

Adam Crum
Commissioner

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**Department of Health
and Social Services**

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STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CARES Act funding used to support mental health and suicide prevention efforts

Sept. 10, 2020 ANCHORAGE — The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) will distribute \$750,000 of federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on mental health and address associated risk factors for suicide. The funds will provide direct support to Alaska’s communities and behavioral health providers as they respond to increased mental health needs that have arisen due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We have not seen a significant increase in suicide rates so far this year, but we know that suicide is a leading cause of death for young people in Alaska and our annual suicide rate continues to be much higher than the national rate,” said DHSS Commissioner Adam Crum. “I thank Governor Dunleavy for his support in approving our use of CARES Act funding to help address risk factors for suicide so that Alaska families won’t have to bear the burden of the loss of their loved ones.”

Through the end of this year, the following strategies will be implemented in response to the mental health challenges Alaskans are facing as a result of the pandemic:

- Providing funding in each region of the state to prevent suicide, substance misuse and mental health stigma associated with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This will support local strategies, assuring familiarity with the needs unique to each region.
- Expanding access to the statewide crisis call center which will include targeted efforts to engage youth and young adults, and connect them with local resources.
- Training behavioral health providers on evidence-based, culturally relevant approaches to treating individuals at risk for suicide.
- Facilitating postvention community planning and training to support healing after a suicide and prevent further suicides in the affected community. This strategy focuses on developing a community response plan with people from a variety of disciplines – such as police officers, teachers, tribes, journalists, social workers, faith communities and behavioral health providers – using best practices so no one inadvertently increases the likelihood of someone else taking their life. Each community develops a plan that is specific to the needs and resources within their own communities or regions.

“We recognized the need for more support to individuals and communities given Alaska’s long-standing struggle with high rates of suicide, which is being compounded by the additional stressors from the pandemic,” said Division of Behavioral Health Director Gennifer Moreau. “But we also know Alaskans are resilient and that if we support one another, these strategies can provide the help we all need to get through this together.”

The week of Sept. 6-12, 2020 is [National Suicide Prevention Week](#) which occurs each year during [National Suicide Prevention Month](#). All year long, including the month of September, DHSS and Governor Dunleavy are committed to taking actions to improve the lives of Alaskans during these difficult times.

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