

COVID-19's Mental Health Toll Amplifies Importance of World Suicide Prevention Day

AUSTIN – Every year in America thousands of lives are tragically lost to suicide. This year, the mounting mental health toll of COVID-19 has intensified the need for awareness and the urgency for ensuring access to mental health care. Today is World Suicide Prevention Day, an opportunity to raise awareness about prevention and stigma, share resources, and provide support to those whose lives have been forever impacted as suicide loss survivors.

“Suicide is a two-fold tragedy that devastates individuals and the people who love them,” said MMHPI President and CEO Andy Keller, PhD. “The stress of the COVID-19 pandemic, grief, isolation of quarantine, and ongoing economic uncertainty have combined to increase pressure on millions of people, elevating the risk that suicide rates may spike above already record levels.”

MMHPI has issued a series of COVID-19 reports analyzing the mental health impacts of the pandemic on individuals across the country. In April, the first report detailed how an economic recession can affect rates of suicide, finding that for every five-percentage point annual increase in the unemployment rate, an additional 300 lives could be lost to suicide each year in Texas, and more than 4,000 nationwide. In 2018, over 3,800 Texans died from suicide and more than 48,000 nationally.

A study released last month, issued by MMHPI and Steinberg Institute, analyzed the potential effects of universal access to a collaborative care model for treating depression, finding it could help prevent between 9,000 and 14,500 deaths from suicide each year, nationally, potentially reducing rates to below pre-COVID levels. Between 725 and 1,100 of those lives could be saved in Texas.

“As a mental health policy institute, we saw early on that this pandemic would have profound short and long-term mental health effects, and the urgent need for our policy leaders, health systems, and communities to have data and recommendations to plan, respond, and recover,” continued Keller. “We simply must do more. By addressing depression as the disease it is and with the tools we currently possess, we can prevent one-third to one-half of all deaths from suicide. And, just as importantly, we can let every individual and family struggling with this scourge know that they are not alone and we are standing beside them in this fight.”

In addition to World Suicide Prevention Day, the entire month of September is observed as National Suicide Prevention Month, with Sept. 6-12 designated National Suicide Prevention Week.

Projected Impact of COVID Recession on Increased Rate of Suicide, Drug Overdose Deaths and Substance Use Disorder can be found here: https://www.texasstateofmind.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/MMHPI_MHSUD_PressRelease_042120.pdf

Collaborative Care, Medication-Assisted Therapy Key to Preventing Thousands of Deaths from COVID-Related Suicide and Overdose can be found here:

https://www.texasstateofmind.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/MMHPI_CoCM-MAT-Press-Release_08072020.pdf

Resources for individuals in crisis or in need of support include:

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Crisis Text Line: Text “HELP” to 741741
- Texas Health and Human Services Statewide COVID-19 Mental Health Support Line available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week toll-free: 833-986-1919
- Disaster Distress Helpline 1-800-985-5990 or Text “TalkWithUs” to 66746
- Mental Health Resources During a Pandemic: <https://www.texasstateofmind.org/covid-19/>

About MMHPI

Since its public launch in 2014, MMHPI has helped Texas legislators, state officials, members of the judiciary, and local leaders identify systemic mental health needs and solutions, quickly becoming Texas’s most trusted source for data-driven mental health policy. The Institute has begun to make a significant impact in multiple areas, helping Texas leaders expand the mental health workforce, improve access to care for veterans and their families, shift the focus of new investments toward early intervention, and address the mental health crisis in our jails and emergency rooms. Learn more at www.texasstateofmind.org.