News

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New Jersey Department of Health Receives $3.68 Million in Funding to Address Youth Suicide

The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) has been awarded $3.68 million Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) grant to work with sister agencies and community-based organizations to strengthen services to youth at risk of suicide.

The project, Readiness to Stand United Against Youth Suicide: A New Jersey Public Health Community Initiative (NJ R2S Challenge) led by the Child and Adolescent Health Unit of the Division of Family Health Services of NJDOH is a collaborative grant with the Department of Human Services, Department of Children and Families (DCF), Office of the Secretary of Higher Education and multiple community-based organizations. The State will partner with the NJ American Academy of Pediatrics, Rutgers University and Monmouth University.

“This initiative incorporates a comprehensive public health approach that will improve the mental health of youth by building the skills of youth, their families and professionals that serve them,” **said Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli**. “This funding will strengthen efforts to identify, intervene and prevent suicides.”

New Jersey’s R2S Challenge is a statewide collaborative that promotes education and resiliency to assist young adults who are transitioning from a healthcare facility to home after a suicide attempt to prevent further attempts and death by suicide among 10-24-year-old youth.

The R2S Challenge will: build social connections for youth using public-private partnerships; distribute grants to school districts, community colleges and hospitals to enrich resiliency; enhance identification and referral of youth at risk for suicide; improve clinical expertise of service providers; and facilitate successful growth after crisis or loss.

"As New Jersey continues to face down the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, a parallel pandemic of depression and anxiety is emerging among New Jersey's youth," **said NJ DCF Commissioner Christine Norbut Beyer**. "Social distancing and social isolation are taking a toll, and exacerbating feelings of loneliness, hopelessness and fear in teens and young adults. This federal SAMHSA grant is arriving just in time to assist with our state's ongoing efforts to support youth mental health and help prevent youth suicide. DCF is ready to join with our colleagues at the Department of Health to engage in this life-saving work."

"Together, as policymakers, educators, parents and health care providers, we must continue to work to support the mental health and emotional well-being of young people in New Jersey," **said Human Services Assistant Commissioner Valerie Mielke**. "We look forward to working with our partners in the Departments of Health, Children and Families and Higher Education to improve awareness and prevention and save lives.”

“Given the multitude of stressors students face as they pursue postsecondary credentials, compounded by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we must ensure that their mental health and wellbeing needs are addressed,” **said Dr. Brian Bridges, Acting Secretary of Higher Education**. “This funding will help our higher education institutions better support New Jersey’s students by providing access to critical mental health services and resources necessary to intervene early, before issues escalate to suicide. This will be especially important amid the ever-evolving pandemic as students face added anxiety and stress.”

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