

# Gov. Evers, Dept. of Health Services: Renew commitment to suicide prevention during Year of Mental Health

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MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) today, amid a nationwide rise in deaths by suicide, are recognizing [Suicide Prevention Month](#) by raising awareness of available resources and important actions all Wisconsinites can take to promote hope, offer support, and save lives. This comes as data indicate that for a second consecutive year, more than 900 Wisconsinites died by suicide in 2022. In 2021, [905 people](#) died by suicide and while data from 2022 is not yet complete, it is estimated at least 912 deaths occurred by suicide last year. This is the first time the state has seen that number of suicide deaths in consecutive years.

Earlier this year, in recognition of the troubling statistics seen over the past few years regarding mental health and the growing demand for mental and behavioral health services providers have seen across the state, Gov. Evers declared [2023 the Year of Mental Health](#), calling mental and behavioral health a “burgeoning crisis” affecting the state and Wisconsin’s kids, families, and workforce.

“I declared 2023 the Year of Mental Health because we cannot overstate the profound impact the past few years have had on our kids, families, and communities, and we know that Wisconsinites across our state are struggling perhaps now more than ever,” said Gov. Evers. “My administration and I remain committed to reducing stigma around the mental health challenges so many are facing, expanding access to affordable mental and behavioral healthcare, supporting prevention and crisis services, and creating a healthier, safer state for

every Wisconsinite. It's so important that we raise awareness and continue talking about this important issue so that folks know they are not alone and that help and support are available."

"These numbers show too many of our fellow Wisconsinites are in pain, and we must call attention to available suicide prevention resources," said DHS Secretary Kirsten Johnson. "We know preventing suicide and promoting mental well-being is not just about one program or strategy alone. During Governor Evers' 'Year of Mental Health,' we are doubling down on our work to create communities across our state where everyone has the resources, support, and connections they need to be their healthiest."

Many factors contribute to suicide risk, including health challenges, job loss, bullying, and social isolation. These can be magnified by community issues like historical trauma and discrimination and societal issues like feelings of shame associated with seeking help and easy access to lethal means such as guns and medications.

As part of a statewide approach to reduce suicide and promote well-being, DHS has joined a nationwide push to reduce suicides among high-risk populations by 10 percent over the next five years. This [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-supported effort](#) aims to support states in identifying populations most at-risk and establishing prevention partnerships across multiple sectors. In Wisconsin, the program is focused on reducing suicide among men 25 and older who live in rural areas and reducing self-harm among adolescents ages 10-19. In addition, DHS has funded efforts to ensure people have access to support during a crisis through the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) and coordinated partnerships aimed at increasing access to mental health services, reducing stigma, and [building resilience](#) are underway.

DHS is committed to using a variety of strategies and tactics to reduce suicide in the state, which includes actions that individuals can take. Every Wisconsin resident has an opportunity to contribute by spreading the word about 988, volunteering locally, or promoting compassion in your home, work, and community.

People can also be there for a friend, family member, co-worker, or neighbor in crisis by taking [these five action steps](#):

- **Asking the question**, "Are you thinking about suicide?" communicates that

you're open to speaking about suicide in a non-judgmental and supportive way.

- **Be there.** This could mean being physically present for someone, speaking with them on the phone, or any other way that shows support for the person at risk. Listen carefully and learn what the individual is thinking and feeling.
- **Keep them safe.** Reducing a suicidal person's access to highly lethal items or places is an important part of suicide prevention. While this is not always easy, asking if the at-risk person has a plan and removing or disabling the lethal means can make a difference.
- **Help them connect.** Helping someone with thoughts of suicide connect with ongoing supports can help them establish a safety net for those moments they find themselves in a crisis. These supports could be a family member, friend, spiritual advisor, or mental health professional.
- **Follow-up.** After your initial contact with a person experiencing thoughts of suicide, and after you've connected them with the immediate support systems they need, make sure to follow-up with them to see how they're doing.

Anyone in need of support can call, text, or chat the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) at all hours of the day or night to talk with a trained counselor about any challenge or concern. This service is free and confidential.

Find more information about suicide prevention and mental health resources on the [DHS website](#).