



Statewide Suicide Prevention Council

431 North Franklin Street, Suite 200, Juneau, Alaska 99801
907-465-8920 • toll-free 888-464-8920 • fax 907-465-4410

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Kate Burkhart, Director 907-465-8920, kate.burkhart@alaska.gov

Every life is valuable: Statewide Suicide Prevention Council releases annual report

“Mending the Net: Suicide Prevention in Alaska” is now online

JUNEAU - While substantial efforts and \$10 million have not reduced the suicide rate in Alaska over the last decade, the state has undergone a significant cultural shift to openly address the issue. That’s according to the fiscal year 2010 annual report from Alaska’s Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, online at

http://www.hss.state.ak.us/suicideprevention/pdfs_sspc/2010SSPCAnnualReport.pdf.

“The message that every life has value is being spread in communities all over our state,” said Council Chair William Martin.

Communities and organizations that were previously unwilling to acknowledge suicide are now sharing ideas with each other and incorporating national best practices.

“This improved communication is a crucial foundation for developing more effective strategies to reach the goal we’ve had for so long: fewer suicides,” said Kate Burkhart, executive director of the Council.

Report highlights:

- The Council hosted the first Suicide Prevention Summit in January 2010, addressing a longstanding disconnect between state, tribal and community prevention efforts.
- A new web portal, StopSuicideAlaska.org, further connects stakeholders statewide.
- Over the past decade, fewer, larger grants are being awarded, with more conditions.
- Suicide prevention funding has increased sharply in the last few years due to a major federal grant.
- Careline, the statewide suicide prevention hotline, saw call volume jump 55% in the second half of fiscal year 2010 over the same period in the prior year. Employees attribute the boost to outreach by partners Alaska Native Tribal Health

Consortium, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, NAMI chapters, and military Family Advocacy Centers.

- Council meetings in Dillingham, Anchorage and Toksook Bay gathered extensive public comment. Much of the Toksook Bay meeting was held in Yupik with English translation.

Successful Council efforts relied on partnerships with the Alaska Mental Health Board, Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority.

The progress highlighted above addressed some but not all of the gaps identified in Alaska's suicide prevention net. Weaknesses include:

- a limited number of support groups for survivors of suicide, in only six communities;
- a lack of support services for Alaskans made vulnerable by loss of structure (veterans, transition-age youth, immigrants, Alaska residents displaced due to economic or environmental hardships);
- a lack of effective bullying prevention and intervention programs;
- a lack of age-appropriate services for 18- to 25-year-olds.

The report avoids conclusions, aiming instead to advance conversations about how we can better prevent suicide. The upcoming statewide suicide prevention plan will include recommendations and strategies for our suicide prevention systems. The Council invites all Alaskans to join in planning for the future and sharing the message that every life is valuable.

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The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council is charged with broadening awareness of suicide, risk and protective factors involved in suicide, enhancing suicide prevention service and programs, and improving Alaskans' overall wellness by assisting in efforts to reduce suicide. For more information on the Council, visit www.hss.state.ak.us/suicideprevention.