

Caring community can prevent suicides

By Sarah Music

More than 24% of Yellowstone County residents have considered suicide, according to the most recent Community Health Needs Assessment. This number could include your neighbor, friend, colleague or family member. Now is the time to reach out to those around you and check in. We can create a community of caring and compassion to prevent suicide.

RiverStone Health suicide prevention efforts focus on creating this community by building up protective factors. Protective factors may include having a counselor or therapist. Pets, family, friends, treatment for mental illness and treatment for substance misuse may reduce the risk of a person attempting suicide. Another crucial protective factor is making it difficult for struggling individuals to access means for suicide.

Firearms safety

A grant from the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services has allowed RiverStone Health to supply gun locks at no charge to those who need them. A gun lock puts time and space between someone's suicidal thoughts and their ability to complete the action. A gun lock can also provide safety when children are in the home. Curious children may try to play with a firearm – even when told that they shouldn't.

This summer, RiverStone Health has distributed 300 gun locks with the help of several community agencies, including Intermountain Health-St. Vincent Healthcare, Billings Clinic and Billings Police Department. Call RiverStone Health at 406-247-3338 if you need gun locks.

Free senior counseling

RiverStone Health has used a state grant to fund a senior counseling program through Big Sky Senior Services. Any Yellowstone County Resident age 60 or over can access three free counseling sessions with a local licensed therapist. Individuals must be referred by either Big Sky Senior Services or the Yellowstone County Adult Resource Alliance. To learn more, please call Big Sky Senior Services at 406-259-3111 or Adult Resource Alliance at 406-259-5212 and ask about the "Three Emergency Counseling Sessions".

Free conference Sept. 22

From 9 a.m. till 2 p.m. on Sept. 22, the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Yellowstone Valley will host "Supporting a Culture of Caring and Compassion for Suicide Prevention." Professionals and other community members who attend will learn more about suicide risks and increase their ability to help a person at risk.

Convened by RiverStone Health staff, the Suicide Prevention Coalition includes more than 18 organizations, plus individual community members and survivors of suicide loss.

At the free Sept. 22 conference. RiverStone Health, Billing Clinic, Intermountain Health-St. Vincent Healthcare, Volunteers of America, DPHHS and YWCA will discuss what they are doing for suicide prevention. Healthy by Design will share the most recent Community Health Needs Assessment data on mental health. The afternoon agenda includes stories of hope. Here are the details:

- Register online at spcoalitionyv.org/2023conference. Participants may attend virtually or in person at the St. Vincent Healthcare Mansfield Education Center in Billings. Continuing education credits are available for virtual or in-person attendance if you are a nurse, teacher, LAC, LCPC or LCSW.

Members of the Suicide Prevention Coalition want to offer hope to those who feel hopeless by letting them to know that our community cares about them. Please join us on Sept. 22.

Sarah Music, program manager for Population Health at RiverStone Health, chairs the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Yellowstone Valley. She can be reached at 406-247-3273.