



DrugFree@WorkPlace

Increase in Suicides and Drug Overdoses

The rate of drug overdose deaths and deaths by suicide in America is growing. Over the past 20 years, the national rate of suicide has risen 33%.

Drug overdoses—now the number one cause of accidental deaths—kill more Americans every year than car crashes. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), more people are also now dying by suicide each year than are being killed in motor vehicle crashes. Many mental health experts believe that a substantial number of opioid overdose deaths are actually suicides.

Widespread anxiety caused by the coronavirus pandemic, economic problems, racial and social unrest, and other stressors, along with easier access to opioids are some of the causes of the recent increase in overdose and suicide deaths in our country. And these “deaths by despair” come at great financial cost to America and American businesses.

The societal price of suicide alone is more than \$70 billion annually. The direct and indirect cost of drug and alcohol abuse is \$1.45 trillion. No wonder, then, that there is an increasing public demand for governmental response to these public health crises.

Preventing Overdose and Suicides

In these difficult times, public education on substance abuse disorders, mental health problems, and suicide are more important than ever.

Suicide and addiction are complex problems, but like most health-related causes of death, there are risk factor indicators that have been identified. People must be taught how to recognize changes in mental health that signal serious risk, and what to do in response.

More than 40 countries, including the USA, have implemented national strategies to prevent suicide. But in order to accomplish

a meaningful decline in the rate of drug addiction and suicides in the U.S., more effective prevention programs must be made available, along with greater support for those at risk.

A Comprehensive, Concerted Effort

When we look at and understand substance abuse and suicide through a public health framework, many solutions become available. The best way to prevent these problems is through a comprehensive approach that includes key elements.

Addiction and suicide prevention information and education can be disseminated through local community-based initiatives in partnership with health systems, school systems, and the workplace. Drug free workplace programs that incorporate a suicide prevention component can be an effective means of reaching a large percentage of the population.

Statistics show that 70% of drug users are employed, and approximately 80% of people who die by suicide are of working age (18 to 65), making the workplace the most cross-cutting system for substance abuse and suicide prevention, intervention, and crisis response.

Workers are a company's most valuable asset, and employees deserve a safe and healthy work environment. Drug overdose and suicide prevention must become health and safety priorities at work. Employers have to take a more proactive role. This is much needed and long overdue.

Employees, supervisors, teachers, healthcare providers, legal and financial consultants, first responders, and probation and parole officers should all be trained in basic first aid and suicide prevention.

Employers' health insurance providers must be educated on the federal requirement (Federal Parity Law) that they cover treatment for mental health and substance abuse disorders at the same level they cover physical illnesses such as cancer and diabetes.

Every patient in primary care should receive a mental health screening and be given addiction and suicide intervention help when needed.

Local government leaders and policymakers need to become aware of these specific, effective strategies that have been proven to reduce substance abuse and suicide, and ensure that they are funded and implemented in their communities.

The news media should be given guidance on safe-reporting strategies, and then be held responsible and accountable for promoting messages of hope and resilience instead of gloom and despair.

As a society, we must move beyond the shame associated with drug/alcohol addiction and suicide attempts, and work to build comprehensive prevention strategies as part of workplace and community health and safety priorities. If we all pledge to engage in these efforts, we can achieve truly drug free workplaces and aspire to zero suicides.

The following information is provided by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities.

Are you or someone you know struggling with thoughts of suicide? Maybe you are afraid of what would happen if you tell someone. What would people think? Would you get taken to a hospital? Would your friend or family member hold a grudge against you?

Suicide is a matter of life and death, and not wanting to seek help can have very bad consequences.

Thankfully, there are a lot of **FREE** and **CONFIDENTIAL** resources that you can access right now, from wherever you are. Help is just a text, chat, or phone call away. Don't hesitate. You have nothing to

lose and everything to gain. Things can get better. Tomorrow can be brighter than today. You are not alone.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

24/7 free and confidential support
Call 1-800-273-8255
suicidepreventionlifeline.org
Lifeline ofrece 24/7, gratuito servicios en español, no es necesario hablar ingles si usted necesita ayuda.

Veterans Crisis Line

Reach caring, qualified responders with the Department of Veterans Affairs
Call 1-800-273-8255 and press 1
veteranscrisisline.net

Crisis Text Line

Text a trained Crisis Counselor for free, 24/7
Text TALK to 741741
crisistextline.org

Trevor Lifeline

Crisis intervention and suicide prevention for LGBTQ people under 25
Call 1-866-488-7386
Text and chat services also available
thetrevorproject.org

Georgia Crisis and Access Line

Telephonic crisis intervention, mobile crisis response, connect to services
Call 1-800-715-4225
Or download the MyGCAL app on your smartphone

To learn more about suicide prevention, visit the DBHDD website at:
<https://dbhdd.georgia.gov/suicide-prevention>.

Or contact Suicide Prevention Director, Walker Tisdale, at:
walker.tisdale@dbhdd.ga.gov.

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