



**Alaska Native
Tribal Health Consortium**

Division of Community Health Services

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Tribal health organizations boost suicide prevention efforts

Anchorage, AK - To stem the increasing numbers of suicides among Alaska Natives, organizations across Alaska have added staff and stepped up staff training and the sharing of suicide prevention information. Suicide incident rates have spiked in northwestern Alaska during the past few weeks and in southeastern Alaska in recent months.

“We are deeply saddened by the recent suicides and extend our condolences to the families affected by the loss of a loved one by suicide,” said Kathleen Graves, PhD, Director of Behavioral Health, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium. “It’s been said that one person’s death by suicide affects at least six people. We know that within the Alaska Native population this number exceeds six when you think of the extended tribal families also affected. In villages, a suicide can have a devastating emotional effect on the entire community.”

In response, an organized and coordinated effort is underway. Regional tribal health organizations are making certain their villages are being taken care of during this suicide crisis. ANTHC has been in touch with representatives of several other groups and organizations -- the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, Indian Health Service, and clergy, to name just a few -- to join them in reaching out to support those in need.

Barbara Franks is a member of the statewide Suicide Prevention Council, and an ANTHC Senior Office Specialist who focuses on suicide prevention and awareness. On the statewide council, she represents those who lost a family member to suicide (her son committed suicide a few years ago). She encourages people to become knowledgeable about warning signs of suicide. “It’s important that people realize they can save a life by being aware and by getting professional help for someone they’re worried about, and most important to let them know they are not alone,” said Franks.

ANTHC has secured staffs (both Injury Prevention and Behavioral Health) who are Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Trainers (ASIST). As an added tool, ANTHC has three employees being trained in Critical Incident Stress Management. The Consortium’s Behavioral Health Team is guided by Kathleen Graves; Dr. Rita Blumenstein, Program Manager, Culture & Native Ways of Knowing; and Alberta Unok, Program Manager, Behavioral Health Aide Program.

Information about suicide warning signs, contacts, resources, and Internet links is attached. Tribal health organizations urge anyone with questions or concerns to contact their health care provider, or any of the contacts shown in the attachment, for more information.

Attachment: Northwest AK tribal health contacts; Suicide Warning Signs; Resources; Links

Northwest Alaska Tribal Health Contacts

Maniilaq Association
Kimberly Haviland, Behavioral Health Director
Phone: 907-442-7644
Email: kimberly.haviland@maniilaq.org

Norton Sound Health Corporation
Melissa Boeckmann, Assistant Vice-President Community Health Services
Phone: 907-443-3241
Email: mboeckmann@nshcorp.org

Suicide Warning Signs

Observable signs of serious depression

- Unrelenting low mood
- Pessimism
- Hopelessness
- Desperation
- Anxiety, psychic pain, and inner tension
- Withdrawal
- Sleep problems

Increased alcohol and/or other drug use

Recent impulsiveness and taking unnecessary risks

Threatening suicide or expressing a strong wish to die

Making a plan

- Giving away prized possessions
- Sudden or impulsive purchase of a firearm
- Obtaining other means of killing oneself such as poisons or medications

Unexpected rage or anger

Resources

Alaska CARELINE Crisis Intervention
Phone (907) 452-2771
Toll-free: 1-877-266-4357

National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Links

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: www.afsp.org

For teens and parents: www.yellowribbon.org

For young adults: www.activeminds.org/

State of Alaska, Statewide Suicide Prevention Council: www.hss.state.ak.us/suicideprevention/default.htm

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