

The Burden of Suicide in Maine and the US: Background Information

Note for facilitator: This information is provided as background to assist in preparing you for potential questions asked during the Awareness Session.

The Burden of Suicide: United States

- Every 13.3 minutes someone in the United States will die by suicide; more than 39,500 deaths in 2011
- Suicide is the tenth leading cause of death across the lifespan. In the US, a person is more than twice as likely to die by suicide than by homicide.
- In 2009, for the first time, more people in the US died by suicide than by auto accidents.
- 80% of suicides are males, but females are 3 times as likely to attempt suicide.
- The greatest number of suicides occur in working age men; Men aged 40-59 represent 13.5% of the population but represent 31% of the suicides in 2011.
- The highest rates of suicide are among males older than 85.

The Northeast region of the US including New England, has the lowest suicide rates of any region in the US. Within the northeast, Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire have significantly elevated rates that are well above the US average. These are the most rural states in the Northeast with associated isolation and increased access to firearms, both which increase suicide risk.

The Burden of Suicide: Maine

- Suicide is the leading cause of injury death in Maine, exceeding that of auto accidents since 2007.
- Every 1.8 days a person in Maine dies by suicide. Maine saw an average of 196 suicide deaths per year between 2007-2011. Maine has among the highest suicide rates in the Northeast.
- Maine had an average of 23 suicides per year of youth under age 25 between 2007-2011. Suicide is the second leading cause of death in Maine youth 15-34.
- In Maine, an individual is 7-9 times more likely to die by suicide than by homicide, depending on the year.
- Firearms are the most common means of suicide in Maine, though for youth suffocation and firearms are almost equal.

Maine's rate of suicide has increased 16% between 2007-2011, a greater increase than the general increase seen across the US in the same time period (10.3% increase). Most experts point to the economic stresses as causal as well as the aging of the Baby Boom Generation. In New England, Vermont had an even greater increase in suicide rates.

Some other groups that are of increased suicide risk are Native American/Alaskan Natives, especially those under age 45; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered individuals; and active military and veterans. 20% of US suicides occur among military veterans