

Ending the epidemic

Signs and prevention tips for suicide

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Oregon's suicide rate has been increasing since 2000, but people can take proactive steps to combat it. For many years, the state's suicide rate ranked seventh to ninth in the U.S., but the problem is getting worse.

In 2011, twice as many Oregonians died by suicide than were killed in vehicle crashes. According to the Oregon Violent Death Reporting System, suicide was the eighth leading cause of death in the state in 2012.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention now regards suicide an epidemic.

Nearly 80 percent of suicides in the U.S. are by men. The cause is typically related to loss of self-esteem due to loss of employment, becoming ill, losing a spouse or partner, an embarrassing public disclosure or fearing loss of control. Suicide rates increase as people age, peaking after 85, and suicide impacts families for years, even generations.

According to the Oregon Health Authority, a little more than half of suicide victims in Oregon in 2012 used firearms, and about three-quarters of all firearm deaths were suicides. About 19 percent of suicides in Oregon that year were by poison, and another 19 percent were by hanging or suffocation. Men accounted for 61 percent of suicides by firearm, while women accounted for 42 percent of suicides involving poison.

Residents of rural Eastern Oregon share many of the same risk factors as other rural communities in the western states, according to Community Counseling Solutions Clinical Director Thad Labhart — geographical isolation, winter weather, family dynamics of denial, abuse, neglect and separation, lack of things to do, higher rates of gun ownership, relatively less access to mental health treatment, low socio-economic status and stigma issues about admitting mental health problems.

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Youth suicide rates, aged 10-24

