

DATA DIVE: DEATH BY SUICIDE IN CUMBERLAND COUNTY



HELP US ALL TO LIVE LONGER, BETTER

By 2027, the Years of Potential Life Lost will be reduced 10%.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

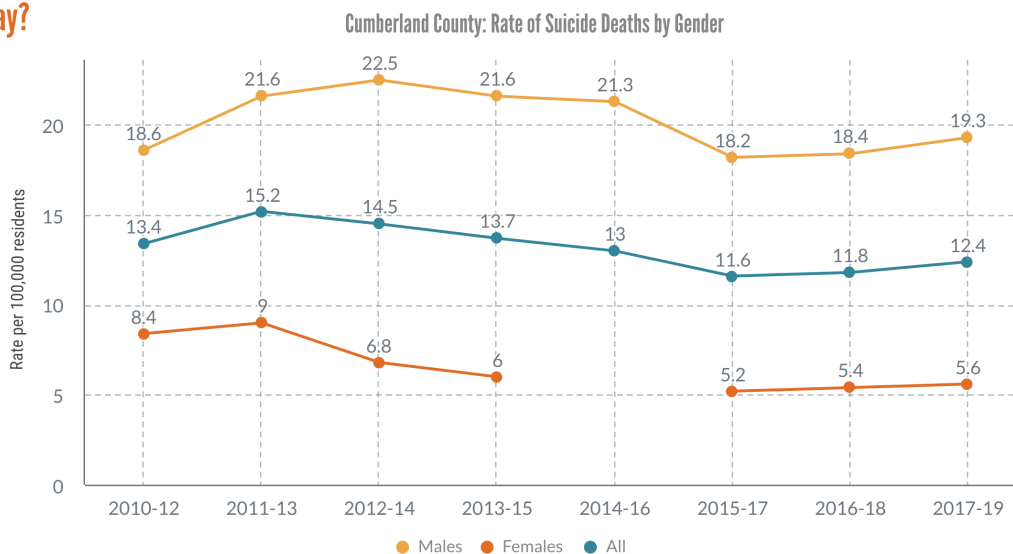
A Maine citizen dies by suicide every 36 hours and the trend in rates has been increasing over the past decade. Yet, suicide is often a preventable tragedy. Understanding warning signs, how to respond, and the data helps to overcome stigma and prevent future suicide attempts or deaths. Preventing suicide relies on the caring concern and engagement of everyone in our community.

WHAT THE DATA TELL US

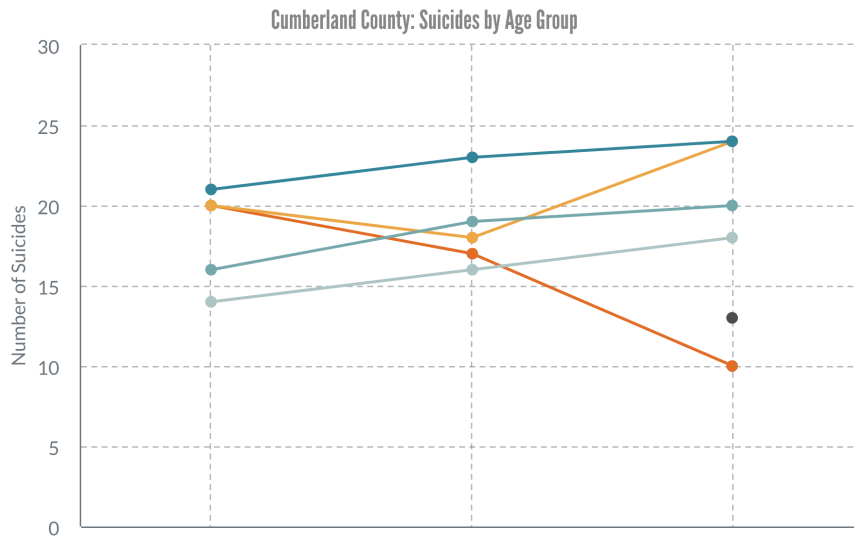
Due to the small population in Cumberland County, suicide deaths are reported at a rate per 100,000 residents over three years. For example, the 2017–2019 rate of 12.4 per 100,000 people includes deaths from 2017, 2018, and 2019. This rate represents on average 37 Cumberland County residents that died by suicide each year.

From 2010 to 2019, one clear trend in Cumberland County and around the country is the difference in death by suicide between males and females. Males are more likely to die by suicide, while females are more likely to attempt suicide.

Where are we today?



Note: The rate of suicide for females between 2014-16 was not reliable due to low numbers.



	2015-17	2016-18	2017-19
15-24	20	17	10
25-34	20	18	24
35-44	14	16	18
45-54	16	19	20
55-64	21	23	24
65-74			13

Death by suicide impacts all ages. The data we track only looks at those up until the age of 75. As seen in the 65–74 age group, numbers are not publicly reported when there are fewer than 10 deaths by suicide in any age range. Nationally, death by suicide has increased in the US among every age group over the past decade. In Cumberland County, only the 15–24 age group saw a decline in deaths.

The Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, a survey administered every other year to middle and high school students, shows that suicidal ideation is more common than one may think. The 2019 survey results for Cumberland County revealed that 18% of 7th and 8th graders had seriously considered suicide in their lifetime, while 15% of high school students in Cumberland County had seriously considered suicide that past year.

Many question the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on deaths by suicide. Preliminary state-level data for 2021 shows that Maine has continued to see an increase in suicide-related emergency department visits among youth—especially girls under the age of 18. While one-year data has limitations, this increase implores us to pay close attention to the mental health and suicide risk of the young people in our lives, especially female adolescents.

WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS AND WARNING SIGNS?

Many factors can increase the risk of suicide or protect against it¹. These characteristics make it more likely that someone will consider, attempt, or die by suicide and it is important to be aware of them. Risk factors can include previous attempts, social isolation, financial or legal problems, relationship changes, major depression, or other mental illnesses. Those at higher-than-average risk for suicide include veterans, those who have had a family member die by suicide, and LGBTQ+ youth.

There are often [warning signs](#) or observable changes in the behavior of someone at risk, such as saying they want to die or feel hopeless and alone. Therefore, a key step is to break their isolation and directly ask if they are considering suicide. **If the answer is yes, sometimes, or maybe, then seek immediate help for this person.**



<https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/index.html>

WHAT'S BEING DONE TO CLOSE THE GAPS?

United Way of Southern Maine (UWSM) is committed to advocating for policy change, offering impactful volunteer opportunities, and funding programs that prevent deaths by suicide and increase access to mental healthcare. These programs operate within schools, healthcare centers, community-based organizations, and residential facilities to provide low-barrier, trauma-informed care to our communities, particularly those at the highest risk. Thrive2027 reviews local data to make funding recommendations that increase access to care and implements best practice prevention and intervention activities. UWSM is also committed to decreasing the stigma of mental illness and is partnering with the Maine Chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI ME) to provide free access to Mental Health First Aid trainings.

YOUR COMMUNITY NEEDS YOU!

ORGANIZATIONS AND EMPLOYERS

- Ensure that employees understand behavioral health benefits and that co-pays for mental health services and physical health care are equal.
- Check out Thrive2027's [Thriving Workplace Policies and Best Practices](#) for ideas, such as implementing a stigma reduction campaign at your worksite.
- Commit to training your workforce on how to recognize and respond to mental health challenges and send staff to an upcoming Mental Health First Aid training.
- Post the National Suicide Prevention hotline number (1-800-273-8255) or the [Maine Crisis Line](#) (1-888-569-1112) in your staff room.
- Support UWSM programs focused on suicide prevention and mental healthcare.
- Sign a [statement of endorsement](#) to show your support for Thrive2027.
- If there is a suicide in your organization or community, please follow [DHHS postvention guidelines](#).

PARENTS, CAREGIVERS, AND INDIVIDUALS

- Ensure weapons and medications are locked away.
- Be aware of the [warning signs](#).
- Get help for your child or loved one if they seem depressed or anxious.
- If you suspect someone is considering suicide—ask directly and seek support.
- Call or text the Maine Crisis Hotline if you need help supporting someone showing risk signs.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Maine Crisis Line: 1-888-568-1112
- National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 800-273-8255
- Veterans' Crisis Hotline: 1-800-273-8255
- [NAMI Maine](#)
- [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#)
- [CDC Suicide Prevention](#)

MENTAL HEALTH

First Aid Training



WHAT IS IT?

The Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training is the national evidence-based best practice and provides participants with a baseline knowledge/skillset around mental health. Participants will learn to recognize warning signs of people at risk and to take appropriate action.

The training itself is 5-6 hours long and requires 2 hours of pre-work. In addition to a series of trainings, United Way of Southern Maine will facilitate a network for trained individuals to connect, share resources, and participate in Thrive2027's Goal 3-related advocacy and volunteer opportunities.



MHFA promotes self-help approaches to enhance mental well-being. 84% of respondents reported offering those approaches to others in the three months post-MHFA training and 83% of respondents reported using those strategies to improve their own mental wellbeing during that same period.

HOW DO I GET INVOLVED?

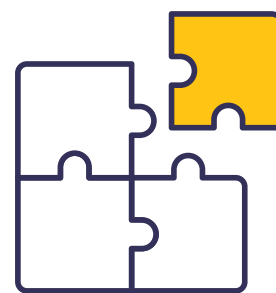
UWSM has a series of trainings throughout the year that are free to attend. Please email Maggie Gamble mgamble@uwsme.org for upcoming dates and availability.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

MHFA Training is a natural first step toward achieving Thrive2027's Goal 3; helping all of us live longer, healthier lives. The National Council for Behavioral Health's nationally recognized mental health first aid course trains participants to help people who may be experiencing a mental health problem or crisis.

INDIVIDUALS WILL LEARN

- ◆ Risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems.
- ◆ Information on depression, anxiety, trauma, psychosis, and addiction disorders.
- ◆ A 5-step action plan to help someone developing a mental health problem or in crisis.
- ◆ Where to turn for help — professional, peer, and self-help resources.



“It was incredibly helpful to get some guidance on how to start these conversations, which I think, is the hardest part. It was also comforting to know that our job is not to fix the problem (I am a natural helper and fixer) but rather provide a listening ear, and then resources.” - **Katie Day, volunteer, Hannaford Supermarkets**



United Way
of Southern Maine