

# Behavioral Health: Developing A Better Understanding

## SUICIDE: WE NEED TO TALK

Suicide is a growing public health problem in Ohio and across the country as the number of lives lost continues to rise. Approximately 36,000 Americans die by suicide each year and 8.4 million (3.7%) of Americans had serious thoughts of suicide in the past year. It also hits us hard as a nation when we read that more US soldiers are losing their lives to suicide than from enemy forces – at the staggering rate of *one soldier per day* so far this year. In the tough realities behind the numbers, there is also help and hope. There are decisions and actions we can take individually and as a society to turn the tide and save lives associated with suicide.

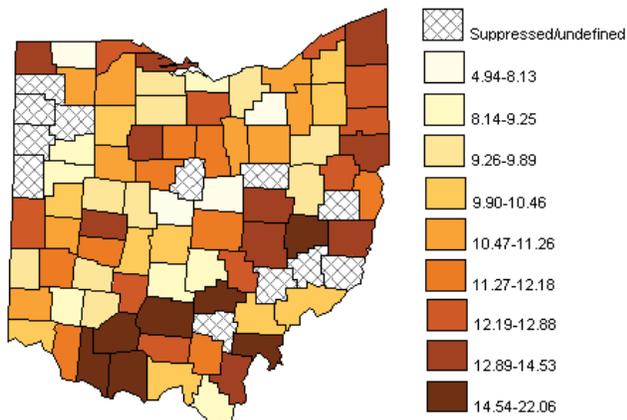
### Why? Seeking an Understanding

The most frequent and complicated question around suicide is why someone would ever take their own life. The answer is usually a complex one, often involving a mix of stressful life issues (unemployment/money problems, death of a loved one, trauma, serious physical illness, etc.) and frequently coupled with an addiction or a mental illness. The link between untreated behavioral health and suicide is demonstrated by the fact that approximately 30% of deaths by suicide involved alcohol intoxication, 50% who die by suicide were afflicted with major depression, and 90% had a mental disorder.

Relatives and friends of people who attempt or commit suicide often blame themselves or become very angry. They may see the suicide attempt as selfish. However, people who try to commit suicide often mistakenly believe that they are doing their friends and relatives a favor.

### 2000-2006, Ohio Death Rates per 100,000 Population

All Injury, Suicide, All Races, All Ethnicities, Both Sexes, All Ages  
 Annualized Crude Rate for Ohio: 10.82



Produced by: Office of Statistics and Programming, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC Data Sources: NCHS National Vital Statistics System for numbers of deaths; US Census Bureau for population estimates

### CLOSE TO HOME

- 1,420 Ohio residents completed suicide in 2010
- On average, 3.8 suicides are completed per day
- 79% of Ohio suicides are male
- Caucasians account for 91% of Ohio suicides
- Suicide is 2nd leading cause of death for 15-24 year olds
- 45-54 year olds account for 22% of all suicides in Ohio
- 15% of all suicides in Ohio are completed by people over 65

### Overcoming Stigma and Promoting Awareness

If you had a broken leg, you would go to a hospital immediately. There would be no hesitation, and no consideration about what others would think. But what if a stigma was attached to having a broken leg? What if you could lose your job because of it? What if people would treat you differently? What if people said that you were weak because of it? Only weak people get broken legs. And what if people told you that your broken leg was all in your mind? That you just needed to be “strong”? That you were choosing to have a broken leg? Sound far-fetched? It is, of course, but unfortunately this scenario unfolds every day for individuals with illnesses that impact the brain because of the stigma that still exists concerning suicide and the often underlying behavioral health problems. Even though there is clear scientific data which indicates irrefutably that a physiological cause exists behind many diseases impacting the brain, many people still stigmatize others because they hold on to the misguided beliefs that people with suicidal ideology are weak or lack willpower. An important step in reducing the number of lives lost to suicide is to promote awareness that suicide is a public health problem, that is preventable and to tackle the stigma head on. We need to talk about it.

### *More Tools & Training for Medical Professionals*

Seventy-seven percent of individuals who die by suicide had visited their primary care doctor within the year and 45% had visited their primary care doctor within the month. However, the question of suicide was seldom raised. This is why the Surgeon General's National Alliance for Suicide Prevention has set objectives around training for recognition of at-risk behavior, promoting effective clinical practices, and increasing access to community linkages with mental health and substance abuse services.

### *Prevention Strategies*

While the causes of suicide are complex and determined by multiple factors, the goal of suicide prevention is simple: Reduce factors that increase risk (i.e. risk factors) and increase factors that promote resilience (i.e. protective factors). Developing and implementing community-based suicide prevention initiatives, such as community coalitions, are other important steps in reducing suicide rates. Community Coalitions can provide the opportunity and structure for allied groups to pursue coordinated strategies to educate and increase public awareness that suicide is a public health problem. Coalitions are committed to reducing stigma, which helps increase people's ability to seek help and ultimately prevent the loss of life. Ohio has been a national leader in this area. Many counties have a suicide prevention coalition. Through these coalitions and trainings offered by groups such as the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation, you can learn about the warning signs of suicide and steps to decrease risk. Learning the warning signs of suicide and getting involved in community efforts is something everyone can do to make a big difference.



### **NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION HOTLINE**

**1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

This toll-free hotline is available 24/7 for anyone feeling sad, hopeless, or suicidal and for family and friends who are concerned about a loved one.

## VETERANS

- U.S. troops are killing themselves at the rate of nearly one a day so far in 2012, 18% above 2011's corresponding toll.
- The 154 U.S. military suicides in the first 155 days of 2012 translates to 50% more troops dying from suicide than were killed in action in Afghanistan.
- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is trying to tackle the growing problem by adopting new video conferencing, text message, and e-mail technology as a means for communication between troops and psychologists. Additionally, they are hiring an additional 1,600 mental health professionals to better meet the needs of veterans.
- Veterans Crisis Line: 800-273-8255

#### **Sources:**

National Institute on Mental Health  
Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Suicide Awareness Voices of Education

SAMHSA-Suicide: *The Challenges and Opportunities Behind the Public Health Problem (AUG 2011)*  
Ohio Department of Health-Bureau of Vital Statistics  
CDC Understanding Suicide Fact Sheet