



## NEWS RELEASE

September 10, 2021

### Contacts:

Department of Health, David Morgan, [david.morgan@state.nm.us](mailto:david.morgan@state.nm.us)

Aging and Long-Term Services Department, Breanna Anderson,

[breanna.anderson@state.nm.us](mailto:breanna.anderson@state.nm.us)

Human Services Department, Jodi McGinnis Porter, [jodi.mcgininis-porter@state.nm.us](mailto:jodi.mcgininis-porter@state.nm.us)

Public Education Department, Judy Robinson, [judy.robinson@state.nm.us](mailto:judy.robinson@state.nm.us)

Children Youth & Families Department, Charlie Moore-Pabst, [charlie.moore-pabst@state.nm.us](mailto:charlie.moore-pabst@state.nm.us)

Higher Education Department, Stephanie Montoya, [stephanie.j.montoya@state.nm.us](mailto:stephanie.j.montoya@state.nm.us)

## Governor Lujan Grisham and State Agencies Recognize National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month

**SANTA FE, NM** – Today, on [World Suicide Prevention Day](#), Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham encourages New Mexicans to monitor their mental well-being and to be on the lookout for signs of mental distress in loved ones.

“I want every New Mexican who is facing a crisis to know you are not alone,” said Gov. Lujan Grisham, “and that needing help is nothing to be ashamed of. You are loved, you are light, you are worth the effort. It is essential that we all recognize and appreciate the hurt and pain being carried by those around us. And it's essential that we tend to our own emotional well-being and build support systems, so we are strong enough to help others when they need it. The state of New Mexico has resources available that can and do help people every single day. This National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, I encourage New Mexicans to share those resources, as they can and do really make a difference.”

In 2019, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that suicide is the ninth leading cause of death in New Mexico, and 513 people were lost to suicide statewide.

To help raise awareness and open the dialogue about suicide, September is recognized annually as National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. As part of that, Sept. 5-11, is recognized as [National Suicide Prevention Week](#) and Sept. 10, as [World Suicide Prevention Day](#).

In New Mexico, departments across the state are working together to reduce the stigma surrounding suicide and increase awareness about suicide prevention. In New Mexico, preliminary numbers are suggesting that death by suicide has increased in all age groups, except for 45–64-year-olds. Led by the Behavioral Health Collaborative and the Department of Health, the state will be heightening suicide prevention efforts year-round with an emphasis on the following groups throughout the month:

- Individuals living with a disability.
- Adults 60+.

- School-age students.
- College-age students.
- Veterans and military members.
- People in recovery.

State departments have been dedicating resources, training, programs, and outreach efforts to reach these populations.

### **Department of Health**

In the last year, the New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) has taken action for suicide prevention in a number of ways, including:

- Convening the New Mexico Suicide Prevention Coalition for a series of online meetings to discuss and plan new strategies.
- Assisted with reduction of access to lethal means through promotion of online training on Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM) <https://zerosuicidetraining.edc.org/enrol/index.php?id=20>.
- NMDOH and the Behavioral Health Collaborative to develop public service announcements and other messaging.
- Funding with the New Mexico Human Services Department (HSD) two contracts for distribution of gun locks and gun safety education through New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence and the New Mexico Alliance of Health Councils.
- Initiated the NMDOH Secondary Prevention of Suicide in the Emergency Department Project with Christus St. Vincent's Regional Medical Center in Santa Fe.

In partnership with HSD, NMDOH provided funding for completion of an American Indian Suicide Prevention Resource Guide, published this June; as well as updated the NMDOH Suicide Prevention Resource Guide (re-published/released July 2021)

The public service campaign promotes the New Mexico Crisis and Access line (NMCAL). Which people in imminent crisis could call and speak to a Mental Health Care professional immediately.

“I encourage every New Mexican to be proactive about their mental health, listen to others, and recognize the signs of a mental health crisis,” said David R. Scrase, MD acting cabinet secretary for the Department of Health and cabinet secretary for the Human Services Department. “Help is available for all age groups – and getting help when we need it is a key part of maintaining our health and wellbeing.”

### **Human Services Department**

The Human Services Department's Behavioral Health Services Division and the Behavioral Health Collaborative work diligently to make sure that all community members have a place to call or a place to go when there is a need. In addition, the department works directly with the staff of Managed Care Organizations (MCOs), the behavioral health provider network and government employees to provide support through a trauma responsive lens in its interactions with each other and all New Mexicans.

“Behavioral health is health care,” said Dr. Neal Bowen, division director for Behavioral Health Services Division. “We want to open a door to talk about a public stigma toward people with suicidal thoughts which can affect help-seeking behavior. If someone indicates they are considering suicide, listen and take their concerns seriously. Don't be afraid to ask questions about their plans. Let them know you care, and they are not alone.”

The department has several campaigns to promote behavioral health care such as:

- [The Dose of Wellness campaign](#) is a campaign to promote mental and physical well-being by offering positive tools and informational resources to help New Mexicans improve their health. The campaign aims to bridge the often-overlooked connection between physical and mental health. Through a series of promotions, the campaign increases public awareness, provides helpful resources, and reduces the stigma, misconceptions and false information surrounding health issues. The campaign helps New Mexicans identify risky or dangerous behaviors using screening tools and entry points for additional resources. It reminds all of us to:
  - Be aware: Consider others and their experience with an open mind.
  - Be kind: Keep love and kindness at the heart of your messages.
  - Be inclusive: Make an effort to embrace mental health conversations.
  - Be healthy: Learn how to improve your overall health.
- [A Dose of Reality New Mexico](#) campaign improves access to opioid addiction treatment providers using a one-stop search map and the increased availability of video and phone provider treatment services. The goal of this campaign is to empower New Mexico communities to seek treatment that is available in-person, by video or by phone, no matter where they live or what gaps used to exist. The campaign includes an easy [interactive treatment locator map](#), a [resource guide](#) and [video](#) to also address stigma associated with opioid addiction.

“It’s up to all of us to connect and reach out to our family, friends and neighbors who might be suffering in silence. Simply to let them know they are not alone and that someone cares,” said Bryce Pittenger, LPCC, CEO of Behavioral Health Collaborative. “Sometimes, all it takes is just a little word of encouragement for someone suffering in silence to let them know that help is available and that brighter days are ahead.”

New Mexicans experiencing any kind of emotional crisis are encouraged to call the [New Mexico Crisis and Access Line](#) anytime at 1-855-NMCRISIS (662-7474) or download [NMConnect](#), a smartphone app, for immediate access to mental health professionals and resources.

### **Aging and Long-Term Services Department**

ALTSD serves seniors, adults with disabilities, and their caregivers by providing programs that help them achieve life-long independence and healthy aging. Throughout the year, the department maintains multiple venues for assisting individuals who need crisis resources as well as a large network of providers they utilize to share information and supports, including:

- The Aging and Disability Resource Center 1 (800) 432-2080 provides benefits counseling and acts as a call center for the department, they can also refer to programs like Adult Protective Services, the New Mexico Crisis and Access Line, Ombudsman Services, and local law enforcement for needed connections.
  - For the month of September, ADRC call center staff will be asking callers if they would like to be transferred to a professional or a peer at NMCAL.
- Create & Connect- the letter writing campaign which started in summer of 2020 is designed to get encouraging letters into the hands of long-term care residents, to help combat feelings of isolation.
- Home-delivered meals- an Area Agency on Aging program, provides meals to seniors, while also serving as a way of ensuring the welfare of New Mexico’s seniors.
- In recognition of September being suicide prevention month, the department will be coordinating a social media campaign regarding awareness and promoting the State’s Crisis and Access Line and participating in media outreach efforts.

“Throughout my 15 years in behavioral health I've seen how devastating the results of suicide are on loved ones and on the community. We want our senior population to know that suicide is preventable and that if you or a loved one is struggling, we have life-saving resources available. Support and effective treatment is key to being able to develop healthy coping skills and live a

meaningful life. So please use these resources, your life is valuable,” said ALTSD Cabinet Secretary Katrina Hotrum-Lopez.

### **Public Education Department**

The Public Education Department doesn't have a web-based suicide prevention program. We will have a web-based platform (7 Mindsets) that is for Social and Emotional Learning and mental health, supportive of suicide prevention but not an evidence-based suicide prevention program. That will launch Sept. 14 on the PED website.

7 Mindsets is a free, statewide platform filled with curriculum, lessons, videos, activities and resources to support SEL for all New Mexico educators, students and families. Educators will be able to access all material via the portal and a simple registration process and everyone else can access the SEL tools and resources that are ungated content. A training will be provided and recorded to assist with navigation of the platform.

"Educators spend significant time with our children and can help families identify students in emotional or mental crises. The Public Education Department is making sure these educators have the tools and training they need to get these children the support they need," Public Education Secretary Kurt Steinhaus said.

### **Children Youth & Families Department**

CYFD supports suicide prevention in New Mexico via the following supports and services:

- The department offers text message services like ReachNM for immediate, safe and anonymous assistance for youth in need.
- Pilot programs like Family OutReach and Community Engagement (FORCE) specialize in connecting families with the kind of resources that can help provide critical supports especially at times of crisis.
- Fostering Connections provide vital supports for youth aging out of the foster care system such as guaranteed housing, job assistance and food access. CYFD's Juvenile Justice
- Protective Services Division have put great effort into building trauma-responsive services and halfway programs with community partners like New Day to ensure they too are part of our approach to supporting youth.
- Lastly, at the forefront of our efforts is CYFD's Behavioral Health Services Division that is rebuilding essential community based behavioral health services throughout our state.

“As an agency dedicated to supporting children and youth, we are proud of to be part of the New Mexico's continuous statewide suicide prevention efforts.” said Acting Secretary Mariana Padilla.

### **Higher Education Department**

“The mental and emotional well-being of students, faculty, and staff at colleges and universities are central to student success and the health of our communities overall,” Higher Education Secretary Stephanie Rodriguez said. “I thank our higher education partners for the work they are doing this month and throughout the year to provide services and support on their campuses and we are looking to expand these offerings so that more students can have support while they are enrolled in school.”

The Higher Education Department received \$1 million in FY22 to support colleges and universities in developing and expanding mental and behavioral health services. According to the American College Health Foundation, schools can engage in suicide prevention by promoting social networks and connectedness, improving access to mental health services on and off campus, identifying and assisting students who may be at risk for suicide, and preparing staff, faculty, and residential assistants with intervention skills and training.

“Suicide prevention efforts are an active and ongoing process, not only institutionally, but in treatment of suicidality,” said Karen Lucero, associate director of Counseling at the University of New Mexico’s Student Health and Counseling Center. “Therapy Assistance Online (TAO) is a UNM resource for students and staff to engage in self-help efforts to manage suicidality when it becomes critical or chronic.”

UNM plans to host activities for students, employees, and the community as part of Suicide Awareness Week from September 12-18, including a walk for suicide awareness, suicide intervention training, peer support sessions, and more. Participants can register and view the full schedule [online here](#).

New Mexico State University hosted a Mental Well-Being Resource Fair last week and has free and confidential counseling services available for students.

###

*For information about Septembers calendar of events go to <https://nmcrisisline.com/resources/wellness/> New Mexicans experiencing any kind of emotional crisis are encouraged to call the [New Mexico Crisis and Access Line](#) anytime at 1-855-NMCRISIS (662-7474) or download [NMConnect](#), a smartphone app, for immediate access to mental health professionals and resources.*