

Joan Ballweg: Suicide Prevention Week

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Each year, 30,000 American lives are lost to suicide and an additional 50,000 Americans attempt suicide annually. A national poll found that nearly 50 percent of respondents identified barriers that stopped them from trying to help someone in crisis, such as not knowing how to find help or fear that they would make the situation worse. This is why it is important to stay informed about the steps you can take to help save lives in your community.

September 9th through September 15th is National Suicide Prevention Week where organizations around the country unite with the goal of educating the public on ways to breakdown mental health stigma, identify signs of crisis and take action to support those who are struggling. This is especially important in Wisconsin, not only because the suicide rate is higher than the national average, but because suicide is shown to disproportionately affect rural counties like the counties in my district. In fact, both Adams County and Green Lake County have some of the highest suicide rates in the state.

To help raise awareness for suicide prevention, various organizations are aligning on World Suicide Prevention Day, September 10th, to promote #BeThere. This campaign focuses on support and care for others. There are also many other campaigns and trainings, such as Take 5 to Save Lives and QPR (Question, Persuade and Refer) that help and encourage people to learn the warning signs, reach out and do their part in suicide prevention leadership.

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Research shows that asking someone directly if they are contemplating suicide provides them with relief not distress. Approximately 50 percent of people who have committed suicide had at least one known mental health problem at the time. Take time this week to #BeThere for your loved ones by learning the risk factors and providing support.

Some warning signs of suicide include:

- Expressions of hopelessness and helplessness
- Verbal threats, “you’d be better off without me”
- Personality changes
- Depression
- Giving away prized possessions
- Lack of interest in future plans

No suicide attempt should be treated lightly. If you or someone you know is contemplating suicide call, 1.800.273.TALK (8255) or text “HOPELINE” to 741-741.

For more information on suicide prevention resources, trainings and information visit <https://www.preventsuicidewi.org/> or <http://actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org>.

— *Ballweg, R-Markesan, represents the 41st Assembly District.*