

\$5 Million For Suicide Prevention Program for Historically Underserved Communities!

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Fri 10/7/2022 2:52 PM

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Sent: Thursday, October 6, 2022 12:14 PM

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Subject: Governor Hochul Announces \$5 Million For Suicide Prevention Program for Historically Underserved Communities!



For Immediate Release: 10/6/2022

GOVERNOR KATHY HOCHUL

GOVERNOR HOCHUL ANNOUNCES \$5 MILLION FOR CAPITAL REGION SUICIDE PREVENTION PROGRAM

Capital Connect Aims to Increase Access to Suicide Interventions in Historically Underserved Communities

Office of Mental Health, Department of Labor and Department of Health Collaborate to Reduce Suicides Among Capital Region's At-Risk Populations

Governor Kathy Hochul today announced a \$5 million multi-agency pilot program aimed at reducing suicide among vulnerable groups in Albany, Schenectady, Rensselaer and Saratoga counties. Funded through a grant from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and administered by the state Office of Mental Health, Capital Connect will utilize data from state agencies and local partners to identify at-risk groups for focused prevention efforts in specific areas and industries in the four-county region. New York is one of only six states to receive the grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"While our state's mental health resources are among the best in the nation, we still lose far too many New Yorkers to suicide each year," **Governor Hochul said**. "With a focused approach to prevention, we can better identify groups and industries most at risk and ensure they have access to resources, and this \$5 million grant announced today will help us provide critical support and foster connections among vulnerable individuals throughout the Capital Region."

With the five-year grant, the Office of Mental Health's Suicide Prevention Center of New York has partnered with the state Department of Health and state Department of Labor to identify groups and industries most at-risk for suicide. In addition, the agencies will work with schools, county mental health, juvenile justice, local hospital emergency departments and the area's construction industry to help focus efforts in the four-county area, where suicide attempts and death rates exceed the state average.

The primary goal of Capital Connect is a 10 percent reduction in suicide attempts and deaths among vulnerable groups who have been shown to have disproportionately high rates of suicide attempts. The initiative is part of the Office of Mental Health's larger goal of reducing mental health disparities in historically underserved communities, including communities of color.

Grant-funded activities in Albany, Troy and Schenectady will increase access to evidence-based suicide prevention programs in underserved communities. These activities will complement ongoing efforts initiated by the Office of Mental Health to reduce disparities, including a suicide prevention pilot program in three Black churches in Albany, Harlem and Rochester.

The success of that program helped secure \$1.5 million in funding from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, the largest source of private suicide prevention research in the nation, and allowed the program to expand to 12 additional Black churches. Also, earlier this year, the Office of Mental Health made \$5 million available for suicide prevention programs for underserved populations, including Hispanic/Latino, African American, Asian American, Native American and LGBTQI+ youth and young adults.

The Office of Mental Health utilized surveillance data from the Department of Health to identify two disproportionately affected populations. These groups include adolescents, who have been increasingly treated at emergency departments following suicide attempts, and working-aged men, whose suicide rate is triple that of the general population.

New York State Office of Mental Health Commissioner Dr. Ann Sullivan said, "Research with diverse populations and age groups clearly shows that social connection matters when it comes to our mental well-being. And while there is no one solution to the complex problem of suicide, by working across sectors and using a number of proven strategies supporting healthy social connection, we can make a difference and save lives."

To support adolescents, the Capital Connect program will partner with schools to provide a structured suicide prevention needs assessment, consultation, and a range of training options. The program will also support expanding and refining e-Connect, an innovative program that screens youth on probation and connects them to mental health care treatment and services.

Likewise, grant-funded activities in the cities of Albany, Troy and Schenectady will increase access to services in communities of color. The pilot program will also help test this model before potentially expanding the approach statewide.

The program will also provide training targeting the local construction industry and financially distressed and newly unemployed individuals, both of whom are known to be at elevated risk. Partnerships developed through the program will also help the Office of Mental Health advance its goal of reducing healthcare disparities in historically underserved communities.

New York State Department of Health Commissioner Mary T. Bassett said, "Coping with stress and anxiety due to such things as employment status, housing instability, and personal well-being has all added to more unaddressed mental health problems and, unfortunately, suicides in underserved communities. The Capital Connect program will help reduce inequities in behavioral health services further amplified by COVID-19 and prevent suicides."

New York State Department of Labor Commissioner Roberta Reardon said, "We at NYSDOL are committed to doing everything we can to aid suicide prevention efforts, and a large part of that is identifying who is most at risk. We will continue to work with vulnerable and

underserved communities, including those who are unemployed and underemployed, to ensure they have the resources they need. The well-being of New Yorkers is - and will continue to be - our first priority."

Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer said, "I'm proud to deliver the vital mental health federal funding to support our most vulnerable residents, prevent suicide and save lives. No one should fight the battle against mental illness alone. The pandemic intensified the mental health crisis, and those in the Capital Region struggling need our support now more than ever."

Representative Paul Tonko said, "The COVID-19 pandemic magnified our existing mental health challenges, particularly in children and for those in vulnerable communities. These diseases of despair deserve a response rooted in compassion. As a member of the Mental Health Caucus, I was proud to play a leading role in getting Congress to launch the 988 Lifeline and expand and fund suicide prevention services. I'm grateful to have a committed partner in Governor Hochul in the effort to provide hope to those in our Capital Region and beyond."

Albany County Executive Daniel P. McCoy said, "We are dealing with a mental health crisis in this nation that has only been made worse by the pandemic and economic shutdown. I'm proud of the innovative mental health initiatives that Albany County is spearheading - including our Mobile Crisis Team and ACCORD - but we cannot go at it alone. I'm happy to have a partner in government like Governor Hochul and the State Office of Mental Health who are committed to preventing suicide in the Capital Region. This \$5 million pilot will help us focus more resources on the most vulnerable population and those most at-risk and get them the help they need before it's too late."

Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan said, "I commend Governor Hochul and New York State for funding this pilot program to help reduce suicides across the Capital Region. As we grapple with the impacts of isolation and loss during the pandemic and the every-day challenges of our ever-changing world, this important program will help provide our most vulnerable residents - especially those in historically underserved communities - with the necessary crisis intervention resources."

Troy Mayor Patrick Madden said, "I applaud Governor Hochul for providing valuable resources to address suicide prevention in our neighborhoods. Suicide is a public health problem that impacts our community, but the good news is it is preventable. This funding will support important programming from Lansingburgh to South Troy with a focus on this in our most underserved communities."

Schenectady Mayor Gary McCarthy said, "The use of research and data to identify vulnerable individuals and at-risk groups will increase the efficiency of services and strengthen access to evidence-based programs in historically underserved communities. I thank Governor Hochul for her leadership in launching this multi-agency pilot here in the Capital Region to improve access to mental health services in our community."

Chairman of the Schenectady County Legislature Anthony Jasenski said, "It is always tragic when we lose any member of our community to suicide. We are extremely grateful to Governor Hochul for recognizing that communities need help in addressing this complex issue and providing us the additional resources to do so."

Chairman of the Saratoga County Board of Supervisors Theodore T. Kusnierz, Jr. said, "Mental health and wellness are equally as important as physical health and Saratoga County is committed to offering services to assist those who face such daily challenges. The Capital Connect Program will help promote a healthier community by assisting at-risk populations including our young people suffering from the lingering effects of the pandemic and working-

class men who've also seen an uptick in mental health crises, according to recent studies. These funds will help Saratoga County reduce the stigma surrounding mental health services while assisting those suffering with mental health issues and suicidal thoughts."

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