

September 14, 2020

Governor Douglas A. Ducey  
Office of the Governor  
1700 West Washington  
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

Dear Governor Ducey:

Pursuant to Laws 2018, Second Regular Session, Chapter 276, Section 10, please find the State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2020 summary of accomplishments in suicide prevention by AHCCCS.

### **ARIZONA SUICIDE DATA**

Death from suicide remains a critical public health issue. In 2018, suicide was the 8th leading cause of death in Arizona and represented 2.4% of all deaths in Arizona. Firearms, suffocation/hanging and poisoning by drugs were the most reported mechanisms of death by suicide, with firearm use being the leading mechanism across Arizona.

There are several suicide trends observed across the state based on geography, race/ethnicity, age, and veterans. Geographically, rural areas have a rate of 32.2 suicides per 100,000 population as compared to urban areas with 17.2 suicides per 100,000 population. On a race/ethnic level, Native Americans have a rate of 36.5 suicides per 100,000 population as compared to European Americans with 23.7 suicides per 100,000 population. From 2008-2018, all rates across age groups have increased; children under 15 have had a 2-fold increase in the suicide rate. The age-adjusted suicide rate for veterans was consistently 2-3 times higher than their non-veteran counterparts from 2008-2018 (i.e. 50.9 vs 22.3 per 100,000 population in 2018).

The following sections of this report reflect the AHCCCS Suicide Prevention Team's efforts to address these suicide data trends in Arizona.

### **2020 STRATEGIC SUICIDE PREVENTION GOALS**

ADHS, in coordination with AHCCCS, convened a Suicide Prevention Stakeholder meeting in August 2019 to update the Arizona Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan. More than 90 community partners participated including representatives from state/local governments, nonprofits, community, and faith-based organizations.

Based on feedback received during this meeting and guidance from the CDC National Framework for Suicide Prevention, ADHS and AHCCCS co-authored the 2020 Arizona Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan. AHCCCS achievements in SFY2020, based on the goals from the Arizona Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan, included:

1. Develop and disseminate information on suicide prevention resources and training.
  - a. AHCCCS, in collaboration with the Helios Education Foundation, hosted three summits with behavioral health and education staff to discuss suicide prevention and resources; more than 340 individuals attended statewide.
  - b. AHCCCS was interviewed by various media outlets about suicide prevention best practice.
  - c. AHCCCS published blog posts regarding suicide prevention.
  - d. AHCCCS collaborated with the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) to promote suicide prevention trainings for school staff.
  - e. The AHCCCS Suicide Prevention Specialist and the AHCCCS Suicide Prevention Epidemiologist served on:
    - The Arizona Coalition for Suicide Prevention,
    - Be Connected – the statewide initiative to end Veteran suicides,
    - Stronger as One Coalition – a community coalition in northern Arizona,
    - Health and Hope for Youth – a community coalition in southern Arizona,
    - The Board of Directors for the Arizona Public Health Association, and
    - Board of Directors for United Food Bank which outreaches homebound seniors across four counties.
  
2. Increase the resilience and well-being of Arizona's youth.
  - a. In partnership with the ADE, the AHCCCS Project AWARE project director worked alongside three school districts (Glendale Elementary, Sunnyside, and Baboquivari) to provide behavioral health and suicide prevention resources.
  - b. Based on the Mitch Warnock Act, AHCCCS worked with a third-party evaluator and ADE to select eight evidence-based best practice suicide prevention trainings for school staff to select from, including online and free options.
  - c. To date, more than 6,000 Arizonans have taken online Question Persuade Refer (QPR) with Project AWARE funding.
  
3. Improve social connectedness and help seeking behavior.
  - a. AHCCCS provided more than 80 community training sessions on preventing suicide and related behaviors reaching more than 2,500 Arizonans; this included trainings to various minority groups of color, highlighting the unique challenges minority populations face regarding mental health and suicide.
  - b. The AHCCCS Suicide Prevention Specialist co-attended two national conferences with Be Connected.
  - c. The AHCCCS Suicide Prevention Specialist lead the Be Connected gun hygiene subcommittee.
  - d. The AHCCCS Suicide Prevention Epidemiologist consulted with the Arizona Coalition of Military Families (ACMF) regarding the CDC scorecard and index project which examines the most vulnerable to suicide among veterans and informs policy, funding, intervention, and prevention activities.
  - e. The AHCCCS Suicide Prevention Team, in collaboration with Stronger as One Coalition in Northern Arizona, the Health and Hope for Youth Coalition in Southern Arizona, the ADE, and Mercy Care Plan, trained 1,397 individuals in Mental Health First Aid or Youth Mental Health First Aid in SFY2020.

4. Increase access to mental health care for Arizonans by adopting the Zero Suicide model statewide.
  - a. The AHCCCS Suicide Prevention Team created a Statewide Taskforce on Zero Suicide.
  - b. The AHCCCS Suicide Prevention Team created a Zero Suicide plan for AHCCCS.
5. Conduct a 50 State review to inform Arizona suicide prevention efforts.
  - a. AHCCCS conducted this review and it was published on the ADHS website: <https://azdhs.gov/documents/operations/managing-excellence/50-state-review-suicide-prevention.pdf>
6. Increase access to the crisis system.
  - a. AHCCCS hosts monthly crisis meetings with crisis stakeholders, including providers, health plans and ADHS, to evaluate crisis data and resolve ongoing crisis system issues.
  - b. AHCCCS cross-walked the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Guidelines for Behavioral Health Crisis Care with Arizona's crisis system and presented at the AHCCCS Community Quality Forum.
  - c. AHCCCS received a federal FEMA grant to fund [www.resilientarizona.org](http://www.resilientarizona.org), which provides crisis counseling to individuals during COVID-19.
  - d. AHCCCS chairs the Behavioral Health (BH) Taskforce to evaluate crisis system utilization trends, available suicide data, and other BH system needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.
7. Increase access to resources and services for individuals and communities that have experienced suicide and increase access to prevention materials. Increase access and awareness to support of suicide survivors.
  - a. The AHCCCS Suicide Prevention Team worked with behavioral health provider EMPACT La Frontera to:
    - Expand Local Outreach to Survivors of Suicides (LOSS) groups
    - Educate first responders of LOSS resources, with the goal of distributing this information when responding to a suicide call.
    - Identify individuals in high risk rural counties (Gila, Yavapai, Mohave) to take bereavement training.
  - b. AHCCCS funded the printing of 1000 LOSS packets for Maricopa County first responders in SFY2020.
8. Increase access and awareness to targeted resources in the community for high risk populations.
  - a. The AHCCCS Suicide Prevention Team partnered with the Arizona Public Health Association and the Arizona Local Health Officer's Association to distribute suicide prevention materials statewide.
  - b. AHCCCS updated the Suicide Prevention website and listed community resources for each priority population and resources by county: [www.azahcccs.gov/suicideprevention](http://www.azahcccs.gov/suicideprevention). The AHCCCS Suicide Prevention website lists best practice tools including information about the Zero Suicide model, postvention care, the Gun Shop Project, Rx Matters for means reduction, suicide prevention tools specific to faith leaders and best practices for the media on reporting suicide.
  - c. The AHCCCS Suicide Prevention Team presented at AHCCCS tribal consultations and meetings coordinated by the Governor's Office of Tribal Affairs to build relationships with tribal partners statewide.

- d. The AHCCCS Suicide Prevention Team partnered with the Arizona Department of Veteran's Affairs to reach individuals who have served in the military through our work in Be Connected.
- e. The AHCCCS Suicide Prevention Team coordinated with ADE on Project AWARE to ensure suicide prevention resources are available to schools, including suicide prevention and postvention policies. During the SFY2020, Project AWARE provided workforce development to 5,188 school staff in Arizona and suicide prevention trainings to 119 community members.
- f. AHCCCS holds an interagency service agreement with ADE's Exceptional Student Services department. The agreement provided \$300,000 in SFY2020 to coordinate and provide behavioral health training to educators. ADE trained 62 individuals in the train-the-trainer model for Youth Mental Health First AID in SFY2020; each of these trainers will train an average of 90 Arizonans each annually, resulting in an estimated 5,580 Arizonans trained each year in Youth Mental Health First AID.
- g. The AHCCCS Suicide Prevention Team partnered with the Maricopa County Health Department and Maricopa County Office of the Medical Examiner to develop standardized questions for medical examiners to investigate when a suicide occurs. This information will be used to inform intervention and prevention activities in Maricopa County once a plan is in place. Further, in FY 2021, the AHCCCS suicide prevention team plans to establish relationships with all 15 county health departments regarding suicide prevention resources and standardization of death certificate data.

#### **FURTHER 2020 SUICIDE PREVENTION SUCCESSES**

The AHCCCS Suicide Prevention Team applied for two SAMHSA grant opportunities during SFY20 and was awarded a \$800,000 suicide prevention grant specific to the COVID-19 emergency. Given the concern regarding an observed increase in suicide in Pima County during the COVID-19 pandemic, AHCCCS worked in partnership with the Pima County Department of Health, Arizona Complete Health, and the domestic violence service provider EMERGE in Pima County. This awarded grant funding prioritizes individuals at risk for suicide age 25 and older living in Pima County and who may also be at risk for domestic violence. The team further helped to coordinate the ADHS' suicide prevention grant application to the CDC to target individuals who served in the military.

During Suicide Prevention Month in September 2019, AHCCCS directly reached more than 1,500 Arizonans with suicide prevention messaging. Multiple state agencies participated in World Suicide Prevention Day. Because of the increased access to behavioral health services in schools, more than 16,000 students in Arizona have received mental health care on campus. AHCCCS will continue to support behavioral health providers who partner with schools and work to reach students in SFY21. AHCCCS has presentation and public messaging planned for the upcoming Suicide Prevention month in September 2020. This includes: presenting to AHCCCS staff during lunchtime brown bags, presenting to community coalitions in Gila and Pinal Counties, presenting to Blue Cross Blue Shield employees and to the Brain Alliance of Arizona, a coordinated statewide social media campaign including honoring National Suicide Prevention Day on September 10<sup>th</sup>.

A final success to note is the expansion of our Suicide Prevention Team. In October, AHCCCS hired Suicide Prevention Epidemiologist, Zeruiah Buchanan. Ms. Buchanan brings a diverse academic background that augments her ability to promote mental health and suicide education, analyze suicide

data internally and externally and call attention to existing disparities and inequities to transparently uphold the mission of AHCCCS.

In March 2020, AHCCCS hired Project AWARE program lead Brian Planty. Mr. Planty comes to AHCCCS after working in homeless outreach and housing in Maricopa County. He serves as the AHCCCS liaison for the Project AWARE grant.

Please feel free to contact our Suicide Prevention Specialist, Kelli Donley Williams, (kelli.williams@azahcccs.gov, 602-417-4493) if you have any questions about this report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jami Snyder". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jami" and last name "Snyder" clearly distinguishable.

Jami Snyder  
Director

cc: The Honorable Karen Fann, President Arizona State Senate  
The Honorable Russell Bowers, Speaker, Arizona House of Representatives  
Richard Stavneak, Director, Joint Legislative Budget Committee  
Matt Gress, Director, Office of Strategic Planning and Budgeting  
Christina Corieri, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of the Governor