



Iowa's Suicide Prevention Efforts: A Legislative Report

Introduction

The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) and the Department of Education (DE) respectfully submit this report in response to the charge presented in House File 2463 (FY 2015 Health and Human Services Appropriations Act). Specifically in section 3, paragraph 2, lettered paragraph j that reads as follows:

"In preparation for the completion of the youth and young adult suicide prevention program (Y-YASP) project funded through the federal Garrett Lee Smith youth suicide prevention grant awarded to the department of public health, the department of public health and the department of education shall submit recommendations by December 15, 2014, to the governor and the general assembly regarding options for continuing the foundation established by the project beyond the project's completion."

Background

In 2013, 445 Iowans lost their lives to suicide; 26 of those deaths were teens. Suicide was the second leading cause of death for Iowans ages 15 to 24 and ages 25 to 44 in 2012, the third leading cause of death for 5 to 14, and the fifth leading cause of death for 45 to 54.

IDPH received a Garrett Lee Smith State Youth Suicide Prevention (GLS) Grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in 2007 for a project period of 2007-2011. One full-time coordinator led this grant, overseeing the strategies implemented as well as working with the committee responsible for writing the 2011-2014 Iowa Suicide Prevention Plan. Through the grant, IDPH implemented strategies to prevent youth and young adult suicides and to establish the framework for the current GLS grant.

IDPH received its second GLS grant in 2013. It is called the Youth and Young Adult Suicide Prevention Program (Y-YASP) and \$1.3 million is provided for a project period of three years (2013 to 2016). Through the grant, IDPH is implementing specific strategies to reduce suicides, suicidal behavior, and suicide risk among Iowa's youth and young adults aged 10 to 24 years. Grant funds support a 0.5 FTE Project Coordinator at IDPH. IDPH substance abuse prevention funding is used to support the other half of the coordinator's time. Specific project goals of the Y-YASP are to:

- Ensure suicide prevention best practices are integrated into Iowa's youth and young adult serving programs;
- Screen all youth and young adults who seek substance abuse treatment for suicide risk;
- Implement an evidence-based gatekeeper program for middle and high school educators in all Iowa's middle/junior high and high schools;
- Provide trauma informed care and other evidence-based practice trainings for providers who work with those at risk of suicide and with co-occurring disorders; and
- Promote suicide prevention resources through the implementation of a media campaign that emphasizes social media and targets youth and young adults.

Related IDPH and DE projects also play a role in suicide prevention. These include:

- IDPH coordination of the Y-YASP activities with the Your Life Iowa program. Your Life Iowa was established by a General Fund appropriation in 2012 as a resource for Iowans seeking help and information about bullying and youth suicide prevention. Your Life Iowa services are provided via website (<http://www.yourlifeiowa.org>), a toll free telephone hotline, and texting. Your Life Iowa has been funded at \$50,000 per year. IDPH directs all of the funding to its external contractor.
- IDPH implementation of Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT). This 2012 federal grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) uses nationally accepted screening tools (including the Patient Health Questionnaire-9) to identify substance use and mental health issues, including suicide. Screenings are conducted at 14 sites, including Federally Qualified Health Centers and the Iowa National Guard.
- The DE was awarded two grants in October 2014 that are not specific to suicide prevention but that are expected to have a positive effect on suicide prevention efforts. These grants are Now Is the Time (NITT)-Project AWARE, from SAMHSA, and the School Climate Transformation (SCT) Grant, from the U.S. Department of Education. These grants are complementary to one another with aligned goals.
- IDPH was awarded a Partnerships for Success grant in October 2014 to address underage alcohol use including binge drinking. As part of this grant, collaborations will be developed and strengthened at the state and community levels to improve both substance abuse and suicide prevention efforts.

Grant Activities

The Y-YASP project is a three-year project, with the first 15 months completed. During these 15 months, the following key activities have been implemented:

- Mental health screening at 20 IDPH-funded substance abuse treatment programs is ongoing. The PHQ-9 is being utilized with all 10-24 year old clients at intake/admission, with many programs using it with all their clients. Approximately 13,500 Iowans were screened in this manner during the first year of the project. Full data collection processes are under development to support appropriate consent for the project.

Representatives of these substance abuse treatment programs visit regularly to discuss the project. During recent meetings, the following feedback was shared: 1) A lot of referrals

have come about due to the screening and there is a sense of better client engagement between the client and clinician; and 2) Reviewing the questions and scores with clients has reassured both clients and their guardians that what they may be feeling, seeing, and experiencing is real.

- Implementation of an evidence-based gatekeeper program for middle and high school educators in all Iowa's middle/junior high and high schools is underway. Y-YASP is utilizing Kognito Gatekeeper Trainings for Educators (<http://iowa.kognito.com/>). The trainings became available in early August 2014 for the 2014-15 school year. Through December 1, 2014, 870 trainings have been initiated by Iowa educators, with over 630 trainings completed. Promotional materials have been distributed through e-mails, via listservs and newsletters, and at education-related conferences. IDPH and DE have collaborated closely in the promotion of this resource.
- Promotion of the Your Life Iowa (<http://www.yourlifeiowa.org/>) resource is ongoing. This is a resource where youth, parents and school personnel can get immediate help and information about bullying and youth suicide. Services are offered via the website, a toll free telephone hotline, and texting. More than 4,300 print promotional materials have been distributed across the state in addition to paid advertising via radio, newsprint, and social media.

Other Activities

The IDPH Project Coordinator, in addition to managing the implementation of the Y-YASP project, has worked to strengthen other suicide prevention efforts in Iowa. This work has focused on specific populations but also the general population, with no age restrictions. This work has included:

- IDPH reconvened the Iowa Suicide Prevention Planning Group (Group) in August 2014. The Group accepted the charge to: A) Revise the Iowa Suicide Prevention Plan 2011-2014; B) Provide recommendations for implementing the Plan and to review the Plan regularly; and C) Provide guidance and direction to suicide prevention efforts in Iowa. The Group has met monthly and has identified the goals (See Appendix A on page 6) to be included in the Plan and are working on objectives and the rest of the Plan as well as identifying current suicide prevention practices in use across the state. The Group has utilized the 2012 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention: Goals and Objectives for Action (Surgeon General, 2012) as the framework for the Plan. This group has approximately 20 members representing diverse experiences and organizations (See Appendix B on page 7 for a list of member organizations).
- The Project Coordinator has presented to a variety of state and local groups on suicide prevention resources and efforts. In addition, he has coordinated trainings by pairing various local suicide prevention experts with interested groups across the state. Upcoming trainings include the 2015 Governor's Conference on Substance Abuse and the 2015 Iowa Veterinary Medical Association Conference.

- The Project Coordinator supports local suicide prevention coalitions. This is done through correspondence, meeting with leadership and/or attending coalition meetings, providing resources and support, and establishing connections across coalitions.

Recommendations

The Y-YASP project was established to reduce the number of youth and young suicides. Other projects implemented through IDPH and DE also support broad suicide prevention efforts, but Iowa does not have a comprehensive, unified approach to suicide prevention. The following recommendations are offered to build upon the framework established through the Y-YASP project and to develop a comprehensive suicide prevention approach:

1. Empower the Iowa Suicide Prevention Planning Group to continue its work and to meet at least quarterly to provide ongoing recommendations to strengthen and improve suicide prevention efforts across Iowa and across the lifespan.
2. Establish and fund at least one full-time suicide prevention coordinator to: lead the Iowa Suicide Prevention Planning Group; manage the Your Life Iowa initiative; liaison with any state and community personnel; and support suicide prevention efforts across the lifespan and across Iowa. In conjunction with the Iowa Suicide Prevention Planning Group, the coordinator would:
 - a. Encourage ongoing discussions and partnerships across the public and private sectors about suicide prevention. Support efforts to recognize how improved health and mental health, substance abuse prevention, education, employment, community connectedness, and improved relationships all play a role in suicide prevention.
 - b. Work across state departments and statewide organizations to institute mental health screenings. IDPH, as part of the GLS grant, should have this done for 10-24 year-olds in substance abuse treatment programs by the end of the grant period. Mental health screenings like the PHQ-9 should be for all ages and in a variety of settings, including but not limited to law enforcement (jails, prisons, and community corrections) education (primary, secondary, and college), medical settings (primary care, hospitals, and counseling centers), and employee assistance programs.
 - c. Encourage government and non-governmental organizations to adopt protocols for helping Iowans at high risk of suicide, and in responding to a suicide death (postvention). Model protocols, based on research, can be developed by the Iowa Suicide Prevention Planning Group.
 - d. Explore opportunities to train Iowans – the general population or specific subgroups – in evidence-based suicide prevention such as or similar to the Kognito Gatekeeper trainings. Promote a blend of online and in-person training opportunities to allow for a wide reach (online trainings) and in-depth or intensive exercises (in-person). This would vary depending on the population to be served and available resources, but any increase in trained Iowans improves the overall health of our state. Where applicable,

clearly define training expectations and standards for specific populations such as school personnel, first responders, and jail staff.

3. Continue to provide stable support for Your Life Iowa website, hotline, and texting services at \$50,000.

Conclusion

After being identified in 2012 as the only state in the nation to not have certain suicide prevention activities in place, Iowa has made significant progress toward supporting a coordinated, comprehensive, evidence-based suicide prevention effort. The federal grant funding that made this progress possible will conclude in 2016. It is critical that Iowa commit to sustaining and continuing this important, life-saving work. This report provides information documenting the efforts undertaken so far to prevent suicides, especially those by youth and young adults, and outlines what can be done to strengthen efforts to ensure all Iowans are safe from suicide.

Appendix A. Iowa Suicide Prevention Plan 2014-2017 Goals

GOAL 1. Identify and coordinate suicide prevention activities across multiple sectors and settings.

GOAL 2. Increase knowledge of the factors that offer protection from suicidal behaviors and that promote wellness and recovery.

GOAL 3. Provide training to community gatekeepers and service providers on the prevention of suicide and related behaviors.

GOAL 4. Promote suicide prevention as a core component of health care services. This shall include the promotion and implementation of effective clinical and professional practices for assessing and treating those identified as being at risk for suicidal behaviors.

GOAL 5. Provide care and support to individuals affected by suicide deaths and attempts to promote healing and implement community strategies to help prevent further suicides.

GOAL 6. Collect data and research findings, and utilize throughout Iowa suicide prevention efforts.

Appendix B. Iowa Suicide Prevention Planning Group Member Organizations

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
County Supervisor
The Crisis Center of Johnson County
Department of Aging
Department of Education
Department of Human Services
Department of Public Health
Des Moines Area Community College
Foundation2
Iowa Behavioral Health Association
Iowa Law Enforcement Academy
Iowa Primary Care Association
Magellan
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Guard
Orchard Place
Polk County Suicide Prevention Coalition
School Administrators of Iowa
State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council
University of Iowa
Veterans Administration
Wartburg College
Waukee Middle School