

# Help make mental health stigma a thing of the past during Suicide Prevention Month



Often people in distress suffer in silence, trying to deal with their emotional pain all alone. Sometimes all it takes is for one person to reach out and express concern for them to feel seen and supported.

September is Suicide Prevention Month, a time to raise awareness about the signs of suicide, promote mental health care and become familiar with mental health resources in your area.

“Your never know when someone in your family or circle of friends will need it,” said Andrea Smith, Associate Vice President of Innovation and Community Engagement for Detroit Wayne Integrated Health Network (DWIHN). “Keep our numbers handy. You’re never alone, we’re here to help.”

DWIHN is working hard to reduce suicide throughout Wayne County. First and foremost, if you or a loved one is suffering from suicidal thoughts, reach out for help by calling DWIHN’s 24/7 Crisis Helpline at 800-241-4949. Professionals are ready to assist 24/7 and provide resources in a compassionate, non-judgmental manner. If you just need to talk or text someone, contact the Support Suicide Crisis Line at 988, DWIHN’s Mobile Crisis

Unit at 844-IN CRISIS or Reach Detroit at (313) 488-HOPE for a supportive listener.

Everyone should know what to watch out for when it comes to suicide prevention. Knowing these signs can literally mean the difference between life and death for someone you care about. Some common red flags are:

- Depression and anxiety
- Change in appetite, like overeating or undereating
- Excessive tiredness or changing sleep patterns
- Withdrawing from friends
- Mood swings
- Declining to participate in activities they once enjoyed
- Substance use
- Just not seeming like themselves, like something is “off”

If someone you know seems to be struggling, approach them in a non-accusatory way. Instead of asking “What’s wrong with you lately?” for example, say “I’m concerned about you. What can I do to help?”

“Express your concern, show support and offer assistance,” said Smith.

Smith, who oversees DWIHN’s Suicide Prevention Coalition, said while much of past suicide prevention efforts have focused on pre-teens, teens and young adults, anyone is vulnerable to suicidal thoughts. Job stress or loss, family responsibilities, divorce, poor health, financial troubles and more can all contribute to feelings of loneliness and hopelessness.

“Hope is often the piece that people are missing,” she said.

Older adults and African-

American adolescents are often most at risk.

“Suicide is increasing in the Black community for a number of reasons – racism, socio-economic status, mental health stigma, feelings of being left behind,” said Smith, adding that studies show that Black children die by suicide 50 percent more often than their Caucasian counterparts.

In many cases, the COVID-19 pandemic worsened the situation, as being unable to participate in typical social activities like school and work led to feelings of isolation. Some children also lost a parent, caregiver or special adult in their life to the illness and that is always a traumatizing event to cope with.

The pandemic also opened up conversations about the importance of mental health. Smith said younger generations are more willing to discuss mental health topics and get support when they need it. They don’t shy away from acknowledging that they have a therapy appointment and that can help remove the stigma that prevents some people from reaching out for help when they need it the most.

As part of the Suicide Prevention Coalition, Smith and a group of local leaders plan events that help bring attention to the issue of suicide and raise funds for suicide prevention programs. More than 300 people attended the Skate for Life event earlier this month, providing an opportunity to connect with the community and emphasize the importance of mental well-being.

Another suicide prevention

initiative is Zero Suicide, which began at Henry Ford Health System, and proved so effective that it was later adopted by communities nationwide, which involves an advisory board with members from a cross-section of the community – among them are hair salon employees who are privy to a lot of personal information, and funeral home workers, who provide insight on working through the grief process.

Smith said the Zero Suicide advisory board is constantly evaluating how they reach those in need and modify their strategies as needed.

What’s clear, she said, is that while DWIHN offers many suicide prevention services, they aren’t alone in this fight.

“We cannot do this work alone. We collaborate with community partners to reach those in need,” she said.

For more information, visit [DWIHN.org](http://DWIHN.org). Help is always just a phone call away at DWIHN’s 24-hour helpline, 1-800-241-4949.

## Learn More

Detroit Wayne Integrated Health Network (DWIHN) is the largest Community Mental Health public safety net in the state of Michigan serving 123,000 people with mental illness, substance use, intellectual and developmental disabilities and children with serious emotional disturbance. To learn more, visit [www.dwihn.org](http://www.dwihn.org) or download the mobile app mydwihn, available free from the Apple or Google Play store.



## WE ARE ONE- A COMMUNITY OF CARE

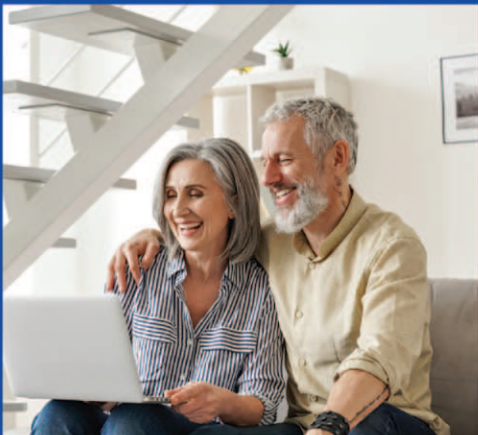


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