

# **Build compassionate community to prevent suicide**

**By Sarah Music**

One person in the United States will die by suicide every 11 minutes. Unfortunately, suicide rates in Yellowstone County are even higher than the national average and have grown worse in recent years.

More than 21% of county residents have considered suicide, according to the most recent Yellowstone County Community Health Needs Assessment. Twelve years ago, the health needs assessment found that only 10% of our residents had considered suicide.

RiverStone Health suicide prevention efforts are focusing on building up protective factors. Protective factors can look different in each person. They 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.

With funds awarded by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, RiverStone Health has supported more than 17 different community organizations in their suicide prevention work. These mini grants from RiverStone Health have assisted support groups for LGBTQ+ youth, equine therapy for veterans and prevention campaigns for Native American youth.

This funding provides training to help identify risk factors of suicide. We train professionals and volunteers how to talk to someone who is having suicidal thoughts.

Along with boosting community prevention campaigns, we emphasize the importance of improving access to counseling. We champion therapy for those who may struggle to access these services. Strengthening these protective factors will help build up a stronger community of support for those who are feeling hopeless.

## **Free conference Sept. 23**

On Sept. 23, the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Yellowstone Valley, which is based at RiverStone Health, will host “Building Up & Encouraging a Compassionate Community.” This free conference will be from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Professionals and other community members who attend will learn more about suicide risks and increase their ability to help a person at risk.

The Suicide Prevention Coalition includes more than 18 organizations, plus individual community members and survivors of suicide loss. We work together to lower suicide rates in Yellowstone County. We want to offer hope to those who feel hopeless. We want them to know that our community cares about them.

On Sept. 23, we will highlight the work of the Billing Urban Indian Health and Wellness Center, Pay Love Forward, Adult Resource Alliance and Adaptive Performance. Our keynote speaker, Debi Meling,

will share her inspirational story of surviving the loss of a family member and starting Step In, an organization which builds up protective factors to save lives.

Here are the conference details:

- Participants may attend virtually or in person at the St. Vincent Healthcare Mansfield Education Center in Billings.
- Professional education credits are available for virtual or in-person attendance if you are a nurse, teacher, LAC, LCPC or LCSW.
- In-person attendance is limited to 50 people, so don't delay your registration.
- Register online at [spcoalitionyv.org/2022conference](http://spcoalitionyv.org/2022conference).

Everyone in the community can help build up protective factors for those feeling hopeless. Create a strong community in your neighborhood by reaching out to a neighbor you haven't seen lately. Clear a neighbor's sidewalk after it snows. Offer to help those who struggle with yard work. Be a listening ear for someone.

Remember to take care of your own mental health. You can't help others when you are struggling yourself. Reach out to a licensed professional if you are depressed or anxious. Adopt healthy habits, such as going for walks or drinking more water throughout the day.

Through these individual efforts we can create a community where everyone feels supported. These protective factors will help save lives for years to come.

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