

For Immediate Release

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Washtenaw County Sees Steady Increase in Suicides

Suicide Death Review Team issues recommendations to raise community awareness, reverse local trends

YPSILANTI, Mich., Dec 21, 2016 – Suicide attempts and suicide completions have increased in Washtenaw County, especially among young people 15-24 years old. Washtenaw County Public Health, Washtenaw County Community Mental Health and other community agencies and partners are working together to monitor and address both suicide attempts and completions with the goal of reversing this trend in Washtenaw County.

“We are deeply saddened by the suicides occurring in our community,” said Jessie Kimbrough Marshall, MD, MPH, medical director with Washtenaw County Public Health. “We see this trend happening nationally as well. As a community, we have been working to better understand the factors contributing to this increase, along with identifying and promoting best practices for suicide prevention.”

Washtenaw County Trends

Similar to national trends, Washtenaw County has seen a steady increase in suicide completions. Locally, this upward trend is especially true among young people 15-24 years old. In the decade ending in 2009, there were approximately six suicide completions in this age group. For the current decade, there have been approximately 32 individuals aged 15-24 years lost to suicides.¹

Response and Recommendations

In 2015, the Washtenaw County Suicide Death Review Team was piloted. The team is multidisciplinary and exists to address suicide prevention, intervention and post-intervention in Washtenaw County. Participating professionals and community members include physicians, therapists, law enforcement officers, religious leaders, school officials and survivors.

During 2016, the team reviewed suicide attempts and completions from 2015 through the present, including data from the Washtenaw County Medical Examiner, local hospital emergency rooms, and countywide surveys.

“The Washtenaw County Suicide Death Review Team developed ten recommendations for suicide prevention and intervention,” said Dr. Marshall. “It is our hope that these recommendations will serve as a guiding resource for mental health agencies, service providers, schools, policy-makers and advocates. The aim is to support a comprehensive and effective community response to prevent further deaths and injuries.”

Suicide Death Review Team Recommendations:

Public Health, community, schools and families

1. Improve social support, especially for those with mental health challenges
2. Increase routine engagement with persons living with mental illness
3. Implement evidence-based community or school-based depression prevention interventions, especially for youth in high risk groups (e.g. teach effective coping strategies and problem solving skills to address emotional health and stressful life events)

Mental health services

4. Improve evidence-based community resources that increase recognition of early warning signs of mental health concerns and awareness of how to respond to a mental health crises and suicidal behavior (e.g. mental health first aid training)
5. Assure that primary care clinicians have the resources needed to adequately assess and link patients to needed therapy, with special emphasis on onsite consultation and treatment
6. Increase number of psychiatrists and therapists, especially child and adolescent psychiatrists
7. Assure access to evidence-based mental health treatment and intervention
8. Improve access to costly psychotropic medications
9. Create mental health urgent care and respite care resources for adults and youth

Substance use disorders treatment services

10. Improve access to adequate and effective substance use disorder treatment

Elizabeth Spring-Nichols RN, BSN, MS, program administrator with Community Mental Health stresses the importance of supporting effective and integrated health services for children and families in their communities, as well as prevention in schools: “School-based interventions for suicide prevention can be quite helpful,” she explained. “Such interventions should focus on the overall health and wellness of all students and staff and not only on mental illness and suicide behaviors.”

Washtenaw County Public Health and Washtenaw Community Mental Health are continuing to work with local schools and community organizations to better understand the factors driving the increase in suicides among youth.

Moving forward, Washtenaw County Public Health is planning a town hall meeting open to residents and mental health professionals to talk about suicide risk factors in our community and potential responsive interventions that are specific to our residents and youth. More information will be available at <http://publichealth.ewashtenaw.org>.

Help for Individuals or Families in Crisis

If you or someone you know is in crisis and needs help, call 1-800-273-TALK (8255). Community Mental Health also provides support 24/7 for individuals in crisis, call 734-544-3050. If your need is life threatening, call 911.

Risk Factors

Multiple factors contribute to the risk of suicide, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:ⁱⁱ

- Local epidemics of suicide
- Family history of suicide or child maltreatment
- Previous suicide attempt or attempts
- History of mental disorders, alcohol and/or substance abuse
- Feelings of hopelessness or impulsive/aggressive tendencies
- Cultural and religious beliefs (e.g., belief that suicide is a noble resolution of a personal dilemma)
- Isolation, a feeling of being cut off from other people
- Barriers to accessing mental health treatment
- Loss (relational, social, work, or financial)
- Physical illness
- Easy access to lethal methods
- Unwillingness to seek help because of the stigma attached to mental health and substance abuse disorders or to suicidal thoughts

Washtenaw Alive

Washtenaw Alive is a suicide prevention planning collaborative of Washtenaw County working to promote best practices in suicide prevention. Washtenaw County Public Health facilitates the coalition with mental health service providers and stakeholders from around the county. For more information or to get involved, contact Ann Daws-Lazar at dawsa@ewashtenaw.org or 734-794-2141.

Washtenaw County Public Health



Washtenaw County Public Health promotes health and works to prevent disease and injury in our community. Our mission is to assure, in partnership with the community, the conditions necessary for all residents to live healthy lives through prevention and protection programs. Washtenaw County Public Health achieved

national accreditation through the Public Health Accreditation Board and maintains state accreditation through the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

For more, visit <http://publichealth.ewashtenaw.org>. Public Health is located at 555 Towner Street in Ypsilanti and reachable at 734-544-6700. The Environmental Health Division is located at 705 N. Zeeb Road in Ann Arbor.

Washtenaw County Community Mental Health



Washtenaw County Community Mental Health seeks to improve quality of life and increase personal fulfillment for all of our community members, particularly during challenging times or crisis, and for those that may be dealing with ongoing conditions. Service information and crisis services and supports are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and holidays.

Community Mental Health is located at 555 Towner Street in Ypsilanti or by calling 734-544-3000. For services at any time, call 734-544-3050 or 1-800-440-7548.

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ⁱ Sources: Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) (2000-2014), Washtenaw County Public Health, Washtenaw County Medical Examiner (2015-2016). Numbers are approximate; MDHHS suppresses counts smaller than four.

ⁱⁱ Center for Disease Control and Prevention: Suicide: Risk and Protective Factors

<https://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/suicide/riskprotectivefactors.html>