

Suicide

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The problem

Suicide rates in the U.S. have increased steadily from 1999 to 2014 for males and females, according to Centers for Disease Control statistics, with rates increasing slightly since 2006.

In Oregon, the rate increased by 28.2 percent from 1999 to 2016, and suicide has become the eighth leading cause of death in the state. More than six times as many Oregonians die by suicide annually than by homicide.

Men are three times more likely to die by suicide than women, and suicide rates generally increase with age. The highest suicide rate for men is found among those over 85 years old, while the highest rate for women is found between 50 and 54 years old.

But suicide issues also can be found among grade-school aged children. The Oregon Health Authority's "2018 Oregon Student Wellness Survey" provides self-reported data on a wide range of topics from sixth-, eighth- and 11th-grade students.

According to the survey, the percentage of students statewide who reported experiencing a high level of psychological distress over the past 30 days was 8.9 for sixth-graders, 14.2 for eighth-graders and 16.5 for 11th-graders.

The percentage of students statewide who reported feeling so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more over the past 12 months that they stopped doing some usual activities was 22.8 for sixth-graders, 29.2 for



NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE

1-800-273-8255 | suicidepreventionlifeline.org

OREGON YOUTHLINE

877-968-8491 | Text "teen2teen" to 839863

MORE INFO

"Breaking the Silence" is a statewide media collaboration aimed at putting a spotlight on the public health crisis of death by suicide in Oregon and offering our readers, listeners and viewers resources to help if they — or those they know — are in crisis. Learn more at breakingthesilenceor.com.

eighth-graders and 35.6 for 11th-graders.

When asked how many seriously considered attempting suicide, 13.3 percent of sixth-graders answered yes, as did 19.9 percent of eighth-graders and 19.7 percent of 11th-graders. When asked how many actually attempted suicide, the figures were 7.5 percent, 10.2 percent and 8.1 percent, respectively.

Given the high suicide rate in Oregon, DHS Research of Portland sought to measure Oregonians' experiences with suicide in a recent online survey. The survey found that Oregonians were more likely than the average American to have had suicidal thoughts, know someone who has had suicidal thoughts or know someone who has died by suicide.

In addition, DHS Research found that Oregonians are more likely to feel concern for people they know and are more likely to act on that concern than most Americans. The survey also found that 93 percent of Oregonians would be likely to tell others if they were having suicidal thoughts compared to 73 percent of Americans.

Old approach

Mental health professionals have identified a number of factors associated with suicide, including mental illness and drug

abuse, previous suicide attempts, problems with interpersonal or family relationships, recent criminal or noncriminal legal problems, job or financial difficulties, physical health issues, death of a family member or friend, problems at school and exposure to suicidal behavior by a family member or friend.

But according to Lindsay, half of people who die by suicide had seen a general practitioner before their death, and 30 percent saw a mental health professional. In the 60 days before their death, 10 percent were seen in a hospital emergency department.

Victims of suicide "are falling through the cracks in our health care system," Lindsay said in a Dec. 15, 2018, presentation on Zero Suicide. She is not alone in that opinion.

"Suicide represents a worst case failure in mental health care," said Michael Hogan, the former State Commissioner of Men-

tal Health for New York. "We must work to make it a 'never event' in our programs and systems of care."

According to the Centers for Disease Control, more than half of people who die by suicide do not have a known mental health condition, which likely means they were not getting the help or support they needed, Lindsay said.

Suicide prevention is a core responsibility for behavioral health care systems, Lindsay said, but many licensed clinicians are not prepared — 39 percent report they don't have the skills to engage and assist those at risk for suicide, and 44 percent report they don't have the training. "Over the decades, individual clinicians have made heroic efforts to save lives," said Richard McKeon at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "but systems of care have done very little."

New approach

"Zero Suicide is a system-wide approach to suicide prevention based on community engagement, in addition to improved systems within the health care system," CCS Clinical Director Thad Labhart told the Eagle.

The initiative is based on a national model, he said. The Zero Suicide approach is a priority for the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention, a goal of the

National Strategy for Suicide Prevention and a project for the Suicide Prevention Resource Center.

The Zero Suicide approach is a framework for systematic, clinical suicide prevention in behavioral health and health care systems, a focus on safety and error reduction in health care and a set of best practices and tools for health systems and providers.

The core components of the Zero Suicide approach, according to Lindsay, include commitment to leadership, standardized screening and risk assessment, establishing a suicide care management plan, workforce development and training, implementing effective evidence-based treatment, following up during care transitions and ensuring ongoing quality improvement.

"It is critically important to design for zero even when it may not be theoretically possible," said Thomas Priselac, president and CEO of the Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. "It's about purposefully aiming for a higher level of performance."

"We will be implementing ZS in all of our counties," Labhart said about CCS's new commitment. "While we've implemented substantial internal changes in how we identify, monitor and treat high-risk patients, we are really in the infancy phase of ZS from a community perspective."

Zero Suicide

"Across health and behavioral health care settings, there are many opportunities to identify and provide care to those at risk of

suicide," the Zero Suicide website states. "Before that can happen, suicide prevention must first be seen as a core responsibility of health care."

Elements of the approach, according to the Zero Suicide website, include leading a system-wide culture change committed to reducing suicides; training a competent, confident and caring workforce; identifying patients with suicide risk through comprehensive screenings; engaging all individuals at risk of suicide by using a suicide care management plan; treating suicidal thoughts and behaviors using evidence-based treatments; transitioning individuals through care with warm hand-offs and supportive contacts; and improving policies and procedures through continuous quality improvement.

The Zero Suicide approach builds on successes reported by the Henry Ford Health System and Centerstone, one of the largest nonprofit community mental health centers in the U.S.

The Henry Ford Health System implemented a system focusing on suicide care using rigorous quality improvement processes and saw a 75 percent reduction in the suicide rate of its health plan members. Centerstone reported a reduction in suicide deaths from 35 per 100,000 to 13 per 100,000 after implementing the Zero Suicide approach for three years.

Health and behavioral health care organizations have found that the Zero Suicide initiative is "feasible without additional funding," Lindsay said. "It's working — lives are being saved."

Reynolds

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source activists" and "disgruntled ranchers" to lay off their attacks on Reynolds.

"They dismiss him as an all-talk-no-action politico who needs to stand down in the 'War on the West,'" the editorial said. "That perception is unfortunate and wrongheaded. Nobody works harder for this county than Reynolds."

Describing Reynolds as a "whirling dervish of activity," the Eagle cited the numerous meetings he attended as county judge, from a forest counties conference in Reno, Nevada, and a wolf management meeting in Newport to property rights seminars in John Day and public forums in Monument and Fossil about John Day River navigability and possible federal land grabs.

In October 2006, Reynolds drafted a request to local clergy asking for volunteers to say an opening prayer at the start of each county court session. Congress starts each session with a prayer, so why not the Grant County Court, he reasoned.

Reynolds announced his decision not to seek a third term in February 2006, citing his own health and his desire to spend more time caring for his 83-year-old mother.

He reflected on his time on the county court after stepping down in January 2007.

"If I had one wish, it would be that we could bring the county toward a more neutralized focus," he said. "That doesn't mean we all have to agree, but they need to understand why things are happening the way that they are."

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden read a tribute to Reynolds' public service into the Congressional Record on April 5, 2006, thanking him for his years of dedication and numerous contributions.

Walden noted that Reynolds had led the county through tough financial times and oversaw essential projects, including construction of a new county health services center, a new criminal justice cen-



Contributed photo

Julie and Dennis Reynolds received a distinguished service award for their longtime support of the Grant County 4-H program during the organization's Oct. 17, 2013, achievement night at Seneca School.

ter, a major remodel of the county courthouse, a new facility for the road department and a new fairgrounds building.

"Judge Reynolds' real impact has been how he has treated his fellow man and the heart with which he has approached every task," Walden said. "Dennis has cared deeply about the people he has so ably served."

Family and 4-H

The Reynolds had three boys. Percy and his wife, Nicole, live in Malaysia but plan to move back to the U.S. Beau and his wife, Sara, and children Jack and June live in Pendleton. Jake lives in Long Creek.

"Hunting season was the big gathering time for the family," Beau said.

Dennis and Julie were very active in 4-H both as children and adults. At the county fair, they served as fair court chaperones, gate tenders, barn superintendents and horse show announcers.

The Reynolds were 4-H leaders for more than 40 years and were the rifle and pistol leaders for 30 years, hosting shooting contests at their home south of Canyon City. They were given the 4-H Distinguished Service Award in 2014 and the Extension Cooperator Award in 2018, among other 4-H and extension honors.

The Reynolds also were involved in the construction of the Heritage Building at the county fairgrounds and led the effort to refurbish the Sale Barn in 2012-

13. They had only 20 days to gather donations for the barn and raised \$30,000 in three weeks from Grant County residents, Julie said.

"Dad was very active in community groups," Beau said. "If you threw a dart at a board covered with community activities, he was on that committee."

Julie noted, whenever Dennis attended a committee meeting, they asked him to join because he was so knowledgeable.

For 16 years, Dennis helped build theatrical scenery for plays Julie put on at Grant Union High School, where she taught English and drama. She retired in 2011 after 20 years at Grant Union.

After retiring from county government, Reynolds spent more time at the family ranch south of Prairie City and restoring antique horse-drawn carriages, including a 1909 two-seated surrey, an 1885 Victorian-era carriage from Germany and a circa-1919 doctor's buggy.

"Dad cared about the county," Beau said. "He was not just a resident of Canyon City; he was a resident of the county."

He loved all the little cities in Grant County and never stood for just one, Julie said.

A celebration of life service for Dennis Reynolds will take place in the Heritage Building on Saturday, April 27, starting at 1 p.m. To help with the potluck or for more information, contact Julie Reynolds at julieareynolds@century-tel.net.

Guns

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their gun and place it in a locked container or gun room.

"That eliminates that object from any sort of use for personal protection," LeQuieu said, adding farmers and ranchers keep them in their trucks and use them as tools.

He said the regulation is a knee-jerk reaction.

"Someone who is motivated to do harm to others is going to find a way to figure it out," he said.

He said it would be easy for a person to buy cable cutters at a hardware store to bypass the locks.

Another part of the bill requires gun owners to report a lost or stolen firearm within 72 hours or be charged with a Class B violation.

"It's a general rule — anyone would go to the police to report it (a firearm) missing or stolen," LeQuieu said. "Again, it's taking away the responsibility from the criminal."

He said the bill, if passed, would "take away liberties unjustly from the American people under the false guise of civil or public safety."

He added, "If we were truly worried about human life, we would focus our efforts, our money, our politics on things that truly cost and damage and destroy our young people and members of society."

He said, although he disagrees with the bill, he has respect for Gov. Kate Brown.

"I would like to encourage her to reach out to industry professionals to give proficient and wise council with regards to the reality of firearms," he said. "... someone who designs, builds and manufactures — they understand the inner workings of them and the safety of the operations."

He said focusing on issues such as drug addiction, homelessness and mental illness would make a greater impact.

Grant County District Attorney Jim Carpenter also expressed concern about the proposed



The Eagle/Angel Carpenter

Dan Vandehey of Canyon City and his daughter Jaime, 10, enjoy the field test day, the culminating event for the ODFW's hunter education safety class.



Marc LeQuieu

legislation.

"Once again, the legislature is focusing on an issue other than mental health,"

Carpenter said. "They're saying enforce more gun laws, but they're not providing us with tools to help people with mental illness."

Canyon City resident Dan Vandehey attended a recent hunter education live fire test day with his 10-year old daughter, Jaime, who was there to complete her gun safety certification.

Jaime said she attended the two-week class, sponsored by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and enjoyed shooting a .22 and bow and arrow during the test day. But it was not her first experience with firearm safety.

"I learned about safety from my dad," she said.

Dan Vandehey, who has been a Grant County Sheriff's reserve deputy and a member of the county search and rescue team, said, "Being a good parent takes a lot more responsibility today."

He feels gun safety classes should be mandatory and said, although he understands the fear over school shootings, more thought and education needs to go into any proposed gun bill.

"This (gun legislation) doesn't affect the bad guys at all," he said.

Canyon City resident Shiela Kowing said she believes her gun saved her in July 2015 when a

man tried to break into her home.

She said, if her gun had been locked up, she would not have had time to get to it to protect herself.

"When you're in those circumstances, emotionally, you're not thinking straight," she said. "You go into fight or flight mode. You can't think 'Oh, where's my key.'"

Kowing, who works as a 911 dispatcher in John Day, said her husband and daughter had left the home earlier.

When she saw the man trying the door knobs, she grabbed the gun that she keeps hidden and her phone, she said.

Kowing said she feels it's important to raise kids to respect the danger of guns.

"Don't leave them out," she said, adding that if some firearms are used only occasionally for hunting they could be locked up.

She said they later found out the man was after her husband's medications that had been prescribed after a transplant surgery.

"He had never been caught in a home before," she said of the would-be robber.

Kowing held him at gunpoint and then he fled. She was able to give 911 a description of the man and vehicle, and he was soon caught.

The man held a metal chain in his hand while trying to break into Kowing's home.

"If I hadn't had the gun in my hand, I think I would have been grievously injured or killed," she said.