



PREVENTING SUICIDES IN MUSKEGON COUNTY

(And information about the Michigan Surgeon General's State Suicide Prevention Plan)

Michigan's Surgeon General Dr. Kimberlydawn Wisdom has stated that "Suicide crosses all race, age, gender, and socio-economic boundaries, and it deserves our undivided attention," spoken at the Capitol Rotunda on September 12, 2005. (Michigan's State suicide Prevention Plan can be viewed at www.michigan.gov/injuryprevention) In 2003, suicide deaths in Michigan (1,018) topped deaths related to homicide and HIV/AIDS (237) combined. From 2001 to 2002 alone, Michigan moved up six spots—from 38th to 32nd—in the rate of suicides compared to other states.

In Muskegon County, the rates of suicide have held fairly steady at approximately 22 per year. Here, like in the rest of the nation, the largest number of suicide deaths occurs among our workforce, primarily men ages 25—64. (Men account for 81% of suicide deaths in Michigan.) The cost in terms of pain and suffering, loss of life, medical payouts and lost productivity, and the impact upon the survivors (people who have lost someone close to them to suicide) of suicide, is immeasurable. Further, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that suicide is under-reported.

There is still a stigma associated with suicide and it results in secrecy that keeps people from talking about it. Most people who commit suicide don't want to die, they simply want an end to the pain. The goal of a current Community Mental Health (CMH) Services initiative in Muskegon County is to initiate discussion, raise awareness, and offer an alternative to suicide. CMH applied for and received a one-year grant to display messages across the community, and develop/distribute materials at worksites, colleges, sporting events, bars, and other local gathering places. We will also promote education about warning signs and risk factors associated with suicide deaths so that, when possible, friends and family members can take the action that might prevent suicide.

The suicide rates have been called a public health issue defined as "anything that affects or threatens to affect the overall health and well-being of the public." As such, we have undertaken a public health approach, both locally and at the state-wide level, and implemented an aggressive prevention campaign.