



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health Services

Tony Evers, Governor
Kirsten L. Johnson, Secretary

February 2, 2024

The Honorable Howard L. Marklein
Joint Committee on Finance, Senate Co-Chair
Room 316 East State Capitol
PO Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707

The Honorable Mark Born
Joint Committee on Finance, Assembly Co-Chair
Room 308 East State Capitol
PO Box 8952
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Senator Marklein and Representative Born:

I am pleased to submit the Suicide in Wisconsin: Impact and Response Report to the Legislature, as directed by the Committee at its October 2, 2019, meeting under Wis. Stat. § 13.10. The attached report addresses suicide prevention activities in Wisconsin between July 1, 2022, and June 30, 2023.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kirsten L. Johnson".

Kirsten L. Johnson
Secretary-designee

Suicide Prevention Activity Report

July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023

Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Division of Public Health



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT
of HEALTH SERVICES

P-02657A (02/2024)

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Purpose of this Report | 3 |
| Suicide in Wisconsin..... | 3 |
| Suicide Data Overview | 3 |
| Suicide Prevention in Wisconsin | 4 |
| Suicide Prevention Activities July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023..... | 4 |
| 988 Wisconsin Lifeline | 4 |
| American Foundation for Suicide Prevention..... | 5 |
| Children’s Wisconsin: Firearm Lockbox Program | 6 |
| Department of Public Instruction | 7 |
| 2022 - 2023 Evidence of Impact..... | 8 |
| Medical College of Wisconsin | 8 |
| Community Engagement Activities..... | 9 |
| Groups..... | 9 |
| Mental Health America of Wisconsin | 9 |
| New Beginnings-APFV | 10 |
| Resilient Wisconsin | 11 |
| Safe Communities | 11 |
| Southwestern Wisconsin Community Action Program’s - Farm Well Wisconsin Program | 12 |
| <i>Impact of COMET</i> | 13 |
| <i>Impact of SafeTALK</i> | 13 |
| The Wisconsin Office of Children’s Mental Health | 13 |
| Wisconsin Department of Health Services: Adolescent Health Team..... | 14 |
| Wisconsin Department of Health Services Injury and Violence Prevention Team..... | 15 |
| Conclusion..... | 15 |

Purpose of this Report

On October 2, 2019, the Wisconsin State Legislature’s Joint Finance Committee (JFC) directed the Department of Health Services (DHS) to provide an annual report regarding suicide prevention activities in the state. This report is submitted in fulfillment of this directive, and as such, it details suicide prevention activities which occurred across Wisconsin between July 1, 2022, and June 30, 2023.

Suicide in Wisconsin

Since the last Suicide Prevention Activity Report was submitted in June of 2022, suicide has continued to grow as a public health concern in Wisconsin. The suicide rate among Wisconsin residents increased by 38% from 2000 to 2021. In 2021, 905 Wisconsinites died by suicide¹ (an increase from 861 in 2020). Data from 2022 is not yet complete but records currently show at least 912 suicide deaths occurred last year. Additionally, it is estimated one suicide death affects as many as 135 other individuals, including family, friends, coworkers, professionals, and others who valued the life of the individual lost to suicide.² This means that in 2021, over 122,000 Wisconsinites would have felt the unique loss and grief which accompanies suicide. This substantial figure fails to account for the additional numbers of individuals affected by a loved one living with suicidal ideation or prior suicide attempts including 18% of Wisconsin public high school students who considered suicide within the past 12 months.³

Suicide Data Overview

Demographics:

- The suicide rate among Wisconsin residents increased by 38% from 2000 to 2021.
- As was true in previous years, in 2021, the majority of suicide deaths were male.⁴
- The majority of those hospitalized or presenting at the emergency department with self-harm injuries were female in 2021.⁵
- Suicide rates were highest among American Indians/Alaska Natives and Whites, 2016–2020 combined.⁶
- Suicide rates continue to be higher among rural county residents compared with urban county residents, 2019–2021 combined.⁷

¹ Resident death certificates, Office of Health Informatics, Division of Public Health, Wisconsin Department of Health Services accessed 8/7/2023.

² Chapman AL, Dixon-Gordon KL. Emotional Antecedents and Consequences of Deliberate Self-Harm and Suicide Attempts. *Suicide Life-Threatening Behav.* 2007;37(5):543-552. doi:10.1521/suli.2007.37.5.543.

³ 2021 YRBS; https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/pdf/WI_2021_YRBS_Summary.pdf

⁴ Resident death certificates, Office of Health Informatics, Division of Public Health, Wisconsin Department of Health Services.

⁵ Wisconsin Hospital Inpatient Discharges and Emergency Department Visits, Office of Health Informatics, Division of Public Health, Wisconsin Department of Health Services.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

- Similar to 2020, firearms were the most commonly used method of suicide in 2021 (53%).⁸
- In 2021, 61% of all deaths by firearm were suicide deaths.

Suicide Prevention in Wisconsin

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS), Injury and Violence Prevention (IVP) Program coordinates state injury and violence prevention efforts. The IVP program includes data collection, surveillance, education, and the promotion of prevention and intervention through collaborative efforts with other state agencies and community partners. The following section provides a summary of suicide prevention activities which occurred across Wisconsin during the report period and highlights some of DHS partner organizations, the activities completed, populations reached, and where available, estimates of Wisconsinites served.

DHS would like to thank our partners who tirelessly engage in the crucial work of preventing suicide and self-harm among all populations in Wisconsin. DHS would also like to acknowledge that due to the large volume of suicide prevention activities occurring in our state, this report is not a complete account of all the activities, programs, and initiatives currently taking place. Rather this report is a snapshot in time representing some, but not all, community partners engaged in this work.

Suicide Prevention Activities July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023

988 Wisconsin Lifeline

On July 16, 2022, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline transitioned to the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, which provides free and confidential support for anyone experiencing a suicidal, mental health, and/or substance use crisis. The service's transition from a 10-digit phone number to a 3-digit dialing code created a much easier way for people to connect with the service. It also now includes text, as well as online chat through 988lifeline.org. Wisconsin's 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline support center, known as the 988 Wisconsin Lifeline, covers the entire state and is managed by Family Services of Northwest Wisconsin with funding and support through DHS.

From July 2022 through June 2023, the 988 Wisconsin Lifeline received 91,834 contacts for mental health and substance use support. Wisconsinites made a total of 72,487 calls. The remainder of the contacts were texts to 988 and online chats from Wisconsin residents. The service is an important resource accessible to all Wisconsinites, providing them with needed help and support. Over 98% of the contacts to the 988 Wisconsin Lifeline are resolved through conversation, reducing pressures on the state's system of emergency services for mental health and substance use concerns. 988 Wisconsin Lifeline staff are trained to help people reduce stress, provide emotional support, and connect people with local resources.

The 72,487 calls from Wisconsin during the period of July 2022 through June 2023 represents a 53% increase in calls over the previous year (July 2021 through June 2022). Additionally, the

⁸ Ibid.

national 988 administrator's high-end projection was for Wisconsin to receive 55,000 calls in the first year of 988. Even with the greater-than-expected increase in volume, most of the contacts from Wisconsin-based phone numbers and locations are handled in state. However, if the 988 Wisconsin Lifeline is unable to take the call, text, or chat, the contact is automatically routed to a backup support center, which may be located outside of Wisconsin. The 988 Wisconsin Lifeline is working to expand its capacity, including hiring more staff, to increase the number of contacts handled in state.

The 988 Wisconsin Lifeline is funded through a combination of federal grants managed by DHS, including the Community Mental Health Block Grant and several federal discretionary grants, which are designed to provide only short-term funding. In recognition of the need for a sustainable funding source for this service, Governor Evers included more than \$3 million for the 988 Wisconsin Lifeline in his 2023-2025 state budget proposal. The Joint Committee on Finance cut this funding from the plan submitted to and passed by the legislature. DHS will continue to identify and apply for federal 988 funding as it becomes available. However, the service will require sustainable funding at the state level to meet the needs of Wisconsin residents and ensure they receive an in-state response when they contact 988.

Further information about 988 is available on the DHS website at:
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/crisis/988.htm>.

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) is a voluntary health organization that gives those affected by suicide a nationwide community empowered by research, education, and advocacy to take action against suicide. AFSP is dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide, including those who have experienced suicide loss. AFSP creates a culture that is informed about mental health by engaging in the following strategies: funding scientific research, educating the public about mental health and suicide prevention, advocating for public policies in mental health and suicide prevention, and supporting survivors of suicide loss and those affected by suicide.

The AFSP-Wisconsin Chapter focuses on grassroots efforts to eliminate the loss of life from suicide. They do this by delivering innovative prevention programs in their communities, educating the public about risk factors and warning signs for suicide, raising funds for suicide research and programs, and reaching out to those individuals who have experienced a suicide loss. The Wisconsin-AFSP Chapter offered several new programs during the report period.

One such program is Soul Shop. Soul Shop is a one-day training workshop designed to equip clergy, faith-based organization staff, lay pastors, and faith-based clinicians with the resources and guidance they need to foster hope and healing in their community. The goal of Soul Shop is to familiarize participants with the incidence and impact of suicide in their faith communities and train them to address issues related to suicide. During the report period, the AFSP-WI Chapter reached a total of 24 faith community leaders across the state.

During the report period, the AFSP-WI Chapter hosted a variety of programs for youth. The Chapter hosted a Stronger Communities: LGBTQ+ Suicide Prevention Conference which was

attended by 43 individuals and several community organizations. They also hosted a Support Group Facilitator training which trained 17 individuals to facilitate support groups for youth and young adults. This work was done in addition to hosting the Chapter's usual offering of programs, which include holding several sessions of Talk Saves Lives, a community-based suicide prevention presentation. WI-AFSP hosted Talk Saves Lives for older adults, LGBTQ+ populations and for workplace suicide prevention.

The AFSP-Wisconsin Chapter also accelerated efforts in loss and healing work this year. They hosted 35 Healing Conversations and due to increasing demand, AFTSP-WI plan to expand them in 2024. They also hosted four International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day events and hosted Out of the Darkness Walks this year, which included campus and community walks and a Hike for Hope. The University Wisconsin-Madison Campus Walk had a benchmark year, ending the season as the second largest Campus Walk in the country. The Milwaukee Out of the Darkness Walk drew a total of 1,651 participants and continues to be one of the top 20 Community Walks in the nation.

In addition to their educational work, AFSP-WI board members and volunteers engaged in community outreach at several events this year. They hosted a chili cookoff which allowed community members to gather in fellowship. AFSP-WI also had a strong showing at State Advocacy Day, during which volunteers met with state legislators to advocate for sustainable funding for the 988 Wisconsin Lifeline and discuss suicide prevention. Several volunteers also spoke with legislators on the federal level during the annual AFSP Advocacy Forum in June.

Children's Wisconsin: Firearm Lockbox Program

Children's Wisconsin provides medical and preventative healthcare to children and adolescents throughout the State of Wisconsin and is the region's only independent health care system dedicated solely to the health and well-being of children. Children's offers a wide range of care and support for children of all ages including medical care, dental care, child, and family counseling, foster care, adoption, social services, child advocacy and injury prevention. The *Firearm Lockbox Program for Patients Presenting with Suicidal Ideation or Suicide Attempt* is part of Children's injury prevention work. The program takes place in the pediatric emergency department (ED) at Children's Wisconsin and seeks to assist families of all patients who present with suicidal ideation (SI) or suicide attempt (SA).

In collaboration with their social work team, Children's reviewed their processes for interviewing and counseling families of patients who present with SI/SA. Social workers previously used a hospital-wide teaching sheet for safety planning that included information about safely storing medications and community mental health services. Children's health literacy and education committees revised the teaching sheet to include more in-depth information about safe firearm storage and suicide prevention. Children's then developed a process to provide up to two firearm lockboxes equipped with a combination lock to interested families. Since January 2022, Children's Wisconsin has distributed over 100 lockboxes to families.

In addition to firearms, the lockboxes may also be used to safely store medications. Adolescent females in particular are more likely to use drug poisoning as their method of self-harm and safe

storage efforts can help prevent this.⁹ Families are grateful that they can achieve greater firearm and lethal means safety in their homes during their child's behavioral health emergency.

Further information is available at:

<https://inpejournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40621-022-00399-1>

Department of Public Instruction

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) is the state agency that advances public education and libraries in Wisconsin. It is headed by the state superintendent of public instruction. DPI's mission is to advance equitable, transformative, and sustainable educational experiences that develop learners, schools, libraries, and communities in Wisconsin. Suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention support, training, and resources are carried out by the Department of Public Instruction's Student Services/Prevention and Wellness (SSPW) Team, in collaboration with internal and external partners. Consultation, technical assistance, and resource development on suicide prevention specifically, and comprehensive mental health systems, more broadly, are provided to school districts, state and local agencies, parents and interest groups, and institutes of higher education. DPI also supports the following grants and activities:

- [Peer-to-Peer \(P2P\) Suicide Prevention Grants](#) - \$1,000 competitive grants for high schools to train students, who often turn to each other in troubling times, on the knowledge and tools to recognize signs and symptoms of depression and suicide and connect their peers to resources and adult support.
- Technical Assistance through in-person, phone call, and email contact, as well as through webinars, and other supports.
- Suicide prevention presentations at regional, state, and national level conferences.
- External partner collaboration - participation on the Prevent Suicide Wisconsin (PSW) Steering Committee, PSW Coalition, PSW Conference Planning Committee, the Protective Factors subgroup, and other state level mental health related committees.
- Partnership with Mental Health America of Wisconsin (MHA) on the Garrett Lee Smith Federal Suicide Prevention Grant, including:
 - Office hours contracted through Wisconsin Safe and Healthy Schools (WISH) Center.
 - Creation of online suicide intervention and policy modules.
 - Suicide prevention curriculum development.
 - Suicide prevention fact sheets.

DPI also develops training modules including:

- A [DPI Gatekeeper Training Module](#) for School Staff to recognize the warning signs of suicide ideation and take appropriate steps to keep students safe.

⁹ Self-Harm among Wisconsin Female Emergency Department (ED) Patients Ages 10 to 19 (P-03457), Division of Public Health, Wisconsin Department of Health Services.

- A [School-Based Suicide Prevention Module](#) which provides an overview of youth suicide and connects to initiatives and programming in schools with possible access points for protecting students from suicide.
- A [Suicide Prevention Curriculum in Health Education](#) module which connects health educators to school/district mental health initiatives and best practices in curriculum implementation.

Additionally, DPI develops resources such as the:

- [Suicide Prevention Model Annual Notice](#).
- [Suicide Prevention Curriculum](#).
- [Suicide Prevention, Intervention, and Postvention webpages](#).

2022 - 2023 Evidence of Impact

DPI P2P Grants

- One hundred and nine grant projects funded.
- All 12 Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs) represented.
- Programs implemented: predominately Hope Squad and Sources of Strength, as well as Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR), Signs of Suicide, and REDgen.
- Thirty-eight percent increase in number of applicants and 39 percent increase in funds awarded, compared to the previous year.
- Eighty-six percent of renewal-eligible applicants renewed their grants.
- End of Year Surveys completed by P2P advisors:
 - Ninety-four percent indicated P2P programs equipped them to have a greater impact on traditionally underserved students.
 - Approximately 80 percent indicated P2P Suicide Prevention Training was very to extremely effective in providing staff with information and resources needed to support student groups and in providing students with tools and resources to support their peers.

"Hope Squad has brought the topic of mental health and suicide into our school. It is breaking down the stigma of talking about mental health and making it okay to ask for help. It is teaching our students how to initiate conversations that they never would have before." – Hope Squad participant

Medical College of Wisconsin

The Division of Suicide Research and Healing at the [Comprehensive Injury Center](#) at the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW) works to prevent suicide through research, education, clinical care, and community engagement and serves as an academic partner and resource to community-based agencies who engage in suicide prevention work across Wisconsin. In addition to publishing numerous academic articles, leading poster presentations, and conducting other academic activities advancing the field of suicide prevention science, MCW also worked hard to engage the community in suicide prevention during the report period.

Community Engagement Activities

- MCW developed a podcast, [“The ‘S’ Word: A Podcast about Suicide Prevention”](#) and has published monthly episodes since January 2022.
- MCW hosted a two-night run of the play *Right Before I Go* in March 2023, which included a staged reading of the play as well as a talkback session with local suicide prevention professionals and advocates.
- MCW has also coordinated two *Inked for Life* events with tattoo shops in Milwaukee. These events are stigma reduction opportunities where tattoo artists design flash tattoos and those tattoos are offered to community members. All proceeds from these events are donated to local suicide prevention organizations.
- MCW hosted a screening of the documentary *Greener Pastures* at the MCW campus to raise awareness of mental health issues facing rural Wisconsinites.

Groups

- MCW leads the Milwaukee Suicide Review Commission – a monthly meeting dedicated to reviewing suicides that occur among Milwaukee residents and making recommendations for prevention strategies. Members include public health, law enforcement, health care systems, veteran serving organizations, county-level health and human services organizations, and suicide prevention organizations.
- MCW co-leads the Prevent Suicide Wisconsin data action group – a group charged with overseeing the implementation of priority four (improving surveillance of suicide and evaluation of prevention programs) of Wisconsin’s suicide prevention strategy
- MCW leads a community of practice for suicide review teams in Wisconsin. The community of practice team gathers representatives from counties across the state engaging in suicide review to share best practices and lessons learned, as well as work through shared challenges.
- MCW has also established a community of practice for organizations engaged in postvention support for suicide loss survivors. This group, which will start meeting in September 2023, will connect postvention groups together to share best practices and lessons learned.

Mental Health America of Wisconsin

Mental Health America of Wisconsin (MHA) serves as the statewide suicide prevention coordinating agency for Wisconsin through its leadership of the Prevent Suicide Wisconsin (PSW) public-private partnership. MHA is a state affiliate of national Mental Health America and provides education, advocacy, and service through a variety of peer and clinical programs serving populations disproportionately impacted by suicide and other mental health concerns. MHA’s Survivors Helping Survivors (suicide loss survivors) support groups and Alternatives to Suicide (for people with thoughts of suicide) groups offer connection to other peers with similar experiences. The Prevent Suicide Wisconsin (PSW) Statewide Coalition, administered by MHA through a grant from DHS, contributed to the state suicide prevention plan and is considered the state’s public-private partnership for suicide prevention. The PSW Steering Committee serves as the advisory body for the state plan, and the current membership includes over 20 individuals

from a variety of sectors including behavioral health providers and organizations, local and tribal health departments, state agencies, people with lived experience of suicide, mental health and suicide prevention advocacy organizations, organizations representing rural areas, underserved populations including BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) communities, and Veteran organizations.

During the report period, MHA worked with the PSW Statewide Coalition to promote implementation of the state suicide prevention plan strategies through the following activities:

- Provision of trainings, such as the Wisconsin Zero Suicide trainings and conference presentations
- Development of subgroups pertaining to prevention strategies outlined in the state plan
- Maintenance of a website with statewide resources
- Dissemination of a monthly e-newsletter
- Organization of an annual conference
- Training and development for additional peer support groups related to suicide
- Support and consultation to local suicide prevention coalitions, school districts, and other organizations interested in suicide prevention.

Suicide prevention coalitions are surveyed annually to collect information on local implementation of the state suicide prevention plan. Thirteen coalitions participated in the 2022 survey. MHA and the PSW Steering Committee will use these results to inform technical assistance offered to coalitions in the coming year.

DHS continued its commitment to the systematic Zero Suicide approach to quality improvement through grant funding awarded to MHA in 2022. MHA works with health and behavioral health care organizations from around the state to support them in implementing the principles and practices of Zero Suicide. MHA's activities in 2022-2023 included: promoting and disseminating the state suicide prevention plan, which contains a Zero Suicide strategy; conducting two annual sessions of the Wisconsin Zero Suicide Training (WZST); holding learning community calls for organizations that participated in the WZST; and teaming with the Behavioral Health Training Partnership at UW-Green Bay to provide suicide care trainings for clinicians throughout Wisconsin.

During 2022-2023, MHA served as a subject matter expert on suicide prevention in a Legislative Study Committee to review Uniform Death Reporting Standards. Following several months of hearings and testimony, the Joint Legislative Council drafted 6 pieces of legislation intended to increase the amount of data collected through vital records, improving the process by which that data is collected, and creating standards and best practices for cross-sector collaboration for public health initiatives which rely on fatality information.

[New Beginnings-APFV](#)

New Beginnings-APFV (Association for the Prevention of Family Violence) is an agency serving victims of violent crimes in southeastern Wisconsin. New Beginnings-APFV core service areas include domestic abuse, sexual assault, human trafficking, stalking and harassment. They provide a 24-hour crisis line, therapy services with licensed counselors, support groups, personal, medical, and legal advocacy, accompaniment to court and law enforcement interviews, as well

as accompaniment to hospitals during forensic medical exams. They also assist victims and survivors with changing their addresses via the Safe at Home program, and relocation to safety as needed.

In 2022, New Beginnings-APFV provided 143 community presentations reaching a total of 6,901 community members in Wisconsin. While New Beginnings-APFV does not specifically provide services to those experiencing suicidal ideation, they recognize that trauma and crisis are closely linked to feelings of depression, anxiety, and hopelessness and that adolescents are at increased risk for suicide and self-harm. New Beginnings-APFV provides education to local school districts about the relationship between harassment, bullying and suicide, interpersonal violence and suicide, and the effects of sexual assault on mental health. The LGBTQ+ community also at higher risk for suicide and self-harm. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans*, Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ+) Advocates regularly speak with school-based Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) and Hope Squad groups to offer support for those with suicidal thoughts or ideation. This work has led New Beginning-APFV to join the Walworth County Community Suicide Prevention Network.

Resilient Wisconsin

Resilient Wisconsin is a state-wide mental health initiative focused on building resilience among the people of Wisconsin. Resilient Wisconsin is led by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Division of Public Health (DPH) and Division of Care and Treatment Services (DCTS). Although suicide prevention is not the focus of Resilient Wisconsin, key activities have an impact on suicide prevention in the state and among higher risk populations. A recent initiative focused on first responders, a lesser-known population at risk for suicide in Wisconsin.

Chronic, toxic stress can overwhelm first responders and their ability to cope, leading to a heightened risk for suicide. This can change when first responders have the support and tools to strengthen their resilience and ask for help. DHS produced a training video through the Resilient Wisconsin initiative in 2021 designed to provide this support and the tools, with the goal to keep Wisconsin's first responders connected, strong, and thriving by letting them know it's okay to ask for help. The training video received recognition from the National Association of Government Communicators as an outstanding educational/instructional video product in the Blue Pencil Gold Screen Awards. From April 24, 2023, through June 11, 2023, DHS promoted this training video to first responders through a paid media campaign involving Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, connected TV ads, and online display ads. This effort generated nearly 13,000 clicks to view the video content on the DHS website. People who watch the video training are invited to complete an evaluation survey. Many viewers have commented that they would take steps to improve their self-care because of watching the video training.

Link to the video: https://youtu.be/sqP_hRrzbKg

Safe Communities

Safe Communities of Madison and Dane County is an injury prevention coalition with program areas including Suicide Prevention, Drug Poisoning Prevention, Elder Falls Prevention, and

Traffic/Pedestrian Safety. Safe Communities convenes the county-wide Ending Deaths from Despair (EDD) Task Force which aims to prevent deaths by suicide, overdose, and alcoholism through strategies including reducing access to lethal means, expanding harm reduction efforts, increasing provider availability in underserved areas, creating safer suicide care through systems change, supporting implementation of upstream prevention programs, training providers and community members in identifying and supporting people at risk of suicide, and providing postvention support after a death by suicide or overdose.

In 2023, Safe Communities' EDD Webinar Series had over 1,060 total views. Staff presented over 202 Question Persuade Refer (QPR) Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper trainings and 92 *How to Save a Life* Suicide Prevention trainings. Additionally, 44 medical students were trained through workshops developed by Safe Communities in partnership with a local family practice doctor and a gun shop owner with an aim to educate medical students about gun culture and safe storage of firearms. Medical residents have shared through post-workshop surveys that this program increases their confidence to have compassionate, nonjudgmental conversations with patients about safe firearm storage and mitigating suicide risk. Three Safe Communities staff members participated in a Sources of Strength Train-the-Trainer session to build capacity for implementation in local school districts for this evidence-based, upstream peer-to-peer suicide prevention program. Six major healthcare systems participate in the Dane County Zero Suicide Collaborative convened by Safe Communities.

Safe Communities continues to promote local suicide loss support groups, peer support and recovery services, and crisis resources in Dane County. The organization will be hosting a community-wide conference in the spring of 2023 to bring together key stakeholders in all injury prevention areas.

Southwestern Wisconsin Community Action Program's - Farm Well Wisconsin Program

Farm Well Wisconsin partners with farmers and community members in Southwestern Wisconsin to develop and offer resources that support the health and wellbeing of farmers, farmworkers, and their families. They believe farming well depends on taking care of our bodies, minds, emotions, and relationships. Farm Well utilizes a three-pronged approach to improving farmers and farmworkers, and their family's mental health and wellbeing in Wisconsin.

1. Community Capacity Building & Empowerment: During the report period, work in this area included meeting with the Farm Well Farmer Wellness Advisory Coalition, which is composed of 8 members, and focuses on gathering their local expertise regarding assets and needs that exist in their communities to help plan, guide, and implement regional training, education, and community building strategies. Farm Well's Program Coordinator, Shawn Monson, partners with program partners and community members to lead [safeTALK](#) (Suicide Alertness for Everyone) trainings to build suicide prevention conversation abilities among rural Wisconsin farmers and their communities. During the report period 53 participants were training in safeTALK.
2. Education & Outreach: Work in this area included offering an empathetic listening training called [COMET](#) (Changing Our Mental and Emotional Trajectory). COMET is a 2-hour training co-facilitated by Farm Well and UW – Madison Division of Extension educators for agricultural and rural communities in Southwest Wisconsin. COMET

introduces attendees to concepts and skills needed to provide support to friends and neighbors. At a COMET training participants learn a natural way to talk with a friend, neighbor, or an acquaintance about difficult topics, and change their trajectory away from the path of a mental health crisis and back towards a place of wellness. During the report period, a total of 83 participants were trained in COMET.

3. Health Equity Capacity Building for Providers: Work in this area focused on offering health providers and rural medicine students' education on farm culture education to ensure they are aware of farmer mental health needs, interventions, and are trained to appropriately recognize and respond suicidal ideation. During the report period 27 WARM (Wisconsin Academy of Rural Medicine) students were educated by a panel of farmer mental health experts that included Farm Well, Wisconsin Farm Center, UW Extension Educators, etc.

Impact of COMET

- “[COMET] made me feel more confident reaching out to people.”
- After the workshop, 49% of participants indicated that they were “very likely” to “ask someone how they’re really doing” (compared to 21% before the workshop) and an additional 45% indicated “likely.”
- After the workshop, 85% of participants indicated they were “likely” or “very likely” to “tell someone that you’ve noticed a change in their mood or behavior” (compared to 28% before)
- After the workshop, 83% indicated they were “likely” or “very likely” to “invite an acquaintance to tell you about a potentially emotional situation” (compared to 47% before)

Impact of SafeTALK

- “I feel pretty certain that I will be able to talk to someone considering suicide if the situation comes up.”
- “More confident of what to say and more willing to have the conversation.”
- “Aware of how to talk to a person who may be considering suicide and how to get them professional help.”

The Wisconsin Office of Children’s Mental Health

The Wisconsin [Office of Children’s Mental Health](#) (OCMH) supports Wisconsin’s children in achieving their optimal mental health and well-being. OCMH convenes family-serving systems in Wisconsin, including state agencies, mental health programs, advocates, and people with lived experience, to collectively focus on improving children’s mental health. Recognizing the prevalence of suicide and suicide ideation among Wisconsin’s young people, OCMH engages in many suicide awareness and prevention activities.

- **Convening peer-led school-based wellness groups** – OCMH brought together 130 students across the state representing 19 schools in a virtual meeting on April 12, 2023, to elevate youth voice and learn from each other. The programs represented are rooted in suicide prevention. They included Sources of Strength, NAMI Raise Your Voice Club, Hope Squad, and REDgen.

- **Conference presentations** – OCMH speaks at many conferences throughout the year on youth mental health and consistently talks about the prevalence of suicide, suicide ideation, and self-harm among youth. OCMH has also distributed information on the 988 suicide hotline at many of these conferences.
- **Together for Children Conference Seminar Day** – OCMH did a Seminar Day for the 2023 [Together for Children Conference](#). The focus of the Seminar Day on April 11, 2023, was children’s mental health. It attracted an audience of over 200 attendees (in person and virtual). One of the featured speakers was the Director of the Division of Suicide Prevention, Comprehensive Injury Center at the Medical College of Wisconsin who spoke specifically on suicide. The OCMH data presentation also shared important data regarding suicide and self-harm.
- **Public events** – OCMH had the opportunity to disseminate 988 and children’s mental health materials at the Milwaukee Bucks game on February 26, 2023.
- **Presentations to OCMH collective impact teams and councils** – OCMH presented suicide data multiple times to its four work teams (120 people) and its [Collective Impact Council](#) (150 people). The presentations specifically called attention to the staggering suicidal rate among LGBTQ+ youth.
- **2022 Annual Report** – In the release of its [2022 Annual Report](#) in January 2023, OCMH called out the alarming reality that suicide reports were up and that nearly half of LGBTQ+ youth (48%) in Wisconsin seriously considered suicide.
- **ArtWorks promotes suicide prevention** – OCMH has partnered with [ArtWorks for Milwaukee](#) to develop youth inspired messaging that promotes suicide prevention. ArtWorks and OCMH sought youth input to create an effective suicide prevention campaign.
- **OCMH Fact Sheets** – OCMH has a history of promoting suicide awareness, prevalence, and prevention, particularly focusing on marginalized youth populations. Two Fact Sheets were produced in the past: [Preventing Suicide Among Black Youth](#) and [Preventing Suicide](#).

Wisconsin Department of Health Services: Adolescent Health Team

The Adolescent Health Team at DHS supports suicide prevention through the Title V Maternal and Child Health program. The grant provides funds to local and tribal health agencies (LTHAs), and partners with statewide organizations who provide support and technical assistance. Statewide partners in 2022 and 2023 include Mental Health America, UW-Extension Institute for Health and Wellbeing, and the Department of Public Instruction. In 2022, partnering LTHAs reported 176 unique sites implemented suicide prevention strategies. In 2023, 35 partnering LTHAs reported implementing suicide prevention strategies among a number of unique sites. Suicide prevention strategies included: implementing gate keeper and non-gatekeeper school-based trainings, implementing means restriction activities, and supporting and promoting support groups and warmlines. LTHAs implemented a variety of trainings with Question, Persuade, Refer (94 trainings, 2634 trained), Mental Health First Aid (35 trainings, 301 trained), Sources of Strength (3 trainings, 521 trained), and Hope Squad (4 trainings, 335 trained), being implemented the most and reaching the largest number of community members. Of these overall, LTHAs reported 70 trainings or activities targeted to benefit LGBTQ+ individuals, 46

trainings or activities targeted to benefit American Indian youth, 51 trainings or activities targeted to benefit Hispanic youth, and 46 trainings or activities targeted to benefit Black youth.

Wisconsin Department of Health Services Injury and Violence Prevention Team

In 2021, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) received the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Comprehensive Suicide Prevention (CSP) grant. The CDC funds states and universities to implement and evaluate a comprehensive public health approach to suicide prevention, with a special focus on populations that are disproportionately affected by suicide. The goal of the DHS funded project is to reduce suicide and self-harm morbidity and mortality among two disproportionately affected populations in Wisconsin by 10% over the funded period.

In September 2022, DHS Injury and Violence Prevention Team began collaborating with partners Mental Health America and the Medical College of Wisconsin to plan implementation and evaluation of Wisconsin's Comprehensive Suicide Prevention (CSP) grant-funded program. From September 2022 to March 2023, DHS worked with MHA and MCW to select and refine the populations of focus, develop, and implement a public-private partnership of stakeholders, gather baseline data for an inventory of existing suicide prevention programs and areas for growth in the state, and select and refine strategies for implementation. Also, during this time, DHS, MHA and MCW worked together to develop and begin implementing a communication plan to share results and programmatic updates as well as an evaluation plan to ensure rigorous evaluation of the selected activities and the success of comprehensive suicide prevention approach.

Conclusion

This report details many but not all of the suicide prevention activities that occurred across Wisconsin from July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023. As this report demonstrates, Wisconsin is home to many public-private partnerships that support suicide prevention work across the state. This network of interconnected state and community-based services and partnerships provide Wisconsinites with a spectrum of suicide prevention services, activities, care, and support. DHS, along with our partners, remain committed to advancing suicide prevention science, implementing, and evaluating best practice approaches to suicide prevention, and reducing suicide ideation and attempts in our state. Through this committed partnership, Wisconsin can transform the mental health of its citizens, increase awareness of suicide prevention, and prevent suicide in future generations.