

# SUICIDE: Men 85 and older have the highest rate in Oregon

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Hines, who struggled with bipolar disorder, might not have fallen neatly into either of the two groups, but still his mind roiled with indecision before the attempt. A compassionate word from one of the pedestrians passing by might have turned him around.

"Empathy and compassion are the keys to saving a life," he said.

Robin Bredfield agrees. As a Mental Health First Aid instructor in Morrow County, the registered nurse spends time talking about suicide prevention. Bredfield urges people to be bold if they suspect someone is considering ending his or her life.

"Don't be afraid to actually ask the question," she said. "Ask, 'Do you feel like harming yourself? Are you considering suicide?'"

Ask the question matter-of-factly, Bredfield said, without dread in your voice.

"Once the question is out on the table, you can talk about it," she said. "If you don't ask the question, it's this big dark cloud."

Bredfield knows the helplessness of learning that someone she cares about has ended it all. After a close friend died by suicide, she felt a deep frustration.

"I wish he would have picked up the phone and called me," she said.

"I would have rushed over if I had known."

After her friend took his life, Bredfield studied prevention and learned a long list of risk factors (previous attempt, efforts to buy a weapon or pills, talking about death, etc.) and the importance of letting people in your life know that you are available to them. Listen without judgment is key.

"All thoughts of suicide are to be taken seriously," she said.

In Bredfield's neck of the woods — rural Oregon — jumping off a bridge is not usually the method of choice for suicide. In 2014, 54 percent of Oregonians who killed themselves used firearms and that number rises to around 80 percent in rural America, where there are more guns and fewer mental health services.

The idea of young people killing themselves is especially worrisome in rural areas. A study appearing in the JAMA Pediatrics journal in 2015 found suicide twice as common among rural youth than in metropolitan areas. About half of the rural youth (between ages 10 and 24) used guns — about three times the rate for urban youth.

In the wider population, approximately two Oregonians die every day by suicide. Four out of five of the deaths involve men. Last year,

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— Debra Shippentower, Yellowhawk community engagement specialist

the state had 742 suicide deaths with 12 in Umatilla County and two in Morrow County. A new study from the Centers for Disease Control reveals that suicide rates in the United States are the highest in 30 years. Native Americans saw their rate rise 89 percent for women and 38 percent for men.

Suicide is so commonplace in Indian Country that the Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center in Mission screens every patient for depression and suicidal thoughts, even those with physical complaints.

"A mental health therapist works side-by-side with medical staff," said Debra Shippentower, Yellowhawk's community engagement specialist. "With depression, you have real physical pain, real physical ailments."

The practice is paying off with early intervention. The clinic also enacted a new staffing policy that requires each employee to go through QPR (Question Persuade Refer) suicide prevention training, a course Yellowhawk also offers periodically in the community. Participants spend

time role playing, asking directly if someone is considering suicide.

"It's hard," said Claudette Enos, a suicide prevention specialist at Yellowhawk. "People get emotional."

Suicide affects every race and age. In Oregon, according to the Oregon Health Authority (using 2013 numbers), men who are 85 and older have the highest rate of 78.4 per 100,000. For every suicide, there are approximately 25 who attempt, but don't die.

Hines is making the most of his second chance at life. He uses diet, exercise, medication and therapy to control his bipolar disorder. Hines shares his story in his memoir, "Cracked, Not Broken: Surviving and Thriving After a Suicide Attempt." He appeared in a documentary film called "The Bridge." He sits on the board of the International Bipolar Foundation and speaks at schools in a quest to keep college, high school, middle school and even elementary school students from choosing to end their lives. He said young people are in pain from such things as bullying,

relationship issues and the effects of puberty. After one of his presentations, the number of students who make appointments with school counselors often bumps up by 600 to 800 percent.

"Suicide is preventable," Hines said.

The author, public speaker and documentary filmmaker said he still sees the Golden Gate Bridge as a "harbinger of death." He serves on the board of the Bridge Rail Foundation, which formed to stop suicides on the bridge. The organization, championed by Hines' father, Patrick Hines, raised money for a suicide barrier to stop the flow of deaths. Construction starts this month on a steel net that will hang 20 feet below the pedestrian deck. Jumpers will most likely suffer non-fatal injury as they are snagged in the net, which will sag under the weight of the person. Each jump will alert a rescue service.

Hines still worries about the lingering effect of his suicide attempt on his father. He recently asked if his dad still worried he would take his own life.

"Yes," said the elder Hines, "every time the phone rings."

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Paris Achen/Pamplin Media Group  
Oregon Gov. Kate Brown Friday announced a plan intended to reduce gun violence.

## GUNS: Is establishing a work group to review relinquishment protocols

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issue an executive order to require Oregon State Police to retain firearms transactions for five years and to require the Oregon Health Authority to report annually on gun deaths and their effect on public health and to recommend policy changes.

She also is establishing a work group to review counties' gun relinquishment protocols and recommended a statewide policy to enhance the safety of domestic violence survivors.

Brown made the announcement Friday at the Veterans Memorial Coliseum here flanked by U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici, other elected officials and gun safety advocates.

After her announcement, Pastor Mark Knutson of the Augustana Lutheran Church announced that he

and other faith leaders plan to circulate an initiative petition to ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines in Oregon.

House Minority Leader Mike McLane, R-Powell Butte quickly issued a statement calling for bipartisan dialogue on any gun control measures.

"Oregon House Republicans welcome a conversation about how to address violence in our communities, but it is absolutely critical that those conversations maintain the appropriate level of respect for Oregonians' constitutional rights and the thousands upon thousands of gun owners in this state who responsibly exercise their Second Amendment rights and Article I, Section 27 rights every day," McLane said. "Sadly, this element of the conversation is all too often an afterthought for politicians in Salem."

## EOTEC: Still needs to scale down and build livestock barns

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Mike Kay from the rodeo board, Don Miller from the fair board and Byron Smith from the city. The EOTEC board appointed the committee Friday to help approve some of the day-to-day decisions needed to move the project forward quickly instead of waiting two weeks between board meetings for approval.

The EOTEC board still needs to scale down and then build the livestock barns. Contractors need to complete electrical work, pave walkways and access roads, install signs, put

up perimeter and interior fencing, extend some water and sewer capacity to the extended stay area for exhibitors, landscape, irrigate and either build food stalls or come up with a plan for renting food trucks.

Frew said in light of Knerr Construction's involvement, project manager Rob Dreier will transition to focusing solely on the Blue Mountain Community College bond projects that Frew Development Group is also managing.

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## LICENSE: More than 400 employers surveyed said lack of reciprocity was one of their top challenges

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electrical work there.

"They pay taxes there, they live there, they support the communities they live in but they can't work there," he said.

The company as a whole is licensed to work in Oregon and Washington, with about half of their employees licensed to work in both states and most of the rest just licensed to work in Washington. Barron said he feels it's worth it for Walla Walla Electric to pay to maintain licensure in both states because there is a demand for that type of work in Eastern Oregon. However, the fact that many of his employees can only work in Washington limits the number of Oregon projects they can bid on.

The company is working on Pendleton's two new schools and has bid on other major Oregon projects including Blue Mountain Community College's new bond construction. But many other contractors in Washington, including Walla Walla and the Tri-Cities, end up deciding it's not worth it to get licensed in both states, leaving Umatilla County with few bidders on some major projects.

Not everyone feels their business is suffering because of a lack of license reciprocity. David Bothum of Bothum Construction in Hermiston said his company has enough work on the Oregon side of the state line to keep them busy, and he would rather use local subcontractors for electrical work and plumbing anyway.

However, a lack of license reciprocity for certified trades between Oregon and Washington was one of the top challenges that more than 400 Umatilla County employers named in a recent workforce needs survey commissioned by the county and BMCC. The study recommended that the county make lobbying for license reciprocity one of its top workforce development priorities in the coming years.

Last week Hermiston Chamber of Commerce



Staff photo by E.J. Harris  
Electrician Pat Sweeney, with Walla Walla Electric, tests a light switch after installing it Friday at Washington Elementary School in Pendleton.

Director Debbie Pedro testified before the House Special Committee on Small Business Growth, urging the state to look at reciprocity agreements with Washington and Idaho to help "ease a large workforce demand" issue in rural Oregon.

"I think this is really important, especially for the border cities," she said.

Oregon doesn't have any reciprocity agreements with other states for general contractors. The state does have agreements with Idaho and Montana for journeyman plumbers, and with Arkansas, Idaho, Maine, Montana, Utah and Wyoming for journeyman electricians. That helps plumbers or electricians who move to one of those states, but doesn't benefit companies in border cities like Milton-Freewater that want to pursue work on both sides of the state line.

Rick Rock, owner of Rock Electric in Hermiston, said even his Oregon-based company can't bid on some Oregon projects due to licensing rules. He has nine electricians working for him who are licensed in Oregon and Washington, but on larger projects he hires temporary workers from the electricians' union. The problem is that the region's union hall is located in Kennewick, so many of the available electricians are

only licensed to work in Washington.

"Some jobs I can't bid on because I can't man them," he said.

Rock Electric is currently working on the new Holiday Inn Express being built in downtown Hermiston. Rock said he feels it is worth being licensed to work in both states, since the Tri-Cities is growing and there is always work to be found up there. But some people don't like the idea of trying to having to pass another licensing test for another state or meeting lengthy requirements.

"It keeps a lot of people from doing it because once they've been out of school and away from the books a while, tests can be a problem," Rock said.

He said changing the rules to allow people to become licensed in both states through a single process would be "a major turning point for the industry."

Tom O'Brien of O'Brien

Construction Company based his business out of Hermiston for 35 years before moving it to Kennewick about seven years ago after they began working on major industrial projects there. He said it was important to be licensed in both states, despite the hassle, because there wasn't always enough work on one side of the state line. Some years 80 percent of his company's work is in Oregon, and sometimes 80 percent happens in Washington.

He said licensing reciprocity agreements between the two states would bring down the cost of projects, in part through a more competitive bidding environment for subcontractors.

"It is what it is," he said of the need for two separate licenses. "There's nothing I can do about it. But it sure isn't good for business."

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