

Pennsylvania's Suicide Prevention Month Guide

Start the Conversation



September 2024



Changing the Narrative on Suicide: Start the Conversation



September is Suicide Prevention Month, with the week of September 8th-14th identified as National Suicide Prevention Week. September 10th is recognized as World Suicide Prevention Day in countries around the world. This year marks the beginning of a new three-year theme focused on changing the narrative on suicide, which involves moving beyond awareness to starting conversations and taking action. Across sectors and settings, changing the narrative requires both culture and systemic change to provide meaningful education, advocate for resources, and prioritize suicide prevention in an ongoing way.

National efforts around suicide prevention over the past year include the release of a new [National Strategy for Suicide Prevention](#), accompanied by a [Federal Action Plan](#) identifying more than 200 concrete action steps to be implemented by the federal government over the next three years. Central to this new strategy are the concepts of health equity and supporting populations disproportionately affected by suicide, addressing social determinants of health as a suicide prevention strategy, and engaging individuals with suicide-centered lived experience. This past July also marked the two-year anniversary of the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#). Since its inception, trained 988 crisis counselors have responded to more than 10 million calls, texts, and chats from people in crisis who reached out for help, and specialized support services have been made available to veterans, Spanish-speaking individuals, LGBTQI+ youth and young adults, and American Sign Language (ASL) users. The Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) also relaunched its [Best Practices Registry](#), a resource library of suicide prevention strategies with evidence of effectiveness.

At the state level and across communities throughout Pennsylvania, suicide prevention efforts have been ongoing. There has been continued work to promote the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline through awareness campaigns, and Pennsylvania also partnered with the [Columbia Lighthouse Project](#) to launch an updated version of the [Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale \(C-SSRS\) app](#), an evidence-based screening tool. With the current four-year [statewide suicide prevention plan](#) reaching its end, Pennsylvania's Suicide Prevention Task Force is initiating the process of developing a new, actionable plan that will align with the National Strategy and incorporate data and input from individuals with lived experience. The new plan will aim to address the unique needs of Pennsylvanians, including those at increased risk of suicide, such as veterans, the farming community, older adults, and youth, with a special emphasis on Black youth.

We are all accountable when it comes to preventing suicide, and together, our efforts can save lives. Individuals and communities throughout Pennsylvania can be part of **changing the narrative** on suicide through actions taken every day, whether it's by reaching out to a friend or family member who may need support, talking openly about suicide, or sharing a helpful resource. We encourage you to use this guide not only during the month of September, but throughout the year. You may also adapt the contents as needed for your community and those you serve.

Thank you for your willingness to start the conversation this September.



Pennsylvania Network for
Student Assistance Services

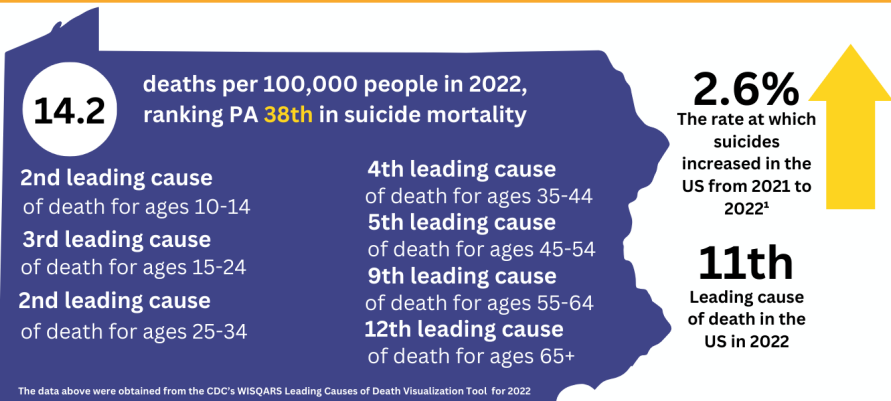


Brief Statistics: Why Suicide Prevention Matters

We all want to live in healthy, happy communities that thrive in all aspects of wellness. Data such as the image below helps us demonstrate the severity of the problem of suicide and the lasting impact it has on a community. The data doesn't just represent a number, but someone's mother or father, brother or sister, neighbor, or loved one who has, for one reason or another, temporarily lost hope. When we promote resources like our hotlines and crisis centers, we frequently see increases in the number of people who reach out for help rather than struggling alone.

Suicide Data: Pennsylvania

This fact sheet reports data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) unless noted otherwise (see footnote). This is the most current verified data at time of creation (August 2024).



Additional Helpful Data Sources:

- [Center for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#)
- [Pennsylvania Youth Survey \(PAYS\) - 2023 report](#)
- [Department of Health Enterprise Data Dissemination Information Exchange \(EDDIE\)](#)
- [SPRC racial/ethnic trends in suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and suicide deaths](#)
- [The Trevor Project Survey on LGBTQ+ Youth \(2024\)](#)
- [National Veterans Suicide Prevention Annual Report \(2023\)](#)

Populations at increased risk of suicide:

While anyone can experience suicidal ideation, some groups experience increased risk factors that can contribute to suicide, such as discrimination. These groups can also intersect (ex. veterans with disabilities). Below is a non-exhaustive list of some of these groups:

LGBTQ Youth:
39% of LGBTQ youth considered suicide in 2023, including half of transgender and nonbinary youth. LGBTQ youth of color reported higher rates than their white peers.²

Black, Indigenous, and People Of Color (BIPOC):
People of American Indian or Alaska Native descent had a 26% increase in suicide rate between 2018 and 2021. Black individuals saw a 19% increase and the suicide rate among Hispanic persons increased by nearly 7%.³

Older adults:
Between 2001 and 2021, suicide rates significantly increased for men ages 55-74 and women 55-84.⁴

People with disabilities:
A study in 2021 found that people with disabilities were 3X more likely to report suicidal ideation in the prior month compared to people without disabilities.⁵

Black adolescents:
The suicide rate among Black youth ages 10 to 19 has increased 54% since 2018, and is increasing faster than other racial and ethnic groups.⁶

Veterans:
The suicide rate for Veterans was significantly higher than that of the national general population in 2020, although the Veteran suicide rate in PA did not significantly differ from the national rate for Veterans.⁷

Download the Pennsylvania Suicide Data Graphic Here:

[Or Click here](#)

Additional sources:
1. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2022/20220930.htm
2. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2024/>
3. <https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2023-02-09/suicide-rates-have-risen-among-people-of-color>
4. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db483.htm>
5. <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/disparities-in-suicide.html#disabilities>
6. https://watsoncoleman.house.gov/imo/media/doc/full_taskforce_report.pdf
7. <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2020/2020-State-Data-Sheet-Pennsylvania-508.pdf>



Creating an Effective Message for Suicide Prevention Across the Lifespan

While focusing on prevention efforts can seem overwhelming at times, your words and actions can help save a life. Here are some overarching guidelines for the development of your messaging to prevent suicide.

Evoked shared values

*Who are you attempting to reach? Schools? Faith-based institutions? First Responders?
Identify the value you want them to work toward.*

Example: Everyone deserves to feel safe, supported, and heard.

Acknowledge negative feelings, like discomfort, fear, or lingering doubts

By acknowledging difficulty, doubt, and discomfort, you can help your audience manage their feelings and avoid using them as a reason to avoid the subject.

Example: I realize that talking about the issue of suicide can make some of us uncomfortable.

Model a journey toward change, it's starting point and pivotal moments

Provide the next steps on how you will make prevention possible. Engage with survivors of suicide loss and individuals with lived experiences to light the way of healing for others.

Example: Many people have shared that hearing personal stories from survivors of suicide loss helped them feel connected and sparked hope, even in their most difficult times.

State the problem precisely

Identify what piece of the problem you are wanting to address. Choose information or a fact to support it.

Example: Feelings of discomfort or shame make it hard for people to talk about suicide, and that silence makes it hard for people to reach out and find help.

Show Progress

Identify examples (big or small) of how prevention efforts have helped your community.

Example: Trainings, such as QPR Suicide Prevention for Gatekeepers and Mental Health First Aid, have helped people learn to speak about these issues and offer support and assistance to people who are struggling with feelings of helplessness or despair.

Name concrete solutions

Be realistic. Make it achievable.

Example: We will provide training to individuals throughout our community so they can learn how to recognize the signs, respond, and refer someone to safety.

Adapted with permission from *Moving Toward Prevention: A Guide for Reframing Sexual Violence*.

© 2018 National Sexual Violence Resource Center and Berkeley Media Studies Group.



Words Matter

It can feel uncomfortable, and sometimes even scary, to talk about mental health and suicide prevention, even though many people have been touched by suicide in some way. The term [suicide-centered lived experience](#) refers to anyone who has had or is currently experiencing thoughts of suicide, survived one or more suicide attempts, lost a loved one to suicide, or provided substantial support to a person with experience of suicide. By finding the courage within ourselves to engage in open discussions, we can help save lives. Here are some tips that may help when engaging in courageous conversations.



- Practice using nonjudgmental language when discussing suicide.
- Present suicide as a preventable event.
- When talking about a suicide death, utilize language that is sensitive to the grieving family.
- Use objective terms for suicidal events, such as “death by suicide” or “non-fatal attempt.”
 - Avoid using the words “commit” or “complete” when discussing suicide. The phrase “committed suicide” is usually associated with a sin or a crime, which suicide is neither. Using the words “completed suicide” conveys success or accomplishing something good, which suicide is not. The proper term for someone who has taken their own life is “died by suicide.” Also acceptable is “killed him/her/theirself” or “took their own life.”
- When discussing the frequency of suicide, always emphasize the importance of every single life. This helps demonstrate that one loss is too many.
- Always provide information for assistance, such as the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. You can order free wallet cards and magnets from the [SAMHSA store](#).

For additional information on safe messaging:

- [Safe and Effective Messaging for Suicide Prevention](#): Evidence-based recommendations from the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC).
- [Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide](#): This guide important points for covering suicide, “do’s and don’ts” for safe reporting, and suggestions for online media/message boards/bloggers. Additional information can be found at <http://reportingonsuicide.org/>.
- [Framework for Successful Messaging](#): The National Action Alliance has provided this framework for public messaging (e.g., posters, PSAs, social media, websites, etc.) to ensure that suicide-related messages are safe, strategic, positive, and in line with best practices. It includes a toolkit for promoting [988](#).
- [Mental Health Media Guide](#): Developed by a groundbreaking coalition of mental health experts and entertainment industry leaders to help storytellers and content creators develop more authentic and accurate portrayals of mental health.



Mental Wellness Resources

Our mental and emotional health are just as important as our physical health, yet stigma and shame have often made these topics taboo to discuss. As we continue to see an increase in mental health needs across our communities, we must bring mental health and well-being to the forefront of conversations. We all can play a vital role in promoting connectedness and resiliency.

Self-care:

- [Mental Health Mobile Apps](#): a compiled list of mobile apps for mental health and wellness.
- [Virtual Calming Room](#): Jana Marie Foundation created a virtual calming room for students, teachers, and caring adults to find tools and strategies for managing emotions and building resiliency.
- [The Trevor Project Self-Care Guide for LGBTQ+ Youth](#): includes ways to practice self-care in various settings.
- [Pause-Reset-Nourish \(PRN\) to Promote Wellbeing](#): provides information about a specific self-care strategy by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network.
- [Stress First Aid](#): Manuals and resources for health care workers available through the U.S. Dept of Veterans Affairs.

Targeted Resources:

- [Mental Health America 2024 BIPOC Mental Health Month Toolkit](#)
- [The Jed Foundation: The Benefits of a Therapist Who Understands Your Cultural Background](#)
- [Suicide Risk and Prevention for LGBTQ People](#)
- [Equity in Mental Health Framework](#)
- [National Action Alliance: Veteran and Military Suicide Prevention Resources](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Resource Center: Rural Suicide Prevention Resources](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Resource Center: Resources for Older Adults](#)

Toolkits and Programs for School and Community Settings:

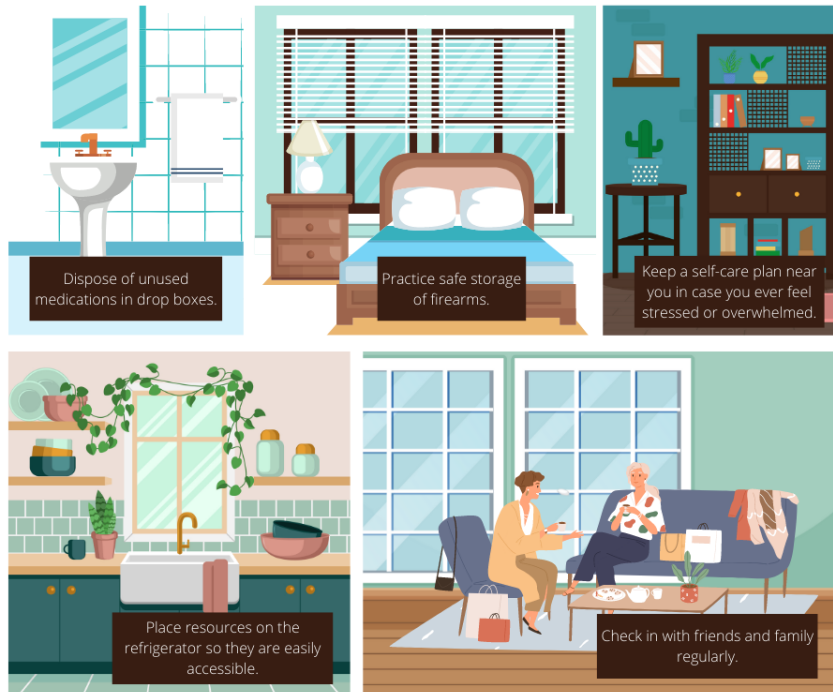
- [Mind Matters by Jana Marie Foundation](#)
- [Mental Health Curriculum by Aavidum](#)
- [Prevent Suicide PA Suicide Prevention Online Learning Center](#)
- [Compassion Resilience Toolkit by Wisconsin Dept. of Public Instruction, Wise, and Rogers Behavior Health](#)
- [Seize the Awkward by Ad Council, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, and The Jed Foundation](#)
- [PA Parent and Family Alliance: Resources for Suicide Prevention and Awareness](#)



Keeping Environments Safe

We can all do our part of creating and maintaining safe environments. Research shows that putting time and distance between a lethal means—such as a firearm—and those who may be in crisis can prevent suicide and save lives. Below is a graphic portraying strategies to consider for keeping your home environment safe, particularly when a loved one is at risk of suicide.

Creating and Maintaining Safe Environments



Resources:

- National Action Alliance's [Lethal Means & Suicide Prevention: A Guide for Community & Industry Leaders](#)
- [Counseling on Access to Lethal Means \(CALM\)](#)
- Zero Suicide: [Lethal Means Safety Resources](#)
- Children's Safety Network's Firearm Safety: [Preventing Death by Suicide](#)
- Harvard School of Public Health: [Means Matter](#)
- [Hold My Guns](#)
- [Be SMART for Kids](#)
- [CeaseFirePA](#)



Suicide Prevention Awareness: Sample Action Steps



- Use a [virtual background](#) or [download social media graphics](#) to help raise awareness.
- Consider using new [988 virtual backgrounds, graphics, and sample social media posts](#).
- Host an educational training such as [Question, Persuade, Refer \(QPR\) Suicide Prevention for Gatekeepers Course](#), [Mental Health First Aid \(MHFA\)](#), or [Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training \(ASIST\)](#).
- Post signs with positive messages around your school, workplace, or town. Be sure to include the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (988) or Crisis Text Line (Text PA to 741741).
- Share the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline through a social media post on 9/8, recognized as 988 Day. [SAMHSA's 988 Day Digital Toolkit includes sample posts](#).
- Light a candle on September 10th to remember a loved one or to remind yourself that you matter.
- Work with your county commissioners to proclaim September as Suicide Prevention Month (see example at the end of packet).
- Attend "Suicide Prevention Awareness Day at the Capitol" in Harrisburg on September 16th from 8:30am—1pm.
- Check in with your [County Suicide Prevention Taskforce](#) to find ways to support local efforts.
- Share posters and videos from the [Prevent Suicide PA Annual PSA Contest](#) for high school students to help spread awareness. For more information about the 2025 PSA Contest, launching September 18, [click here](#).
- Visit [Prevent Suicide PA's Suicide Prevention Online Learning Center](#) and take a free suicide prevention training.
- Participate in Drive Out Suicide by placing a [free suicide prevention magnet](#) on your car.
- Promote equity in mental health and suicide prevention awareness efforts by sharing [targeted resources](#) from diverse populations in your community.
- View selected presentations from a [past STAR-Center Conference](#), such as the 2024 Keynote on "The Clock is TikToking: The Urgent Need to Understand Social Media and Teen Suicide Risk." Keynotes and workshops from the 2024 conference are available on the website.

The following national and international associations have developed resource guides containing additional lists of activities and ideas that can be implemented across settings:

- International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP): [Suggested activities](#)
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center: [Suicide Prevention Month Ideas for Action](#)
- 988 Crisis & Suicide Lifeline: [National Suicide Prevention Month](#)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): [2024 Suicide Prevention Month Toolkit](#)



Crisis Resources

You are not alone. Many organizations are working each and every day to support you and your efforts with suicide prevention. Please consider using these crisis lines and resources in your messaging during Suicide Prevention Month.

National:

- [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#): call or text **988**; or to talk with someone over the computer visit 988lifeline.org/chat
 - [Veterans Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#): **988, press 1**
 - [Spanish Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#): **988, press 2**
 - [LGBTQI+ Affirming Counseling for Youth](#): **Text Q to 988, or call 988, press 3**
 - [Native and Strong Lifeline](#): **988, press 4**
- Crisis Text Line: **TEXT PA to 741741** or visit <http://www.crisistextline.org/>
- The Trevor Project: 1-866-488-7386, text 678-678, or visit <https://www.thetrevorproject.org>
- Trans Lifeline: 1-877-565-8860 <https://www.translifeline.org>

Pennsylvania:

- [List](#) of Crisis Intervention contact information by county.
- [County Task Force Resources](#): By county, available contact information is provided for crisis, the Suicide Prevention Task Force, local chapter of AFSP, and other local mental health/suicide prevention resources.
- [University of Pittsburgh STAR-Center Postvention Services](#): Consultation for school districts and agencies regarding postvention. Call 412-864-3346, available 24/7.
- [AgriStress Helpline for Pennsylvania farmers and their families](#), available 24/7. Call or text 1-833-897-AGRI (2474).

National and State Organizations

National:

- American Association of Suicidology (AAS): <http://www.suicidology.org/>
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP): <https://afsp.org/>
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC): <http://www.sprc.org/>

Pennsylvania:

- Jana Marie Foundation: <http://www.janamariefoundation.org/>
- Aavidum: <http://aavidum.com>
- Prevent Suicide PA: <http://preventsuicidepa.org/>
- Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services (PNSAS): <http://pnsas.org/>
- Services for Teens at Risk (STAR) Center: www.starcenter.pitt.edu
- PA Department of Human Services: [988 implementation](#)
- PA Department of Agriculture: [Mental Wellness Resources for the Agricultural Community](#)
- PA Department of Military and Veterans Affairs: [PA VETConnect](#)



Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services



Social Media

Use popular hashtags #WSPD, #WorldSuicidePreventionDay, #NSPM, #SuicidePreventionMonth, #SuicidePrevention, #988, and #BeThe1To to add your voice to the larger Suicide Prevention Month conversation happening on social media.

Consider tagging Jana Marie Foundation, Aavidum, and Prevent Suicide PA in your posts so those accounts can reshare your content.

Sample Social Media Posts (to be copied or adapted):

To be posted on 9/8, 988 Day.

You are never alone. There is help and hope. If you or a loved one need emotional support, call 988 [or insert your local crisis number]. It's free and available 24/7. No judgment. Just help. #NSPM #SuicidePreventionMonth #SuicidePrevention, #988Day

To be posted on 9/10:

Today is World Suicide Prevention Day. Reach out to someone today and let them know you care. #WSPD #WorldSuicidePreventionDay #SuicidePrevention

This year's World Suicide Prevention Day theme is "Starting the Conversation." Connection is prevention and anyone can play a role in suicide prevention by reaching out. Check out seizetheawkward.org for a helpful list of conversation starters. #WSPD #WorldSuicidePreventionDay #SuicidePrevention

To be posted anytime in September:

Anyone can play an important role in preventing suicide. Knowing the warning signs and how to ask the question can help save lives. Learn more at janamariefoundation.org/get-informed/candid-conversations #SuicidePreventionMonth #SuicidePrevention

Starting a conversation about someone's mental health can feel scary and overwhelming. But being present, listening, and offering support can make a huge difference in someone's life. #BeThe1To reach out. #NSPM #SuicidePreventionMonth #SuicidePrevention

Conversations about #mentalhealth and #suicideprevention are valuable. Make sure the people around you know that you care and that you're available to help and listen. #NSPM #SuicidePreventionMonth #SuicidePrevention

There are many misconceptions about suicide. Take a moment to educate yourself about the facts at preventsuicidepa.org/myths-misconceptions. Everyone has a role to play in #SuicidePrevention. #NSPM #SuicidePreventionMonth

Suicide is a leading cause of death among US youth. If you know a young person who is experiencing a mental health concern or crisis, help is available. Call, chat, or text 988. #NSPM #SuicidePreventionMonth #SuicidePrevention

Did you know most major social media platforms have ways to reach out to friends who may be in crisis? Visit 988lifeline.org/help-someone-else/safety-and-support-on-social-media to learn more about the different options you have to support a friend. #BeThe1To #NSPM #SuicidePreventionMonth #SuicidePrevention



Sample Proclamation

An official signing of a proclamation by your county commissioners is a great way to publicize the kick-off for Suicide Prevention Month and the activities that will be taking place throughout the month. Below is sample proclamation verbiage:

Suicide Prevention Month 2024

Suicide Prevention Day, September 10, 2024

WHEREAS, suicide is a public health concern; and

WHEREAS, in the state of Pennsylvania, one person dies by suicide nearly every five hours, making it the third leading cause of death for ages 10—34 and the 5th leading cause of death for ages 35-44 (CDC, 2021); and

WHEREAS, over 5.4 million people in the United States have lost a loved one to suicide (CDC, 2019); and

WHEREAS, each member of our community is valued and irreplaceable; and

WHEREAS, talking openly about stress and psychological health builds trust, reduces barriers to care, and enables early intervention; and

WHEREAS, local and statewide suicide prevention efforts should be developed and encouraged to the maximum extent possible, and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED the [COUNTY] Board of Commissioners does hereby proclaim September 2024 as “Suicide Awareness and Prevention Month” and September 10, 2024 as “Suicide Awareness and Prevention Day” in [COUNTY].

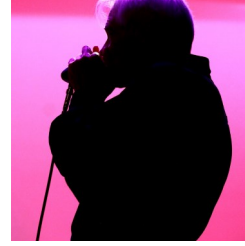
Proclaimed this _____ day of _____, 2024

[COUNTY] Board of Commissioners,

Name, Title



Working Together.



Organizations across the state of Pennsylvania continue to work together to provide mental health and suicide prevention education and awareness events. Jana Marie Foundation, Garrett Lee Smith Youth Suicide Prevention Grant, Prevent Suicide PA, Aavidum, and the Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistant Services are proud to provide this informational packet to help you build awareness and take action to prevent suicide within your community.

About Jana Marie Foundation

Jana Marie Foundation harnesses the power of creative expression and dialogue to spark conversations, build connections, and promote mental wellness among young people and their communities. The organization envisions communities working together to knock down walls and transform emotional distress into resilience and hope. Jana Marie Foundation is located in Centre County, Pennsylvania.

<https://janamariefoundation.org>

About Garrett Lee Smith Youth Suicide Prevention Grant

The Garrett Lee Smith Youth Suicide Prevention Grant is a five-year federal SAMHSA grant awarded to the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) at the Department of Human Services. Using a two-tiered model, this project targets youth ages 10-24. Tier 1 is statewide and provides awareness, training, and screening activities to increase identification and improve continuity of care for youth at risk of suicide. Tier 2 works with target counties around continuity of care between youth serving systems for those at risk of suicide.

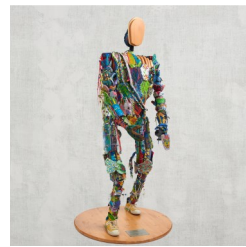
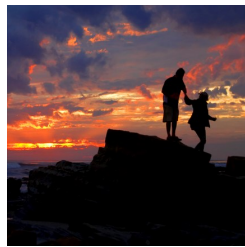
About Prevent Suicide PA

Prevent Suicide PA supports those who are affected by suicide, provides education, awareness, and understanding by collaborating with the community to prevent suicide, and reduces the stigma associated with suicide. The organization envisions having a Commonwealth where every life is valued, that everyone has the support necessary to get help when needed, and that hope and healing abounds in every person.

<http://preventsuicidepa.org/>



Working Together, Continued



About Aavidum

Aavidum is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that empowers youth to shatter the silence surrounding depression, suicide, and other issues facing teens. The word Aavidum, which means “I’ve got your back,” was created by students after a classmate died by suicide. Aavidum uses free student-driven clubs, curricula, and other programming to inspire schools and communities to adopt cultures of care and advocacy, encouraging all members to have their friends’ backs. Aavidum exists in nearly 300 elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and colleges.

<http://aavidum.org/>

About Services for Teens At Risk (STAR) Center

Services for Teens At Risk (STAR-Center is a suicide prevention program for teens and young children within the Division of Child and Adolescent Services at Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic and the Department of Psychiatry, University of Pittsburgh. From its inception in 1986, the program has been primarily funded through an appropriation from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to the University of Pittsburgh. The program combines clinical and outreach services designed to combat the problem of child and adolescent suicide. We provide outpatient assessment and treatment for depressed and anxious children and teens. We also offer acute treatment to depressed and suicidal teens via our Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP). STAR-Center Outreach adapts and disseminates what we have learned about best practice clinical care into practical guidelines for educational and community settings and offers trainings and consultations.

www.starcenter.pitt.edu

About Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services (PNSAS)

The mission of the Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services is to provide leadership for developing a safe and drug-free environment and mental health wellness in schools and communities across the commonwealth. Barriers to learning will be removed and student academic achievement will be enhanced through collaborative prevention, intervention, and postvention services. The Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services provides technical support to counties and Student Assistance Programs (SAP) teams in schools districts, charter, cyber, and nonpublic schools across Pennsylvania. Contact your local school to find out how their SAP teams can help provide support to children/adolescents and their families.

<http://pnsas.org/>



Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services

