SANTA FE – The New Mexico Department of Health (DOH) Epidemiology and Response Division report provisional data show a small decline in the 2021 rate of suicide among youth, ages 5 to 18 years, compared to the year before.

It is a beginning in a what is expected to be a long-term collaborative effort with the New Mexico Human Services Department and community partners to address a nationwide problem of suicide death rates, which exceed national averages.

“Suicide prevention works. It requires concerted effort of people properly equipped with training and resources. We need to maintain focus on our ongoing efforts to fix New Mexico’s broken mental healthcare system,” Department of Human Services Secretary and Acting Department of Health Secretary David R. Scrase, M.D., said.

Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham has proclaimed September as Suicide Prevention Month to call attention to suicide as a priority among New Mexico’s public health concerns.

The provisional data for ages 5 to 18 come from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a central source for suicide rates nationwide. Final figures from 2021 are expected in mid-to-late fall of this year.

Several factors have likely contributed to the lower child suicide rates including:

Concerted efforts across the state to educate residents about mental health wellness, suicide risk awareness, and training in suicide prevention by the Department of Health's Office of Injury Prevention and Office of School and Adolescent Health.

DOH oversight of the New Mexico Suicide Prevention Coalition, which meets four times a year to network, receive suicide data and trend updates, and to share resources for preventing suicide. This information is then brought back to local communities.

The Coalition has an active Native American Workgroup advocating for services and resources for indigenous populations, including the Honoring Native Life program which provides culturally appropriate suicide prevention assistance to New Mexico's nations, tribes, and pueblos.

Partnerships among the Department of Health, the New Mexico Crisis and Access Line, and the HSD's Behavioral Health Services Division's Behavioral Health Collaborative which included a focus on youth suicide prevention.

DOH-supported efforts by HSD's Behavioral Health Services Division to establish the "988" 3-digit dialing for mental health crises, a part of a larger systems change to improve care for New Mexico residents with mental, behavioral, and substance use challenges.

DOH and HSD have also collaborated on suicide prevention workgroups to secure funding for various projects related to suicide prevention as part of the New Mexico Suicide Prevention Coalition. For example, the coalition's Faith Communities Workgroup has developed a draft Suicide Prevention Resource Guide for Faith Communities with sections by Faith leaders and for congregants that is under review. This group has received a small grant award for design and printing for review prior to publication and dissemination to various religious affiliations.

In addition, the coalition's First Responders Workgroup has secured a grant from a health care organization in the state to offer suicide prevention training across the state to first responders in rural communities. Meanwhile in Taos, the Veterans and Service Members Coalition Workgroup secured a grant to support veterans in their community as well.

DOH is continuing its efforts to partner and collaborate with governmental and non-governmental agencies to reduce New Mexico's rate of suicide among all ages and population groups, recognizing it will take years to reduce suicide rates across all ages.

While youth suicide rates appear to be trending downward, provisional data of adult suicide rates in 2021 are showing an increase from 2020. The extent to which the small increase in suicide rates in New Mexico adults 18 years and older in 2021 compared to 2020 reflect various emotional, physical, and financial costs associated with the pandemic is not clear.

Suicide can be prevented in several ways, including:

People who are having thoughts of suicide feel relief after someone talks with them in a caring way.

People are more likely to feel less depressed, less suicidal, less overwhelmed, and more hopeful after speaking with someone who listens without judgment.

Acknowledging and talking about suicide may reduce rather than increase ideation.

Staff Reports