



Panhandle Health District

Healthy People in Healthy Communities

Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Panhandle Health District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Katherine Hoyer

208-415-5108

Hope & Strength Part 3 of 3 Part Series

HAYDEN, ID – After losing her son in 2009, Linda wasn't sure how she was going to continue on with her life. She spoke to a psychiatrist and went to counseling, but she never felt like they understood what she was going through. Linda had lost her son to suicide and was struggling to find anyone else who understood the pain she was suffering through.

"When my husband and I attended our first Survivor Support Group, they knew we were feeling lost, scared, hurt, broken and unsure how to go on or even if we could," said Linda. "Listening to the others that were walking this path and seeing and hearing how they were coping one day, one hour, one minute or one second at a time gave us the courage to put one foot in front of the other."

Ninety percent of people who die by suicide have a mental health disorder at the time of their deaths according to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP). There are evidence-based biological and psychological treatments that can help address the underlying issues that put people at risk for suicide. Depression can be treated both with medications and therapy.

"People can come back from an attempt and lead productive lives," said Claudia Miewald, Kootenai Health's director of behavioral health services. "Many times, we find that if people had been able to reach out to someone, it would have stopped them from attempting, but the stigma often stops them from starting that conversation."

Research from Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health states that nine out of ten people who attempt suicide and survive will *not* go on to die by suicide at a later date. Most people who die by suicide in the U.S. did not make a previous attempt. According to research from the U.S. National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health, almost half of people who try to kill themselves do so impulsively.

"This is why it's so important for all of us to recognize warning signs of suicide in those that are close to us," said Lora Whalen, Panhandle Health District Director and current Suicide Prevention Action Network of North Idaho (SPAN) chair. "If a friend or loved one is at risk, it's ok to ask the question, 'are you considering suicide?'. If you know someone who may be thinking

about suicide, talk to them about temporarily reducing access to lethal means, such as, guns or opioids. These are truly impulsive acts and limiting access to lethal means may prevent a suicide attempt. There is no simple solution, one thing we can all do is educate ourselves on the warning signs and learn about resources to help a loved one in crisis.”

The Idaho Suicide Prevention Hotline (ISPH) was contacted 3,474 times from January to March 2019. People can call, text or chat online and ISPH provides crisis intervention, emotional support, problem solving and referrals to local resources.

In 2018, there were a total of 62,557 emergency department visits in north Idaho, of those, 78 were for suicide attempts. From January to March 2019, emergency departments in north Idaho have seen 16 visits specifically for suicide attempts. The ages of those individuals ranged from 10 years to 92 years. From January to March this year, the average age of a person who died by suicide was 50 years old for females and 58 years old for males. Of the forty-two completed suicides in Kootenai County in 2018, the average age was mid-40s among men and women.

“This affects everyone,” said Whalen. “No one is immune and if you are hurting, we want you to know that there is help available. Mental health is just as important as physical health, and just like we go to the doctor when we are sick, we also need check-ups for our mental wellness.”

According to ISPH, if someone is talking about suicide, isolating or withdrawing themselves, is agitated and sleepless, having nightmares, abusing drugs or alcohol, or struggling with a close relationship they may be at risk of harming themselves. Another way people can become more aware is to take a QPR class. QPR, Question, Persuade, Refer, is the CPR of mental health. People who take the class are taught techniques to recognize if someone may be contemplating suicide. The class educates attendees on what questions to ask, how to persuade someone to seek help and to refer that person to a professional.

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.

