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DHHS Using Grant Money to Prevent Youth Suicide

Lincoln, Neb.

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services was notified last week it will receive \$500,000 per year for 3 years to implement best practices to prevent youth suicide.

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Email Address: desk@1011now.com



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“In part, this grant will help us respond to behavioral health needs of children and youth we saw through use of the state’s ‘safe haven’ law last year,” said Scot Adams, director of the DHHS division of behavioral health. “It will complement the activities being put in place by LB 603, which was passed by the Legislature in May, such as the 24-hour helpline and peer support.”

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Nebraska youth ages 15-19. In 2006, Nebraska’s suicide rate for youth ages 10-24 was 11.86 per 100,000 people, exceeding the national rate of 7.14.

Adams said the project will include the entire state, prioritizing high risk groups for intervention activities such as outreach and screening. The groups of particular concern at high risk for suicide in Nebraska are:

- Children and youth involved in multiple systems,
- Minority youth, and
- Youth in transition to adulthood (ages 19-24), especially those who have served in the Global War on Terror and their families.

The project aims to increase general awareness of suicide as a preventable public health problem and produce measurable decreases in Nebraska’s youth suicide rates.

Project goals are to:

- Screen high risk youth,
- Train behavioral health providers to treat youth and young returning veterans at risk for suicide,
- Train intervention specialists to recognize and act on signs of impending suicide,
- Assist emergency rooms in implementing life saving protocols for youth,
- Work with communities to ensure local support is available for young returning veterans and military families.

The grant is from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) within the US Department of Health and Human Services. DHHS will work with the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center and Interchurch Ministries of Nebraska to carry out grant activities and evaluate the project’s progress. The state’s Behavioral Health Regions will receive funding through the grant for prevention activities related to their work with youth and families.