessions was to specifically address the strategic direction for the next 3 to 5 years in youth suicide prevention, building upon YSPA's decades of specialized experience in this area.

The data collected from the suicide prevention retreat, qualitative data collection efforts, state needs assessment, and strategic planning sessions were analyzed and synthesized. The analysis aimed to identify common themes, trends, and priorities to guide the development of the 2025-2029 strategic plan. Based on the analysis of the collected data and participant input, the strategic plan on suicide prevention was formulated.

By following this methodology, the strategic plan on suicide prevention in New Hampshire was developed through a collaborative and data-driven approach, incorporating input from engaged partners and utilizing various data collection and analysis methods to inform decision-making and prioritize efforts in suicide prevention.

Scope of Suicide in New Hampshire

Preventing suicide requires strategies at all levels of society. New Hampshire is dedicated to promoting awareness that suicide is a preventable public health problem. Together we can raise awareness and increase access to mental health, substance use, and suicide prevention services.

Suicide in New Hampshire is a complex issue affecting individuals of all ages and backgrounds. While anyone can experience suicidal thoughts, certain groups, including adolescents, young adults, veterans, LGBTQI+ individuals, and those struggling with mental health conditions or substance misuse are at higher risk for making a suicide attempt or dying by suicide[3]. Common risk factors include feelings of hopelessness, isolation, stress, and access to lethal means. Protective factors, such as strong social connections, coping skills, and access to mental health resources, can help mitigate these risks[4]. Firearms are the most common method of suicide in New Hampshire and nationally, resulting in nearly twice as many deaths as the next most common method[5]. Suicides and attempts often occur in times of crisis, such as loss, relationship difficulties, or financial hardship[6]. While these events may be triggers, no one event causes suicide. Suicide is complex and there is no single cause.

Each fall, the NH Suicide Prevention Annual Report is released, summarizing data from the previous calendar year. The NH Suicide Prevention Annual Report is the result of the collaborative work of many groups, committees, and organizations in NH who have dedicated time and resources to study the issue of suicide in our state. The report looks at suicide prevention and postvention across the lifespan. This makes the report one of the most up to date resources available on suicide and suicidality in NH[7].

[3] 2022 NH Suicide Prevention Annual Report (https://theconnectprogram.org/annual-reports) – Table 7, Pg. 32; Figure 11, Pg. 40; Figures 26 & 27, Pg. 52; Figure 54, Pg. 73; Figure 58, pg. 76; Figure 59, Pg. 77.

[4] Risk and Protective Factors for Suicide - https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/risk-factors

[5] CDC WISQARS, 2018-2022. https://wisqars.cdc.gov

[6] 2022 NH Suicide Prevention Annual Report (https://theconnectprogram.org/annual-reports) – Figure 49, Pg. 68.

[7] NH Annual Suicide Prevention Reports – The Connect Program

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NH Suicide Prevention Infrastructure

A robust state infrastructure is essential for effective and lasting suicide prevention. New Hampshire has embraced the Suicide Prevention Resource Center's recommendations for a suicide prevention infrastructure at the state level to carry out the suicide prevention strategies. These recommendations are categorized into six essential elements: Authorize, Lead, Partner, Examine, Build, and Guide[8]. These essential elements help to streamline suicide prevention efforts and improve capacity to save lives in New Hampshire.

NH Suicide Prevention Council

Established in 2008 through a legislative mandate, the NH Suicide Prevention Council (SPC) aims to reduce the incidence of suicide in the Granite State by raising public and professional awareness of suicide prevention. The SPC is tasked to promote policy change on suicide prevention-related matters. According to its statute, NH RSA 126-R, SPC shall "oversee the implementation of the New Hampshire suicide prevention plan. The Council shall ensure the continued effectiveness of the plan by evaluating its implementation, producing progress reports, and recommending program changes, initiatives, funding opportunities, and new priorities to update the plan."

A Chair leads the SPC, with overall responsibility for the Council's functioning; and a Vice-Chair supports leadership efforts. Amy Cook from NAMI New Hampshire is the current Chair. The Vice-Chair position is currently held by Shamera Simpson, Executive Director of American Foundation for Suicide Prevention – NH Chapter.

NH SPC Committees:

- Communications – promotes awareness that suicide is a public health problem that is generally preventable, encourages safe messaging, media reporting, and portrayal of suicidal behavior. Works to advance the visibility of suicide prevention and NH SPC activities, trainings, and events.
- Data Collection & Analysis – improves and expands suicide surveillance systems. Develops and disseminates the NH Suicide Prevention Annual Data Report.
- First Responder – collaborates with partners and implements trainings to address at-risk behaviors among this population.
- Military/Veterans - collaborates with partners and implements trainings to address at-risk behaviors among this population. Aligns strategically with the *Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide among Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families.*
- Public Policy – provides subject matter expertise to the NH SPC and NH Legislature regarding the public health impact of suicide.
- Survivors of Suicide Loss – supports survivors (family, friends, and associates of people who died by suicide) through the implementation of support and education programming.

[8] State Suicide Prevention Infrastructure – Suicide Prevention Resource Center (sprc.org)

- Youth – collaborates with partners and implements trainings to address at-risk behaviors among this population and with youth-serving organizations and institutions.

While committee membership is open to all interested participants who wish to serve as an ambassador for SPC and suicide prevention efforts in NH, the SPC Charter outlines the representing agencies required by statute. Members often work within their affiliated organization and system to promote suicide prevention efforts, ensuring consistency with the SPC statewide plan. SPC generates support and excitement for initiatives through its diverse membership while addressing priorities and resources.

Suicide Prevention Coordinator

In 2021, the State of New Hampshire established the role of Suicide Prevention Coordinator within the Department of Health and Human Services, following strong advocacy from members of the Suicide Prevention Council. This position serves as the subject matter expert on suicide prevention, focusing on strategies that address suicidality across the lifespan. The Suicide Prevention Coordinator plays a vital role in supporting and coordinating efforts across state agencies, organizations, and community partners, ensuring alignment with the state's broader suicide prevention goals. Administratively tied to the Suicide Prevention Council, the position is instrumental in the development, oversight, monitoring, and evaluation of the state's suicide prevention plan. Currently filled, the coordinator works closely with the leadership and statutory members of the Council to advance initiatives, foster collaboration, and provide critical insights into statewide activities. By facilitating relationships and strengthening partnerships among key communities, this position is an essential component of the state's suicide prevention infrastructure and crucial to the ongoing success of the Council's efforts. The current Suicide Prevention Coordinator is Katherine Cox, MSW.

Suicide Fatality Review Committee

The Suicide Fatality Review Committee (SFRC) was established via NH RSA 126-R:4. The committee reports to the Suicide Prevention Council established by NH RSA 126-R:2. The SFRC conducts case study analyses of identified deaths in New Hampshire; collects data that can help identify common trends among cases; report findings in a clear, accessible, and consistent manner; and make recommendations to key decision-makers in New Hampshire.

SFRC Goals:

1. Identify missed opportunities for prevention and gaps in the system.
2. Build working relationships between partners on suicide prevention.
3. Recommend policies, programs, and legislation to prevent future suicide deaths.

Strategic Plan

The following 5-year strategic plan leverages NH's strengths and collaborations and focuses resources on the areas where greatest impact on suicide prevention can be achieved. This plan includes 3 priorities:

1. Collaboration & Community Engagement
2. Preventing Suicide in Key Settings
3. Data & Reporting

PRIORITY #1

Partnerships, Community, & Public Awareness

Develop and implement wide-reaching partnerships and communication strategies to raise awareness and advance suicide prevention activities.

GOAL 1

Work with partners to advance a coordinated and comprehensive public health approach to suicide prevention, by actively engaging communities in decision-making, fostering meaningful partnerships for prevention initiatives, and supporting activities led by community members, peers, and youth. This collaborative approach ensures prevention strategies are informed by community wisdom and responsive to local needs.

OBJECTIVES

- Foster and grow partnerships to advance NH's strategic priorities and the public health approach to support partners in suicide prevention. Support NH Suicide Prevention Council members in developing partnership strategies.
- Engage organizations not traditionally connected to suicide prevention (including but not limited to hunting/fishing clubs, libraries, chamber of commerce, major employers, parks and recreation, etc.) in outreach efforts to raise awareness of suicide warning signs and intervention strategies.
- Work with statewide and regional partners to advance a coordinated approach to postvention.
- Collaborate with schools, college campuses, community organizations, first responders, correctional facilities, and other settings to integrate mental health education and suicide prevention interventions into existing programs.
- Work alongside key partners and local leaders to promote and support activities that address lethal means safety.
- Develop targeted prevention strategies that address the unique needs and challenges faced by populations identified through data as having elevated suicide risk, including suicide prevention programing specifically designed for men's mental health.
- Implement outreach programs that effectively engage different community contexts and increase understanding of suicide risk factors in populations where data indicates elevated risk.

- Partner with community organizations, such as veterans' groups or local clubs, to create social activities and events that promote social interaction and reduce isolation.
- Create sustainable community support structures that connect survivors of suicide loss with resources, peer support, and long-term healing opportunities.

GOAL 2

Expand public awareness about suicide and mental health while building comprehensive provider and community capacity to deliver effective responsive care. This includes increasing help-seeking, reducing barriers to care, and ensuring prevention services meet the diverse needs of all community members.

OBJECTIVES

- Develop and implement a communication strategy to advance the mission of the NH Suicide Prevention Council and the role of public health in suicide prevention.
- Communicate NH's suicide prevention priorities, data, research, best practices, and project successes with partners and collaborators.
- Promote public outreach campaigns and strategies focused on help-seeking for individuals with behavioral health needs.
- Increase public awareness about the availability of crisis resources in our state.
- Develop and/or support tailored public awareness campaigns that address the specific needs and concerns of populations disproportionately impacted by suicide.
- Develop targeted mental health awareness campaigns specifically tailored for older to middle-aged men in rural areas to address the identified need for this subpopulation.
- Implement educational programs to enhance mental health literacy and reduce stigma surrounding seeking help for mental health issues, using necessary communication access tools to ensure understanding (e.g. interpretation, translation, materials that are developed in plain language, etc.).
- Train community members, including family members, friends, and local leaders, on how to recognize signs of distress and provide appropriate support to those in need.
- Promote and offer on-going training programs that increase awareness and understanding of diverse cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and practices.

PRIORITY #2

Preventing Suicide in Key Settings

Preventing suicide requires making sure those at risk of suicide get connected to the proper treatment and services they need.

For this priority, New Hampshire will focus on the following three sectors over the next five years:

1. Health Care
2. School and College Campus
3. Substance Use Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery

This priority area focuses on enhancing suicide prevention efforts within these critical settings. By integrating suicide prevention across these environments, the goal is to ensure that all nine elements of a comprehensive suicide prevention strategy—ranging from awareness and education to intervention and postvention—are actively implemented.[9] Targeted improvements in these sectors will create more supportive and responsive systems for individuals at risk of suicide, ultimately reducing risk and fostering environments of care and resilience. Addressing suicide prevention within these settings will be a key component in advancing statewide efforts to save lives.

Health Care Suicide Prevention

GOAL

Improve the systematic approach to suicide care within health systems, including emphasizing the structural role of the health system in preventing suicide, rather than the responsibility resting solely in the hands of individual clinical providers.

OBJECTIVES

- Train primary care providers to provide brief suicide prevention interventions, such as counseling on access to lethal means and safety planning.
- Share information with healthcare settings about 988, NH Rapid Response, the Doorways, and other crisis response services.
- Offer training and education to healthcare professionals and staff about the risk factors and warning signs for suicide and how to respond appropriately.
- Utilize and promote best practices for improving system-wide suicide prevention treatment and care, such as Zero Suicide Framework.
- Attend and participate in existing healthcare coalitions that focus on quality improvement, such as the NH Behavioral Health Clinical Learning Collaborative.

[9] A Comprehensive Approach to Suicide Prevention – Suicide Prevention Resource Center (sprc.org)

School & College Campus Suicide Prevention

GOAL

Enhance the capacity of schools, college campuses, and youth-serving organizations to effectively prevent suicide and promote mental health by equipping educators, staff, and students with the knowledge and tools needed to recognize and respond to signs of suicidality.

OBJECTIVES

- Support access to comprehensive training programs for educators, staff, parents/caregivers, and students on the signs of suicidal behavior, the importance of mental health, and self-care strategies.
- Promote the creation of clear guidelines and protocols for responding to suicide risk and crises within schools, including postvention plans.
- Support local school districts in creating school culture that emphasizes mental wellness, belonging, and open discussions about mental health, substance use, and suicidality among students and staff.

Suicide Prevention in Substance Use Treatment & Recovery

GOAL

Integrate suicide prevention strategies within substance use treatment and recovery settings, recognizing the deep connection between substance use and suicide risk. This includes fostering collaboration between suicide prevention and substance use treatment systems to create comprehensive, accessible, and effective care pathways.

OBJECTIVES

- Support comprehensive training for substance use treatment providers, including staff and counselors, on identifying and responding to suicide risk in individuals with substance use disorders. This will include training on the interconnectedness of substance use and suicidality, as well as strategies for providing integrated care.
- Strengthen collaboration with the Governor's Commission on Alcohol and Other Drugs to align suicide prevention and substance use treatment efforts.
- Promote the integration of the state's crisis response systems, ensuring that individuals in crisis, particularly those with substance use disorders, have access to timely, coordinated, and supportive care that addresses both suicidality, mental health and substance use concerns.
- Distribute and promote the state's existing behavioral health public awareness campaign, ensuring that key messages about mental health, suicide prevention, and substance use recovery are accessible, widely disseminated, and presented under one unified campaign.

PRIORITY #3

Data

Good quality data enable the evaluation of suicide prevention efforts and are important for applying advances in the collection and analysis of surveillance data to improve prevention practices and, ultimately, to reduce the impact of suicide. This priority focuses on enhancing accessible and timely data on suicide thoughts, attempts, deaths, and will lead to a better understanding of the risk and protective factors for suicide.

In addition to monitoring overall trends, New Hampshire dedicated to collecting and analyzing data that identifies disparities in suicide and suicidality across different populations. This includes examining suicide thoughts, attempts, deaths, and risk and protective factors within specific communities, particularly those that may be experiencing higher rates of suicidality. By consistently monitoring and reporting on this data, we aim to highlight these disparities and use the insights to inform targeted, accessible interventions that address the unique needs of populations disproportionately impacted by suicide.

GOAL 1

Improve the quality and enhance the use of existing data sources and systems.

OBJECTIVES

- Participate in the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) to link state and national data sources to provide more comprehensive, holistic details on suicide mortality data.
- Improve the quality, utility, and accessibility of existing data for analyzing nonfatal suicide-related outcomes (e.g. self-harm, suicide attempts, non-suicidal self-injury).
- Build state and community capacity to use existing data for comprehensive prevention.
- Develop and disseminate the Annual Suicide Prevention Data Report

GOAL 2

Improve Data Collection and Reporting systems to capture accurate and comprehensive information on suicide rates among different populations.

OBJECTIVES

- Enhance data collection systems to capture demographic information, including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, primary language spoken, gender identity, sexual orientation, veteran/military status, and age.
- Analyze and disseminate data to identify disparities and inform targeted prevention strategies.
- Improvement in the completeness and accuracy of demographic data captured in the data collection systems.

- Perform an in-depth analysis of surveillance data to understand the specific risk factors and underlying causes of suicide among populations identified as having higher rates of suicidality. This analysis will help inform prevention efforts by providing a deeper understanding of the unique contributing factors for these groups.

Commitment to Evaluation

Evaluation is essential to ensure that suicide prevention efforts are effective, accountable, and continuously improving. By systematically assessing the impact of our strategies, we can measure success, identify areas for growth, and refine our approaches to maximize effectiveness. A robust evaluation process not only helps in tracking progress but also ensures that the most successful strategies are recognized, sustained, and implemented as best practices.

To assess the success of this plan, the Suicide Prevention Council (SPC) will utilize the following key evaluation measures:

1. Ensure that all Subcommittee activities are directly aligned with the broader goals of the SPC.
2. Achieve consensus among SPC members on goals, activities, and progress, fostering a unified approach to suicide prevention.
3. Conduct periodic assessments to identify existing strengths and gaps in current strategies and resources.
4. Track the number and effectiveness of partnerships with key suicide prevention partners, ensuring strong collaborative efforts.
5. Ensure SPC leadership is actively involved in state-level policy and legislative decisions to advocate for suicide prevention priorities.
6. Guarantee SPC activities are represented in statewide initiatives, such as the Suicide Prevention Annual Report, to strengthen advocacy and awareness.
7. Leverage data for advocacy, ensuring that it is used to inform decisions, drive policy change, and support the establishment of a state mandate for suicide prevention data collection.

Through these evaluation measures, the New Hampshire is committed to ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of New Hampshire's suicide prevention efforts, fostering continuous improvement, and adapting strategies to meet the evolving needs of the community.

Closing Remarks

As we move forward with this 5-year strategic plan, New Hampshire is committed to leveraging our collective strengths, building on existing collaborations, and focusing our resources on areas where we can make the greatest impact in suicide prevention. Through our three core priorities—Collaboration & Community Engagement, Preventing Suicide in Key Settings, and Data & Reporting—we aim to create a comprehensive, inclusive, and data-driven approach that will enhance the effectiveness of our suicide prevention efforts. By working together across sectors and ensuring that our strategies address the unique needs of diverse populations, we are confident that we can reduce suicidality, save lives, and foster a more supportive and resilient community for all New Hampshire residents. This plan reflects our ongoing commitment to addressing the complex and interconnected factors that contribute to suicide, and we are dedicated to continuous evaluation, learning, and adaptation as we strive to make meaningful progress over the next five years.

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