

State of Wisconsin
Department of Health and Family Services

Scott McCallum, Governor
Phyllis J. Dube` Secretary

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To the Citizens of Wisconsin:

This document is the Department of Health and Family Services' Wisconsin Suicide Prevention Strategy. It was developed in response to the former U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher's *Call To Action to Prevent Suicide* (1999), in which he stated that the problems of suicide and suicide prevention are critical public health priorities for our nation. Suicide claimed the lives of nearly 600 Wisconsin residents in the year 2000 alone. It is a major public health problem in the state.

Many dedicated individuals from public and private sectors of our state contributed to the development of the Wisconsin Suicide Prevention Strategy, providing guidelines to assist communities in developing their own suicide awareness and prevention campaigns.

We live in an era of unprecedented scientific knowledge and health care technology. Research shows that effective clinical care for mental, physical and substance use disorders provides significant protective factors in preventing suicide. The Wisconsin Suicide Prevention Strategy lists goals and intervention objectives based on scientific evidence that can have a direct impact on suicide prevention efforts.

The Wisconsin Suicide Prevention Strategy provides guidelines for us to come together in Public-private collaborations to address the critical public health problem of suicide in Wisconsin. Suicide prevention is a priority in our state.

Sincerely,

Phyllis J. Dube`

Phyllis J. Dube`
Secretary

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Information about this document is available on the following web pages:

www.hopes-wi.org and
www.dhfs.state.wi.us/dph_emsip/index.htm

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The Wisconsin Suicide Prevention Strategy

Foreword

Suicide is a major public health problem in Wisconsin. It is the second leading cause of death for Wisconsin young people and the tenth leading cause of death for all ages. Our state suicide rate is three times greater than the state homicide rate. In 2000, 588 people died of suicide in Wisconsin.

The problem of suicide is so extensive that someone in the United States commits suicide every 17 minutes. Half a million Americans are taken to hospitals every year because of suicide attempts. One in five people with major depression in the United States attempts suicide, and, even more striking, one in two people with manic depressive illness attempts suicide.

The Department of Health and Family Services, Divisions of Public Health and Supportive Living are committed to addressing the problem of suicide in Wisconsin. The cost of suicide in Wisconsin is significant, both in dollar and human terms. The majority of suicides are of people in the prime of their working lives. Suicide and suicide attempts exact an incalculable toll on family, friends and loved ones. In response to the Surgeon General's *Call to Action to Prevent Suicide*, we are participating in the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention by developing a guide for suicide prevention that addresses the needs of Wisconsin residents. Research and science of the past decade provide us with strategies to save lives by applying new knowledge in rational ways. Suicide *can* be prevented.

The Wisconsin Suicide Prevention Strategy (the Wisconsin Strategy) provides a framework for getting every interested person in Wisconsin involved in preventing suicide. The Wisconsin Strategy is designed to guide individuals, agencies and organizations in local communities and at regional and state levels in suicide prevention efforts. The Strategy seeks to change knowledge and attitudes about suicide. It seeks to promote suicide prevention in many of the environments in Wisconsin that touch our lives, including education, health care, media, the workplace, faith communities, and criminal justice.

The Strategy is not a mandate for services or a state directive. Rather, it is offered as a guide for developing public/private partnerships that consist of multiple organizations, agencies, and interested others. It promotes the coordination of culturally appropriate resources and services that link science and practice for the prevention of suicide.

Promoting suicide prevention for all citizens of Wisconsin requires science and knowledge but, more importantly, a community resolve to make the needed investment. The investment does not call for massive budgets, which are not available, but rather the willingness to educate others about suicide and mental illness and to implement evidence-based approaches in ways that best fit each community.

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Executive Summary

Suicide is a major public health problem in Wisconsin

Almost 600 people die by suicide each year in Wisconsin. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Wisconsin young people and the tenth leading cause of death for all ages. Our state suicide rate is more than three times greater than the state homicide rate and nearly eight times greater than the number of deaths related to HIV.

These data show the need for a response by individuals and communities that have not yet recognized suicide as one of Wisconsin's leading causes of death. The Department of Health and Family Services, as part of its mission to help Wisconsin's citizens become independent, healthy and safe, has responded to the Surgeon General's Call to Action by developing this guide for suicide prevention that addresses the needs of Wisconsin residents. The Wisconsin Suicide Prevention Strategy provides a framework to guide individuals, agencies, and organizations in local communities and at regional and state levels in suicide prevention efforts.

Suicide is preventable

This document seeks to raise awareness and help make suicide prevention a statewide priority. Recognition of suicide as a public health problem, as well as the fact that the majority of persons who commit suicide have mental health or substance abuse diagnoses, is needed. Supporting use of local data on suicide and suicide attempts will be needed to develop and evaluate suicide prevention efforts. Best practices in assessment, crisis services and treatment must be available in practice to address the incidence of suicide as well as its impact on others.

Partners in the development of this document view suicide as a public health problem and the public health approach is used as a model of action. The approach emphasizes the use of factual data about suicide in Wisconsin and the use of present research and best practice for widespread education and improvement of and access to treatment services.

The Wisconsin Suicide Prevention Strategy document lists 11 goals with related objectives and activities that interested persons and

organizations can select from to implement suicide prevention in their communities.

The 11 Goals

- ❖ Promote Awareness That Suicide Is A Public Health Problem That is Preventable
- ❖ Develop Broad-based Support For Suicide Prevention
- ❖ Develop And Implement Strategies To Reduce The Stigma Associated With Being a Consumer of Mental Health, Substance Abuse, and Suicide Prevention Services
- ❖ Develop and Implement Community-based Suicide Prevention Programs
- ❖ Promote Efforts To Reduce Access To Lethal Means and Methods of Self-harm
- ❖ Implement Training For Recognition Of At-Risk Behavior And Delivery Of Effective Treatment
- ❖ Develop and Promote Effective Clinical and Professional Practices
- ❖ Increase Community Linkages With And Access To Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services
- ❖ Improve Reporting and Portrayals of Suicidal Behavior, Mental Illness, and Substance Abuse in the Entertainment and New Media
- ❖ Promote and Support Research and Evaluation on Suicide Prevention
- ❖ Improve and Expand Systems for Data Collection, Underscoring the Public Health Emphasis on Surveillance of Suicide and Suicidal Behavior

Like its National model, the Wisconsin Suicide Prevention Strategy emphasizes that for any prevention activity to go forward, three things are necessary: a knowledge base, public support for change, and a strategy to accomplish change. Approaches must be community focused with leadership at the community level. Implementing the Wisconsin Suicide Prevention Strategy requires broad participation and collaboration from each of us in our own communities.

Our challenge is to create communities where residents believe that *suicide is preventable and that suicide prevention is everyone's business!*