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Department of Human Services



Pennsylvania  
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Department of Aging



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Department of Agriculture

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Shapiro Administration Recognizes Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, Highlights Multi-Agency Efforts to Strengthen Behavioral Health Supports and Save Lives**

*Pennsylvanians in crisis can contact the national Suicide and Crisis Lifeline 24/7 by calling or texting 988.*

**Harrisburg, PA –** Today, **leadership from the Shapiro Administration** joined suicide prevention advocacy groups and Pennsylvanians affected by suicide to recognize September as Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. The event shared resources and information on how people can help others experiencing suicidal ideation or a mental health crisis and uplifted stories of people from groups with a heightened risk of suicide, including older adults, farmers and rural communities, veterans, Black youth, and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

“DHS is honored to work alongside our agency colleagues and suicide prevention organizations to share stories of suicide loss and raise awareness about how to get help, reduce stigma, and to offer hope,” said **Human Services Secretary Dr. Val Arkoosh**. “The more we talk about our mental health and check in with our loved ones, the more we can help people feel safe talking about what’s going on beneath the surface. By starting the conversation, providing resources, and directing help to those who need it, we can save lives. If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. You are not alone.”

Suicide is a leading cause of death in the United States. In 2023, the most recent year that data is available, suicide was the cause of more than 49,000 deaths in the United States, including over 1,900 Pennsylvanians. According to the CDC in 2023, an estimated 12.8 million adults seriously thought about suicide, 3.7 million made a plan, and 1.5 million survived a suicide attempt. [Long-term data](#) shows that suicide rates increased 37% between the years 2000-2018 and then decreased 5% between 2018-2020. However, rates returned to their peak in 2022.

Since taking office, **Governor Josh Shapiro** has prioritized making targeted investments in behavioral health services throughout the Commonwealth, investing \$40

million so far for county mental health programs, \$5 million for crisis stabilization walk-in centers, with a focus on geographic areas that may not have a center, and \$200 million for student mental health supports and school safety and security.

Pennsylvania has 14 call centers affiliated with the national Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, which is available 24/7 for free by calling or texting 988. Any Pennsylvanian experiencing a behavioral health crisis or who needs help for a loved one, can contact 988 at any time and be connected to highly trained staff or volunteers who will provide free and confidential support and, if needed, referrals to additional community resources.

More than 11,000 calls were made to 988 in Pennsylvania alone in August 2025 with nearly 7,000 chats. More than 90 percent of calls are resolved by call center staff without the assistance of EMS or law enforcement.

“Addressing veteran suicide requires a unified effort so when agencies come together, we amplify our impact and ensure no veteran falls through the cracks,” said **Maj. Gen. John Pippy, Pennsylvania’s adjutant general and head of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs**. “Collaboration strengthens our support networks and demonstrates our collective commitment to honoring and protecting those who have served. By raising awareness, we break the stigma and open pathways to the help our veterans deserve.”

“Older adults are at greater risk for social isolation than other age groups. Social isolation may lead to untreated depression and other psychiatric illnesses that are often significant underlying causes for older adults to take their own lives,” said **Aging Secretary Jason Kavulich**. “Mental health is just as crucial as physical health to an older adult’s overall well-being, and we need to eliminate any stigma that would discourage older adults from seeking assistance. If an older adult is experiencing social isolation, loneliness, or depression, we encourage them to reach out to their local Area Agency on Aging, call 988, or speak with a friend or loved one to get connected to the help they need.”

“Our agricultural community faces unique mental health stresses,” said **Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding**. “Farmers often work alone. They live where they work and face constant pressures from changing markets, unpredictable weather, and increasing unpredictability in costs of supplies and other business inputs. These stressors — plus keeping a business that is often also a family legacy profitable — can take a heavy toll. But help is available free, at any time, from someone who understands and speaks the language of farming. It’s ok to ask for help.”

At Governor Shapiro’s direction, Pennsylvania’s 988 call centers have received in-depth training to best serve the LGBTQ+ community and continue to work with The Trevor Project to help support LGBTQ+ youth, after the federal government ended LGBTQ+-specific services through the hotline.

"LGBTQ+ youth are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide compared to their peers. During Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, it is imperative that we shed light on high risk groups like LGBTQ+ youth, and the need for culturally competent crisis care that is responsive to their unique experiences and challenges," said **Casey Pick, Director of Law & Policy at The Trevor Project**. "Especially in the wake of the recent elimination of federal funding for LGBTQ+ youth suicide prevention services, we are grateful for the state and local lawmakers and government agencies, in Pennsylvania and across the U.S., who are stepping in to fill critical gaps in care, and help save young lives."

"It's impossible to ignore the rise and toll of suicide loss for our youth, especially our most vulnerable youth, in Black communities. The state's continued investment in suicide prevention and youth mental health is so important and makes Pennsylvania unique leaders for the nation," said **Stephen Sharp, co-leader of the Pennsylvania Black Youth Suicide Workgroup**. "It's so essential to continue to elevate and invest in this work, foster and support the many partnerships with the groups here today and the many more working tirelessly to save lives, and build systems that help our youth have ready access to care and sustainable supports towards recovery."

[Veterans and service members](#) can contact 988 to receive resources tailored specifically to them and their behavioral health needs.

The [AgriStress HelpLine for Pennsylvania](#) connects farmers to mental health resources and health care professionals. The helpline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Farmers can call 833-897-AGRI (2474) to speak to a health care professional. More information about the helpline and [mental wellness resources for the agricultural community](#) are available at [agriculture.pa.gov](http://agriculture.pa.gov).

If you or a loved one are experiencing a behavioral health crisis, call or text 988 to contact the [Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#). Additional ways to contact the Lifeline via chat or American Sign Language are also available at [www.988lifeline.org](http://www.988lifeline.org).

More information on behavioral health and crisis resources in Pennsylvania is available on [DHS' website](#).

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