

## **Suicide Prevention initiative to reduce attempts, deaths**

The Detroit-Wayne County Community Mental Health Agency has launched a plan to help reduce suicides in Wayne County over the next four years.

The Agency unveiled the plan during the observance of National Suicide Prevention Week. It is designed to help increase awareness and discussion of suicide, an often taboo topic.

“Suicides can be prevented if persons are trained to understand the symptoms and signs, as well as take action toward intervening,” said Michele Reid, MD, D-WCCMHA Medical Director and psychiatrist. “We need to talk about suicide and offer solutions and treatment to those that need it.”

Dr. Reid added: “Suicide is very complex. The experience of persons who resort to suicide is that they want their profound psychological pain to stop. It is not because they really want to die. They are seeking relief.”

The Agency is teaming up with several community partners. Rev. Aaron Harris of Rewarding Faith said the faith-based community can play an important role in suicide prevention.

“We had someone come to the altar for prayer. That’s where we in the faith-based community help people. Three days later, he committed suicide,” he said. The church later started the Soul To Soul ministry to help educate people about the signs and symptoms of those at-risk for suicide.

The Agency’s suicide prevention initiative includes greater public awareness so that suicide is no longer such a taboo topic and so more people can recognize the signs and symptoms for those at risk for suicide. There will also be training for counselors, clergy, health care intake personnel, and other gatekeepers who might come in contact with persons who might be suicidal. A third part of the initiative also looks at preparing clinicians to look at more critical assessment of person in crisis.

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death in Michigan, with over 200 deaths in Wayne County in 2005. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 80-90% of suicides involve a diagnosable mental illness that can be treated, mostly major depression and Bi-Polar disorders, though suicidal behavior can be caused by several biological, psychological and sociological factors.

Of the 200 suicides committed in Wayne County in 2005, only six of those persons had been seeking or receiving mental health services. To mental health professionals, that data means treatment works and that those in treatment are less apt to commit suicide.

The Agency’s plan will focus initially on adolescents and youth and expand to address other populations through 2010. The mental health board approved the Agency’s policy plan on suicide prevention in July. The new initiative is being supported by various other organizations including the Michigan Association of Suicide Prevention.

## Box Info

- The U.S. experiences more than 30,000 suicides a year, and an estimated 750,000 attempts.
- Firearms are the leading method of suicide - over 54%.
- Older adults aged 65 and over are the highest risk population and frequency of suicides
- Suicide is rising among adolescents ages 10-18 years.
- call our toll free crisis hotline to address intervention for potential suicidal behavior as well as referrals for mental health treatment, 1-800-241-4949.