



Panhandle Health District

Healthy People in Healthy Communities

Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Panhandle Health District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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A Community Working Together Part 1 of 3 Part Series

HAYDEN, ID – When it comes to our health, data is important. We pay attention to many indicators; our cholesterol, our blood pressure, our weight. One number continues to stand out and it is tied directly to the mental health of our overall community. According to data from our coroners, 61 people in Benewah, Bonner, Boundary, Kootenai and Shoshone died by suicide in 2018. Of those, 42 were in Kootenai County.

“The goal is to have that number be zero,” said Lora Whalen, Panhandle Health District Director and Chair of the Suicide Prevention Action Network of North Idaho (SPAN). “I am proud of the passion and the energy our community has demonstrated in response to suicide in North Idaho.”

North Idaho’s Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN) continues to provide and emphasize community education, awareness and prevention of suicide. If you have a family member or friend who you think may be considering suicide, it is vital that you ask the question, “are you thinking about suicide”. You can then take action to get that loved one the help he or she needs. To learn more about how to recognize the warning signs of suicide, consider taking a two hour, no cost course called Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR). In 2018, 888 North Idahoans were trained in QPR.

“We’ve made it easy to request QPR training for your organization, company or group on our website,” said Whalen. “You can also find media training and other resources on the site.”

One of SPAN’s subcommittees is the lethal means task force, which works to promote reducing access to means like guns and opioids when someone is at risk of harming themselves. SPAN committee members attend gun shows, fairs and other community events to spread awareness and have given 100s of gun locks to attendees. Another way SPAN is impacting our community is by organizing a suicide prevention walk. Last year marked the 10th annual walk with over 800 registrants.

Another positive outcome is the North Idaho Opioid Solution Symposium & Prescription Opioid Solutions workgroups. Last year, the first North Idaho Opioid Solution Symposium was organized by PHD and from that the Prescription Opioid Solutions grew. The Symposium launched conversations and partnerships that have formed into four workgroups that make up the Prescription Opioid Solutions. The groups focus on prevention, harm reduction, access to treatment and community resources. All of these efforts work towards the goal of reducing morbidity and mortality associated with local opioid use disorder. People affected by mental illness are twice as likely to abuse drugs or alcohol, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). Research shows that early intervention and identification can minimize the long-term effects of mental disorders.

“The effort being done in these workgroups complements the work that SPAN is doing in our area,” said Whalen. “We are so fortunate to have engaged and hardworking community partners that are working to reduce the number of suicides in North Idaho.”

Everyone has a role in suicide prevention.

If you or someone you know is struggling with suicide, there is help available. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support. 1-800-273-8255. The North Idaho Crisis Center is open 24/7/365 and provides care to men and women at no cost. They can be reached at 208-625-4884 and they accept walk-ins.

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Panhandle Health District provides over 40 different public health programs to families, individuals and organizations in northern Idaho. From food and drinking water safety to health education and disease control, public health services are critical to ensure our community is a safe and healthy place to live, work and play.

The PHD team is made up of nurses, nutritionists, environmental health specialists, health educators and many other dedicated professionals with a common goal to deliver vital public health services.

Panhandle Health District is one of seven health districts in the state of Idaho.