

Help prevent suicides in Yellowstone County

By Sarah Music

Montana continues to be one of the worst states in the nation for our suicide rate. One in four area residents has considered suicide, according to the 2023 Yellowstone County Community Health Needs Assessment.

The 2023 Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey shows that 30% of high school students in Yellowstone County have considered suicide and 25% have made a plan or attempted suicide. While these statistics are alarming, please know there are strong community efforts to help prevent suicides.

The Suicide Prevention Coalition of Yellowstone Valley includes more than 20 organizations in Yellowstone County. We come together to brainstorm and share information on our work towards zero suicides in our community. Local suicide prevention initiatives include:

- Promoting the 988 crisis line, which is answered 24/7 by trained crisis counselor in Montana. People can phone or text 988.
- Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) trainings that teach community members how to talk to someone in crisis. People can train in QPR in about one hour. To schedule a QPR training for your group or staff, go to the Suicide Prevention Coalition's website spcoalitionyv.org or send an email to spcoalitionyv@gmail.com.
- Ask in Earnest, a Montana-based project, supports farmers and ranchers, recognizing the stresses of agriculture producers and rural life. Check out Ask in Earnest's website at askinearnest.org.
- Pay Love Forward, online at payloveforward.net, is a Billings volunteer organization that offers mentoring to youth through healthy activities and building a supportive community.
- Local organizations supporting the well-being of U.S. military veterans and families include: Veterans Navigation Network 406-435-9308 or 406-698-5448, which connects veterans to needed services; and Horses Spirits Healing 406-245-4076, which offers equine therapy. Dog Tag Buddies (dogtagbuddies.org or 406-969-1227) provides service dogs to veterans with PTSD and offers other services.
- Big Sky Senior Services offers free counseling sessions for older adults who are struggling with depression and other mental health concerns. Call 406-259-3111.
- The Rainbow Coffee House supports LGBTQIA+ youth by offering healthy activities and counseling. Learn more by going to Rainbow Coffee House Billings on Facebook or Instagram.

RiverStone Health makes mini grants to fund prevention projects offered by some of our Suicide Prevention Coalition partners. The coalition meets at noon on the third Monday of the month at RiverStone Health, 123 S. 27th St. in the Lil Anderson Center. Community members who want to

offer hope and save lives from suicide are welcome to join our one-hour meeting in person or remotely. Visit spcyv.org to learn more.

At RiverStone Health, one of our ongoing projects is promoting safe firearms storage. The majority of suicides in Montana involve firearms. Research has shown that gunlocks can help deter a person who is thinking about suicide. If you want free gunlocks for safe firearms storage, please call us at 406-247-3273.

The hardest thing for someone who is struggling is to ask for help. They are secretly hoping they are not invisible, and someone will reach out and notice them. Be that someone. A caring gesture or word can make all the difference in whether that person feels seen and heard.

If you feel like there is nowhere to turn, remember the 988 number is there for you to text or call — day or night. A Montanan is on the other side of that call to help you. You are not alone.

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