



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health Services
Jim Doyle, Governor
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Report Highlights Need for More Suicide Prevention Efforts

September 7-13th is Suicide Prevention Awareness Week

The Department of Health Services, Mental Health America of Wisconsin, and the Medical College of Wisconsin have released the *Burden of Suicide in Wisconsin* report, which provides detailed information on suicide deaths and attempts.

“Communities can use this information to help them develop and implement suicide prevention strategies,” said Department of Health Services Secretary Karen Timberlake. “We encourage our partners at both the state and local levels to create coalitions that work together to focus efforts on increasing recognition, screening, and treatment for mental illnesses and substance abuse disorders, especially for depression.”

“We felt it was critical for the citizens of Wisconsin to understand the magnitude of this issue – it is truly a call to action,” said Shel Gross, Mental Health America of Wisconsin. “I think people are surprised when they learn there are three times as many suicides as there are homicides in Wisconsin. Suicide is a silent killer. It most often occurs behind closed doors with no one else around, but it results in a huge societal burden, including the medical costs for those who attempt suicide and require care. Perhaps the highest cost though is the mothers, fathers and children that are lost.”

According to Dr. Stephen W. Hargarten, M.D., MPH, professor and chairman of emergency medicine and director of the National Injury Research Center at the Medical College of Wisconsin, “Suicide and suicide attempts are a significant health care and public health burden in Wisconsin. This report, a collaboration between mental health, health care, and public health leadership, is an important first step towards improving our understanding of this challenging problem and developing comprehensive strategies to reduce it. The public health approach to reduce suicides in our state requires evidence-based programs and policies aimed at high-risk individuals and their families, high risk environments, and access to lethal means. This report is a major first step towards informing our efforts in Wisconsin.”

The *Burden of Suicide in Wisconsin* report uses a variety of data sources on suicide deaths and attempts from 2001-2006. It breaks down the information by county, age, sex and circumstances associated with the deaths, such as mental health status, presence of alcohol or drugs, and methods utilized.

Key findings from the report include:

- Wisconsin experiences an average of 650 deaths by suicide per year.
- Suicide deaths account for 20,000 years of potential life lost per year (YPLL). This is only slightly less than the YPLL from motor vehicle crashes and is more than twice the YPLL lost from homicides.

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- In addition to those who died by suicide, more than 9,000 people are treated in hospitals or emergency departments each year for self-inflicted injuries at a total cost of more than \$64 million in 2006 alone.
- The greatest number of suicide deaths was among 35-54 year old males. Men account for about 80% of all suicide deaths in Wisconsin, although women are twice as likely to make attempts. Youth age 15-24 had the highest rates of inpatient hospital and emergency department visits for self-inflicted injuries.
- Veterans account for 20% of all completed suicides. For persons age 55 and older, veterans account for almost half of completed suicides.
- Almost two-thirds of those who died by suicide had a current depressed mood; one-third of individuals who died by suicide were noted as having an alcohol problem.
- Firearms were the most frequently used method of completing suicide, accounting for almost half of all suicide deaths. This was followed by hanging/strangulation/suffocation methods and then by poisoning.

The *Burden of Suicide in Wisconsin* report was developed as part of the Garrett Lee Smith Youth Suicide Prevention Grant with funding from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, and the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

To view of a copy of the report, go to: http://www.mhawisconsin.org/Content/suicide_prevention.asp

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