

# New Mexico Ranks Third in Suicides, Staying Silent is Not the Solution

Meg Long, MPH  
NMSU - WAVE

New Mexico is ranked #3 for suicide rates in the United States, just below Alaska and Montana, respectively. For college age adults, persons 15 yrs-34 years, suicide is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death, after unintentional injuries (CDC, 2014). Nearly 1,100 suicides are projected to occur on college campuses this year. Further, 1 in 12 college students having actually made a plan at some point. According to the NMSU 2015 CORE survey, 6.4% of NMSU student surveyed reported having thoughts of suicide and 2.6% attempted suicide.

This high of a suicide rate suggests that most everyone knows someone who has completed suicide, or has been affected by suicide in some way. Yet the topic of suicide is avoided. Why? There are electronic billboards on I-10 that tell us how many people have been killed in car accidents this year in order to encourage us to drive safely. Meanwhile, there have been more deaths from suicide than cars accidents. Why can we openly discuss deaths caused by car accidents and what to do to prevent it, yet the conversation about suicide is hushed? Perhaps it stems from the lack of control many feel around preventing suicide. The reasons why someone thinks about or attempts suicide are complex and vary from person to person. The inability to have a checklist of how to know if someone is thinking about suicide and what to say to someone can be very discouraging. There are, however, common warning signs to look out for in friends and family.

If someone is thinking about suicide, they might express some of the following:

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill oneself
- Looking for a way to kill oneself, such as searching online or obtaining a gun
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings

It is not necessary to wait until thoughts of suicide arise to prevent suicide. There are protective factors, which serve as a shield from suicidal thoughts and acts. Protective factors include the following:

- Effective clinical care for mental, physical, and substance abuse disorders
- Easy access to a variety of clinical interventions and support for help seeking
- Family and community support (connectedness)
- Support from ongoing medical and mental health care relationships
- Skills in problem solving, conflict resolution, and nonviolent ways of handling disputes
- Cultural and religious beliefs that discourage suicide and support instincts for self-preservation

If you are experiencing thoughts of suicide, or are concerned that someone you know may be having thoughts of suicide, please contact the resources below:

- In Room 100 of Garcia Annex, the NMSU Counseling Center provides free counseling services to all main campus students and can be reached by calling 575-646-2731, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- New Mexico Crisis and Access Line Crisis and Access Line: 1 (855) NMCRISIS (662-7474);
- Peer to Peer Warm line: 1 (855) 4NM 7100 (466-7100); TTY Line: 1 (855) 227-5485, a 24/7 resource for peoples with thoughts of suicide.
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255 for phone and <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org> for chat, a 24/7 resource for peoples with thoughts of suicide.

*Suicide Prevention Training:*

Trainings on suicide intervention are offered through the WAVE program several times a year. If you are interested in participating in one of our Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) trainings, please contact Deb Darmata at 646-5673.

*Suicide Awareness and Prevention Event:*

NMSU's annual 'Aggies for Hope' Event will take place Friday, September 9<sup>th</sup> during Suicide Prevention Week outside of the Corbett Center Student Union.