



SUICIDE PREVENTION AWARENESS MONTH

Our Role in Preventing Suicide

September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, a time for mental health organizations, survivors, allies, and community members unite to promote suicide prevention awareness and spread this important message.

If you, or someone you know, are suicidal please call Crisis Services at 716-834-3131 or you can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (toll-free) at 1-800-273-TALK.

During the pandemic, many people are struggling with mental health issues as they deal with physical distancing, stay-at-home orders, family and financial concerns. Yet, stigma prevents many from seeking help.

According to Jessica Pirro, CEO of Crisis Services, we have a responsibility to our community members to help them find safety, help, and hope. Many people struggle alone and at times this leads to a heightened crisis where thoughts of suicide can occur.

"We know that the fear of talking about suicide can become a barrier. This fear is because of stigma and how the person believes they will be received when sharing these thoughts with others," Pirro said. "The more we talk about mental health being a priority and provide safe and compassionate spaces to do so, the more we reduce stigma and reinforce that seeking help is a strength."

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A study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

reports that one in four young adults in the U.S. considered suicide during the pandemic.

In addition, the study found that 40 percent of American adults experienced mental challenges associated with COVID-19.

We all have experienced crisis moments in our lives.

Some that are threatening our safety and security, others that medically threaten our health and others where the crisis quickly subsides and we see hope ahead. With COVID, we have no end date. This experience has been out of our control and that lack of safety causes fear, anxiety and can overwhelm us more than we can manage.

Pirro explains that Crisis Services has seen an increase in calls because for some, this is the first time this level of fear and anxiety has occurred and is now a norm in our daily living. To be in a perpetual heightened state of concern takes a toll on our mental health and wellbeing.

"I am glad to see services are being used and that our community members feel confident to reach out to our crisis first responders so they don't have to suffer alone," Pirro said. "This increase in service demand is just the beginning of this experience. This is a trauma to our community and it will take time to heal, recover our sense of safety, and build the confidence needed to continue our path of recovery from this pandemic."

Crisis Services administers the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Erie County which works to prevent suicide and suicide attempts by increasing awareness, promoting resiliency and facilitating access to resources.

According to Celia Spacone, Ph.D., coordinator of the Coalition, middle-aged men account for two-thirds of all suicide deaths. Stigma is a significant factor, with men less likely to reach out for help if they are struggling with mental health issues.

Men tend to turn towards self-medication which puts them at risk. Other risks include impulsive behavior, more access

to firearms, and lack of seeking ongoing mental health treatment.

There are several initiatives to encourage men to reach out and get help.

Means Reduction

Conditions like depression, anxiety and substance use problems increase risk for suicide. That risk is greater when a firearm is present in the home.

A new partnership between the *American Foundation for Suicide Prevention* and the National Shooting Sports Foundation, has implemented public education resources for firearms retailers, shooting ranges and the firearms-owning community about suicide prevention and firearms.

Local gun shops and law enforcement agencies will accept guns for temporary storage to remove them from homes or provide firearm locks. Locally, gun locks and prevention information is available at COVID testing sites for individuals who may be experiencing mental health issues related to the pandemic.

"Studies show that half of the people who attempted suicide made the decision to take action within ten minutes," Spacone said.

"It is important that lethal means are not in the home."

Be A Man

Earlier this year, Crisis Services launched the "Be A Man" campaign, which encourages men to tell their stories and talk openly about their mental health struggles.

Buffalo firefighter Daniel Mulovich and men from all walks of life share their stories in the public service commercial and on the *Suicide Prevention Coalition website*.

When launching the campaign Jessica Pirro CEO, Crisis Services, said "We want to reduce stigma, encourage people to reach out for help, but also share the stories of men who lived successfully with their mental health conditions, who have reached out and received the help that they needed."

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Community Awareness and Events

Suicide Prevention Coalition presents gatekeeper training for first responders, health care workers and other individuals who may be encounter individuals in crisis. This one-hour program addresses risk factors, warning signs and how to respond.

According to Spacone, there is a silver lining relating to the current health crisis. It has never been easier to access services as most mental health providers are offering telehealth so you can participate in counseling in your own home.

"During the current health crisis, we encourage individuals to get beyond the stigma and get help," Spacone said.

On September 10, World Suicide Prevention Day, the Flag of Hope will be raised at the Rath Building and will travel to other locations in the community to spread hope and raise awareness. Buildings in Buffalo and Niagara Falls will be lit in yellow to raise awareness of suicide prevention.

The *Out of the Darkness Buffalo Experience* is a fundraising and awareness event to honor those lost to suicide, raise awareness and share hope. The *event* will be held on

September 26 with walkers stopping at Canalside to pick up material and prizes and then completing the walk on their own.

"We all have a role in caring for each other. Being a champion to reduce stigma can help community members from reaching the critical crisis state and the ability to see hope through challenging times," Pirro said. ■

HELP IS AVAILABLE

Buffalo & Erie County: 716-834-3131

24 Hour Addiction Hotline: 716-831-7007

Kids Helpline: 716-834-1144 | 1-877-KIDS-400

24 Hour NYS Domestic & Sexual Violence Hotline:
1-800-942-6906

24 Hour Erie County Domestic Violence Hotline:
716-862-HELP
For Shelter: 716-884-6000

Hearing Impaired?
Use 711 (National Relay Service)

September Events

SEPTEMBER 10

World Suicide Prevention Day

SEPTEMBER 15

People Inc. — Informational Session for Families

SEPTEMBER 26

Out of the Darkness Experience

During these unpredictable times, visit our events page at
LETSTALKSTIGMA.ORG/EVENTS
For information about mental wellness, stigma and self-care.



BECOME A MEMBER OF THE ERIE COUNTY ANTI-STIGMA COALITION

Does your organization, church, temple, or community group want to combine forces with our organization? Do you individually want to engage with us to stop the stigma of mental illness?

Please consider becoming a member of our Coalition by completing our membership form at letstalkstigma.org/support/pledge.

It is going to take a massive community effort to move the needle on stigma, please become a part of the solution. Questions? Please contact Karl Shallowhorn, Chairperson, at kshallowhorn@chcb.net.

A Q&A with EPIC – Every Person Influences Children

EPIC is helping families, schools, and communities raise children to become responsible and successful adults.

Why did your organization become a member of The Anti-Stigma coalition?

EPIC became a member of the Anti-Stigma coalition because we are an organization grounded in inclusivity and support to all.

The stigma of mental health challenges can prevent families from getting the help they need and deserve. Mental health is as important as physical health, and by treating and preventing mental health challenges, we impact a whole family's ability to thrive.

How are people with mental health challenges impacted by stigma?

The pandemic has brought so many challenges to the forefront for parents and children. For many, this may be their first time struggling with mental health, and for others, it has only exacerbated a pre-existing struggle. So many parents may be feeling guilt, that they "should be handling things better" or suppressing their own mental health care to focus on their children. At EPIC, we want these parents – and all parents! – to feel seen, valued and supported.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



What impact is the Campaign having in the community?

The Coalition is such a wonderful resource to Western New York, as we continue to break down the barriers around mental health and truly unite as the City of Good Neighbors.

Parenting has not stopped, so neither have we. Families know that they can continue to count on EPIC for our parenting and family engagement programs, which so many need now more than ever. ■

WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS



Visit letstalkstigma.org/current-members for more information on our current members.

ERIE COUNTY
ANTI-STIGMA
COALITION

Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition Founding Members:

BryLin Behavioral Health System • Children's Mental Health Coalition of Western New York, Inc.
Community Partners of Western New York • Compeer • Crisis Services of Erie County
Erie County Department of Mental Health • Erie County Office for People with Disabilities
Fellows Action Network • Fuerst Consulting Corporation • Jewish Family Service of Buffalo & Erie County
The Mental Health Advocates of WNY • Millennium Collaborative Care • Patrick P. Lee Foundation
Preventionfocus, Inc. • Telesco Creative Group • The Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation