



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**September 13, 2022**

## **Wolf Administration Recognizes Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, Discusses Multi-Disciplinary Approach to Strengthen Supports and Save Lives**

**Harrisburg, PA** -- Leadership from multiple state agencies joined advocates from Prevent Suicide PA to recognize September as Suicide Prevention Awareness Month and raise awareness around work to embed suicide prevention efforts across systems.

“So many Pennsylvanians of all ages, backgrounds, and identities live with mental health issues or experience times of personal crisis that leave them feeling isolated, alone, and hesitant to seek help for a variety of reasons. These are real people – our friends, neighbors, acquaintances and ourselves,” said Human Services Deputy Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Kristen Houser. “We’re here today to tell you that you are not alone, and no matter what it is you are facing, your experiences are valid, and you do not have to carry the weight of these situations by yourself. Free, caring, and confidential help is available, and using these resources can save lives.”

Approximately 1.2 million adults attempt suicide annually in the United States, with more than 85 percent reporting having made a suicide plan prior to their attempt. In 2020, the most recent year that data is available, approximately 1,700 people died by Suicide in Pennsylvania. Throughout September, we remember and honor those lost to suicide, and support loss and suicide attempt survivors and all who experience suicidal ideation, mental health challenges, and crisis every day.

Mental health challenges or times of crisis can affect anyone at any time. All Pennsylvanians should take extra care to be mindful of their mental health and tend to their overall health and wellness as often as possible. Do a self check-in, be honest about how you are feeling to yourself and your support network, and if you need someone to talk to or a little extra support, help is available.

“Suicide is a public health issue that affects us all as a society,” said Dr. Denise Johnson, acting secretary of health and Pennsylvania physician general. “To those who may be experiencing crisis, help is available. As a trained OB/GYN physician, I would like to share that there is also help for mothers struggling with their mental health in addition to the Lifeline. By calling 1-833-9-HELP4MOMS, mothers are just one call or text away from help to work through their mental health and the range of emotions that come with motherhood.”

“Veterans are a proud and humble group and may be reluctant to ask for help. I want them to know we are here for them and have resources that can help,” said Maj. Gen. Mark Schindler, Pennsylvania’s adjutant general and head of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. “Our veterans have served us in times of need and now we commit to assisting them. Our

commitment to serve Pennsylvania's veterans will never waver. If you know a veteran, especially one in crisis, take the time to let them know you care. With a little effort, together we can reduce the high rate of veteran suicide."

"Agriculture is among the most stressful and isolating industries," said Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding. "If our businesses shut down, we don't eat. When the pressure mounts, the Pennsylvanians who feed us day in and day out should know there is a place to turn, and someone who understands and can help. Pennsylvania's AgriStress mental health hotline is only a call or a text away, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at 833-897-2474."

"Given the current size and projected increase in Pennsylvania's older adult population, we need to ensure adequate access to resources and supports to meet the demand for mental health services. Older adults are at greater risk for social isolation than other age groups. We know that social isolation adversely impacts older adults and can lead to feelings of loneliness and depression that can negatively affect their physical and mental health status," said Secretary of Aging Robert Torres. "We also need to eliminate any stigma that would discourage older adults from seeking mental health services."

"It might be easy to think that there are few students at risk of suicide in the commonwealth, but recent data has shown that last year, 20 percent of Pennsylvania youth seriously considered suicide. That's one in five kids in our commonwealth," said Acting Secretary of Education Eric Hagarty. "In my role, I travel to schools across our commonwealth and interact with learners of all ages, who come from all walks of life. Each of these students has their own unique circumstances, perspectives, strengths, passions, and challenges. But one thing they all have in common is they have a bright future. They have potential and promise. This Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, we are committed to keeping Pennsylvania students safe, happy, and well."

This summer, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline officially launched nationwide, streamlining call and text access to the national lifeline that provides no-cost crisis response support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. With the national launch of 988, Pennsylvania's 14 lifeline call centers are continuing to provide support for individuals considering suicide or self-harm, or experiencing a mental health crisis or emotional distress as well as for people looking for help for a loved one. While 85 percent of calls are triaged and de-escalated without deploying in-person services, if needed, a call or text to 988 can activate a mobile mental health crisis team or other emergency response services that will arrive on site and provide therapeutic interventions, make referrals for outpatient services, or transportation for further evaluation. Callers to 988 can also connect with the Veterans Crisis Line or assistance in Spanish.

"Suicide is one of the most preventable causes of death," said Dr. Matthew Wintersteen, vice chair of Prevent Suicide PA. "Prevent Suicide PA is pleased to partner with so many of Pennsylvania's state departments and agencies to highlight the importance of a comprehensive public health approach to reducing the morbidity and mortality associated with suicide."

In 2019, the Wolf Administration announced the formation of a statewide Suicide Prevention Task Force comprised of leadership from Prevent Suicide PA, members of the General Assembly, and representatives from more than 10 state agencies covering health and human services, public safety, education, and veteran's affairs, among others. Because suicide is so far-reaching, this diverse array of subject matters and expertise is necessary to build a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary awareness and focus on embedding suicide prevention wherever possible.

In addition to 988, many other resources also remain available to Pennsylvanians in need of support, including:

- Crisis Text Line: Text “PA” to 741-741
- Veteran Crisis Line: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990
- Get Help Now Hotline (for substance use disorders): 1-800-662-4357
- Pennsylvania Sexual Assault Helpline: 1-888-772-7227 or <https://pcar.org/help-in-pa>
- National Domestic Violence Helpline: 1-800-799-7233 or [www.PCADV.org](http://www.PCADV.org)

Additionally, the challenges of COVID-19, uncertain economic climate, and increased inflation may still create challenges for individuals and families who are trying to make ends meet. When people struggle to access essential needs, this can create more stress and anxiety, and resources are available in your community to help you meet these needs. The United Way of Pennsylvania can help connect you to these resources. Text your zip code to 898-211 to be connected to programs and resources in your community or visit <https://www.uwp.org/>. People in need of assistance can also visit [www.dhs.pa.gov/compass](http://www.dhs.pa.gov/compass) to learn more, apply for assistance programs and connect to local programs that can help with health care, food, housing and utility bills, plus other needs.

To learn more about mental health and crisis supports in Pennsylvania, visit [www.dhs.pa.gov/mentalhealthinpa](http://www.dhs.pa.gov/mentalhealthinpa).

Learn more about Prevent Suicide PA’s work around Pennsylvania at [www.preventsuicidepa.org](http://www.preventsuicidepa.org).

**MEDIA CONTACT:** Brandon Cwalina, DHS – [ra-pwdhspressoffice@pa.gov](mailto:ra-pwdhspressoffice@pa.gov)

###