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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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State to recognize National Public Health Week with a series of stories

Day 5: April 6 — Promoting mental and emotional well being

ANCHORAGE — The Alaska Division of Public Health is recognizing National Public Health Week with a series of stories centered on the week's theme: A Healthier America Begins Today.

Each day, Monday through Friday, we will focus on a different aspect of health:

- Monday, April 2 — Obesity prevention through active living and healthy eating
- Tuesday, April 3 — Reducing the impact of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs
- Wednesday, April 4 — Preventing communicable diseases through immunization
- Thursday, April 5 — Preventing sexually transmitted diseases
- Friday, April 6 — Mental and emotional well-being

Sometimes the smallest change can make the biggest difference. Small changes in diet and exercise, tobacco use, immunization practices and sexual conduct can help people stay healthy. Yet each year, nearly 1 million Americans die from diseases that could have been prevented.

It's no secret that suicide is a problem in Alaska. Alaska had the highest suicide incidence rate in the nation in 2007, the most recent year for which national comparison data are currently available. Suicide was the second leading cause of death among Alaskans age 5 to 44 from 2006–2008 and the sixth leading cause of death overall in Alaska in 2008.

Many state, tribal and private organizations are hard at work in Alaska to promote mental health in an effort to improve the quality of each life and reduce the tragic number of suicides. The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council has just released its Alaska State Suicide Prevention Plan: FY2012-2017 [*Casting the Net Upstream: Promoting Wellness to Prevent Suicide*](#). The plan lists prevention steps everyone can take.

“Suicide is preventable. We know how to build mental health, which suicide-risk evaluation programs are effective and how to intervene when appropriate,” said Kate Burkhart, executive director of the Alaska Mental Health Board and Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse.

Many Alaskans don't realize that they can manage their emotional and mental fitness like they can their physical health, she said.

We can all help. Alaskans can attend or adopt school- and community-based programs that teach students and community members how to identify signs of depression, how to reach out and how to connect people to help.

Other positive ways to impact mental and emotional health are highlighted in the state's [*Sound Minds in Sound Bodies* campaign](#). The campaign encourages Alaskans to take five simple steps to improve their mental health: establish strong social connections; have regular physical activity; be attentive and aware of the world around them; enjoy lifelong learning; and help and share with others.

The campaign includes specific examples of positive steps people can take, such as:

- reading the same book your child or friend is reading;
- helping someone with a project — shovel their driveway, organize old photos or make dinner for friends;
- going for a 30-minute walk every day — doing it with friends is even better;
- writing in a journal;
- taking dance lessons or learning a new language; or
- helping at a soup kitchen.

Other small steps Alaskans can take to promote mental and emotional well-being include positive parenting and maintaining violence-free homes; encouraging children and adolescents to participate in extracurricular and out-of-school activities; and by encouraging those who need help to seek proper treatment or screening.

For more information on building violence-free homes, go to Gov. Sean Parnell's Choose Respect website <http://gov.alaska.gov/parnell/priorities/choose-respect.html>.

Alaskans who need help are encouraged to contact Careline at 1-877-266-HELP (4357), or www.carelinealaska.com.

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