



# W FOREFRONT SUICIDE PREVENTION

Forefront Suicide Prevention, a Center of Excellence at the University of Washington based at the School of Social Work, focuses on reducing suicide by empowering individuals and communities to take sustainable action, championing systemic change and restoring hope.

**S**uicide is among the most pressing public health issues of our time. *Scientific American* recently called the U.S. suicide rate “nothing short of an epidemic,” with one life lost every 11.7 minutes. Washington’s suicide rate is 11 percent higher than the national average, with about 1,300 suicide deaths each year. Suicide in our state disproportionately affects young people, veterans, Eastern Washington residents, Native Americans and middle-aged Caucasian men.

Many suicides are preventable. At Forefront Suicide Prevention, we are translating the research and expertise of leading experts in suicide prevention at the University of Washington into innovative approaches that can save lives. The laws, programs and partnerships we have developed across the state are serving as a national model for bringing suicide prevention and mental health to the forefront of legislative agendas, school curricula and public awareness.

## Forefront is restoring hope with a focus on these key efforts: **SAFER HOMES, SUICIDE AWARE CAMPAIGN**

More than half of all suicides involve a firearm, and a fifth of all suicides and suicide attempts involve medications. The Safer Homes, Suicide Aware campaign raises public awareness of suicide and offers people immediate steps they can take to make their homes safer. Research has shown that a temporary barrier between a person in crisis and a chosen means of suicide can be lifesaving.

Our trained peer volunteers engage attendees at gun shows and community events to ask about their firearm and medication storage practices, assess their level of awareness about suicide prevention, and offer free firearm and medication locking devices. The campaign also offers online suicide prevention training for firearm retailers, gun safety instructors, pharmacists and medical professionals and distributes informational materials at gun shops and health care providers across the state.

## CONTACT

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**1<sup>st</sup>** in the U.S.

First state to *require* suicide prevention training for all health and behavioral health professionals



**9**

New suicide prevention bills in Washington state shaped by Forefront advocacy efforts



**29**

High schools developing and implementing sustainable suicide prevention programs



**60**

Washington colleges and universities working to improve their mental health support and suicide prevention efforts



**2,300+**

Lifesaving conversations to increase safe storage of medications and firearms and to increase suicide prevention awareness



**50,000+**

Professionals and community members statewide trained in suicide prevention awareness

*Our key efforts, continued*

## FOREFRONT IN THE SCHOOLS

On average, our state loses two young people to suicide each week. Rates of youth depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts are at an all-time high and are continuing to rise. Most Washington schools have robust procedures to deal with fires and natural disasters, but they lack training and protocols to respond to mental health crises.

Forefront in the Schools is helping Washington high schools implement a comprehensive approach to mental health promotion and suicide prevention, including training for teachers, school counselors, students and parents; customized crisis plans; supportive linkages to community-based mental health services; and student-led mental health promotion activities.

## SUICIDE PREVENTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The Washington state legislature designated Forefront, in statute, to lead the state's colleges and universities in suicide prevention and mental health promotion. This work involves building a suicide-prevention resource portal that will serve all four-year, two-year, public, private and vocational institutions. An annual conference for participating colleges and universities helps disseminate key approaches and allows campuses to showcase their progress and share experiences.

## POLICY REFORM

Our approach to policy and systems change enlists lawmakers, state agencies, the private sector and community partners in developing and implementing sustainable solutions. Forefront has been instrumental in the passage of nine bills in Washington related to suicide prevention, including the first state law in the nation requiring suicide prevention training for all health and behavioral health providers.

## PUBLIC AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

From advising Facebook on suicide prevention tools to training hockey teams, the Washington State Bar Association, investment firms and Governor Jay Inslee's cabinet, Forefront is reaching diverse audiences with our training and consultation services. We customize our five-step prevention model for each audience to ensure that people understand how to spot signs of suicide risk in their setting and feel prepared to intervene.

We have also developed relationships with journalists across the country to help improve reporting about mental health and suicide. Sensational and inaccurate stories after celebrity suicides can lead to spikes in the suicide rate, while good reporting highlights available resources and explains how support and mental health treatment can restore hope to individuals in crisis.

## JOIN US

We need your support to bolster our innovative programs, ensure their sustainability, evaluate their impact and build on our successes. To learn more about how you can help, please contact **Kristen Morgan**, Forefront's communications and development manager, at [morgank5@uw.edu](mailto:morgank5@uw.edu). *Thank you.*