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Youth Suicide Prevention Task Force Formed in Snohomish County

SNOHOMISH COUNTY, Wash., September 1, 2021 – The Snohomish County Children’s Wellness Coalition today announced the creation of the [Snohomish County Youth Suicide Prevention Task Force](#) (YSPTF). The YSPTF will work to reduce incidence of suicide and increase the mental health and resiliency of youth.

Suicide is preventable, and yet it is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States and 2nd leading cause of death for youth in Washington State. In Snohomish County, suicide is the highest cause of death for youth ages 10-17, and the 2nd highest cause of death for 15-24 year olds.

Over the years, suicide has been addressed by providing mental health services to young people who disclosed having thoughts of suicide or who exhibited behaviors that professionals, such as school counselors, identified as putting them at risk. Unfortunately, this approach is limited in its ability to prevent suicide. While services are critical for those who may be thinking about or who have made a suicide attempt, there are a limited number of people in the community who correctly identify youth at risk for suicide and many barriers (barriers may include: parental stigma, limited resources, abusive homes, etc.) youth face in receiving the services that best meet their individual needs. There are also other factors, in addition to mental health, which place young people at risk for suicide. A community collaboration and public health approach to suicide prevention can address these factors and prevent youth suicides.

To take a more comprehensive approach to youth suicide prevention, the Youth Suicide Prevention Task Force (YSPTF) has been newly formed. The YSPTF is a subcommittee of the Snohomish County Children’s Wellness Coalition consisting of many disciplines across multiple sectors (e.g., health, media, social services, criminal justice, education, public health, crisis services) with the goal of reducing youth (age 10-18) suicide, ideation, planning and attempts across Snohomish County. We plan to do this by:

- Supporting and strengthening youth suicide prevention, intervention and postvention efforts across the region.

- Coordinating with the Department of Health, Forefront Suicide Prevention at the University of Washington, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Riverside Trauma Center, and other recognized suicide prevention organizations.
- Enhancing coordination and providing targeted supports to youth and family serving sectors to maximize prevention efforts outside of the school day.
- Identifying gaps to leverage resources and globally recognized best practices.
- Providing technical assistance and training to build capacity for promoting protective factors and reducing risk factors that influence suicide through:
 - Trainings that develop adult comfort, competence and confidence in responding to distress; and,
 - Forums that promote youth voice and perspectives of those with lived experience in the mental health system.
- Identifying critical policy gaps to engage with model-policy developers like the Washington State School Directors Association, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington State Health Care Authority and other agencies.
- Identify and address barriers to help-seeking (ex. stigma, limited resources, parental abuse, etc.).

Facts about suicide:

- Suicide is complex. There are almost always multiple causes, including mental illnesses and/or childhood trauma that may not have been recognized or treated. However, these conditions are treatable.
- Mental disorders and/or substance abuse have been found in 90 percent of people who have died by suicide.
- Suicide is a response to intense, emotional pain that results in feelings of hopelessness and of burdensomeness.
- Depression, anxiety, and suicidal crises are livable and survived by most who get help.
- The majority of people who survive suicide attempts report that they did not want to die, instead they did not believe there was any other way to end their pain.

With a multi-disciplinary approach and working with community partners, the Youth Suicide Prevention Task Force aims to save the lives of our youth. To learn more about the YSPTF visit www.snocochildrenswellnesscoalition.com

If you or someone you know is struggling with thoughts of suicide, feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, increased stress, or feeling like a burden, reach out to talk with a counselor today:

- 24-hour local crisis line – 800-584-3578
- 24-hour chat service – www.imhurting.org
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 800-273-TALK (8255)

Wendy Burchill, Rena Fitzgerald, Nicole Daugherty, Amber Noone

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