

PROJECT ZERO  
ADULT SUICIDE  
DEATH REVIEW

CALUMET | OUTAGAMIE | WINNEBAGO

SUMMARY  
REPORT

2022 -  
2025

collaboration



An Initiative of the Northeast Wisconsin Mental Health Connection



# Forward

**Project Zero: Every One Matters**, an adult suicide prevention initiative of the Northeast Wisconsin Mental Health Connection, began in 2020 in response to concerns about increasing rates of suicide in our region. While the suicide rate has been variable over time in the Tri-County region, the rate of increase has slowed over the past 10 years. While this suggests some progress, suicide rates continue to rise, and we have not yet turned the curve. This underscores both the urgency of the issue and the importance of sustained, coordinated prevention efforts across our community.

As we know, suicide is complex. No one single factor is ever responsible for a death by suicide, but rather

the convergence of many factors that persist over time. The same is true for suicide prevention. There are many efforts underway across the Tri-County region, including Project Zero, that are working to slow the rate of increase in suicide deaths and address underlying risk factors. One such effort of Project Zero was the implementation of evidence-based, multidisciplinary adult suicide death review teams in each county. Death review teams work to identify systemic gaps, understand patterns, and develop recommendations to prevent future deaths.

In 2025, the Calumet and Winnebago County Suicide Death Review Teams were among the 17 Suicide Death Review Teams that



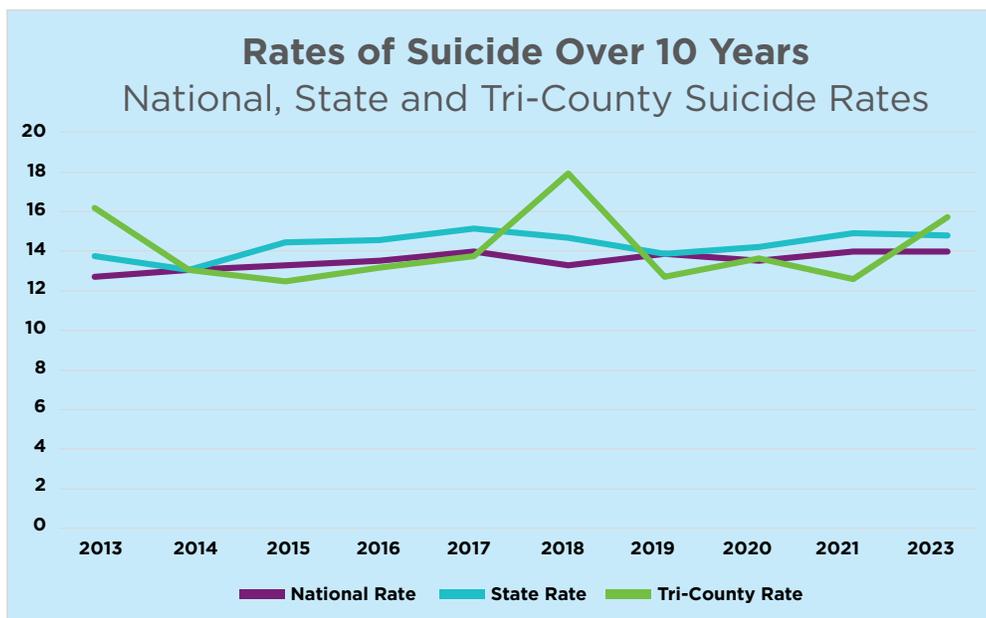
exist in Wisconsin, guided by the Suicide Fatality Review Manual developed by the Medical College of Wisconsin.

In this report, you will find local suicide data as well as the suicide prevention recommendations that have been generated through this work. You will also learn about Project Zero's Suicide Prevention Action Team, which serves as the action arm of the suicide death

review teams. Through the collaboration of multiple Tri-County organizations and partners, we are targeting local factors for suicide prevention and **working to save lives!**

### Definition of Suicide Rate:

A suicide rate is used to quantify the number of deaths in a population over a specific period of time. It allows for comparison regardless of population, for the frequency of an event. To calculate the rate, we take the number of suicides divided by the total population, then multiply that number by 100,000.



### About the Cover

The sunflower represents hope, resilience, and the light that guides us through dark times. The semicolon (;) is a universal symbol of suicide prevention, reflecting a pause rather than an end — reminding us that every story can continue. Together, these symbols honor those we've lost and affirm our commitment to collaboration, prevention, and healing in our Fox Valley community.



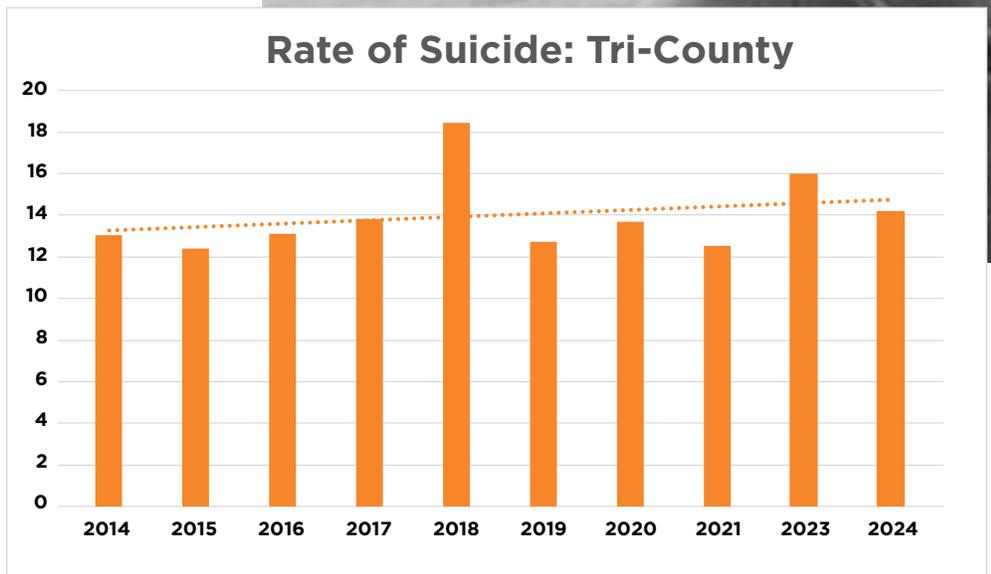
# OUR COMMITMENT

We recognize that each death by suicide is a profound loss that ripples through families, friends, workplaces, and the wider community. Research suggests that a single suicide can directly or indirectly affect up to 135 people. We approach this reality with deep respect and the urgency it requires.

The goal of the Adult Suicide Death Review process is to identify gaps in services, opportunities for systems improvement, and broader patterns in suicide risk factors.\*

## Background: A Tri-County Approach

Suicide remains a leading cause of preventable death and continues to be a critical public health issue in our region. Project Zero focuses on adult suicide prevention and systems-level change to strengthen protective factors and reduce risks for suicide across our community. Partnerships with our local Tri-County coroners/medical examiners office to implement Adult Suicide Death Review (ASDR) teams in each of the three counties of Calumet, Outagamie, and Winnebago, to drive prevention is a critical asset as people often live, work and play across county lines. Gaining access to timely data on suicide losses in our community is crucial for informing prevention efforts.



**The suicide rate in the Fox Valley has increased by 20% from 2014-2024.**

Both the state and national level mortality data is generally two years behind the current calendar year. Because suicide is a relatively rare health outcome, the rate across years is highly variable and even a small shift in the number of suicides a year can show a significant difference in the rate of suicides.

\*For a more detailed look at process and methodology, please refer to the Medical College of Wisconsin's 2023 Manual "Suicide Review Teams: Guiding Principles & Best Practices" Kohlbeck, S., Monroe, P., Kant, J., Bassing-Sutton, S., Klatt, C., Bokhoven, J., Moore, M. (2023) Suicide Review Teams: Guiding Principles & Best Practice [Manual].

## Partnerships

### **An effective Adult Suicide Death Review (ASDR) team** is multidisciplinary by design.

According to Medical College of Wisconsin's Suicide Review Teams: Guiding Principles and Best Practices (2023), some of the core membership should include representatives from medical examiner or coroner offices, law enforcement, emergency medical services, health and human services, hospital systems, public health, social services, and mental health providers. Teams also benefit from the perspectives of suicide prevention advocates and individuals with lived experience. This broad representation ensures that the many systems and sectors that touch a person's life are continuously identifying gaps and barriers to service and the recommendations are grounded in input from those embedded in the systems responsible for their implementation.



## Development of Consistent Data Reporting

The ability to create well-informed suicide prevention recommendations is only as good as the data that informs them. Inconsistent data collection creates barriers to identifying local risk or protective factors and developing meaningful prevention strategies. Recognizing this gap, now retired Winnebago County Public Health Nurse, Teresa Paulus, RN and a data collection team of professionals set out to create a standardized tool to capture specific information regarding suicide risk and protective factors for effective community suicide prevention. This data collection tool has undergone nearly a decade of advocacy and refinement.

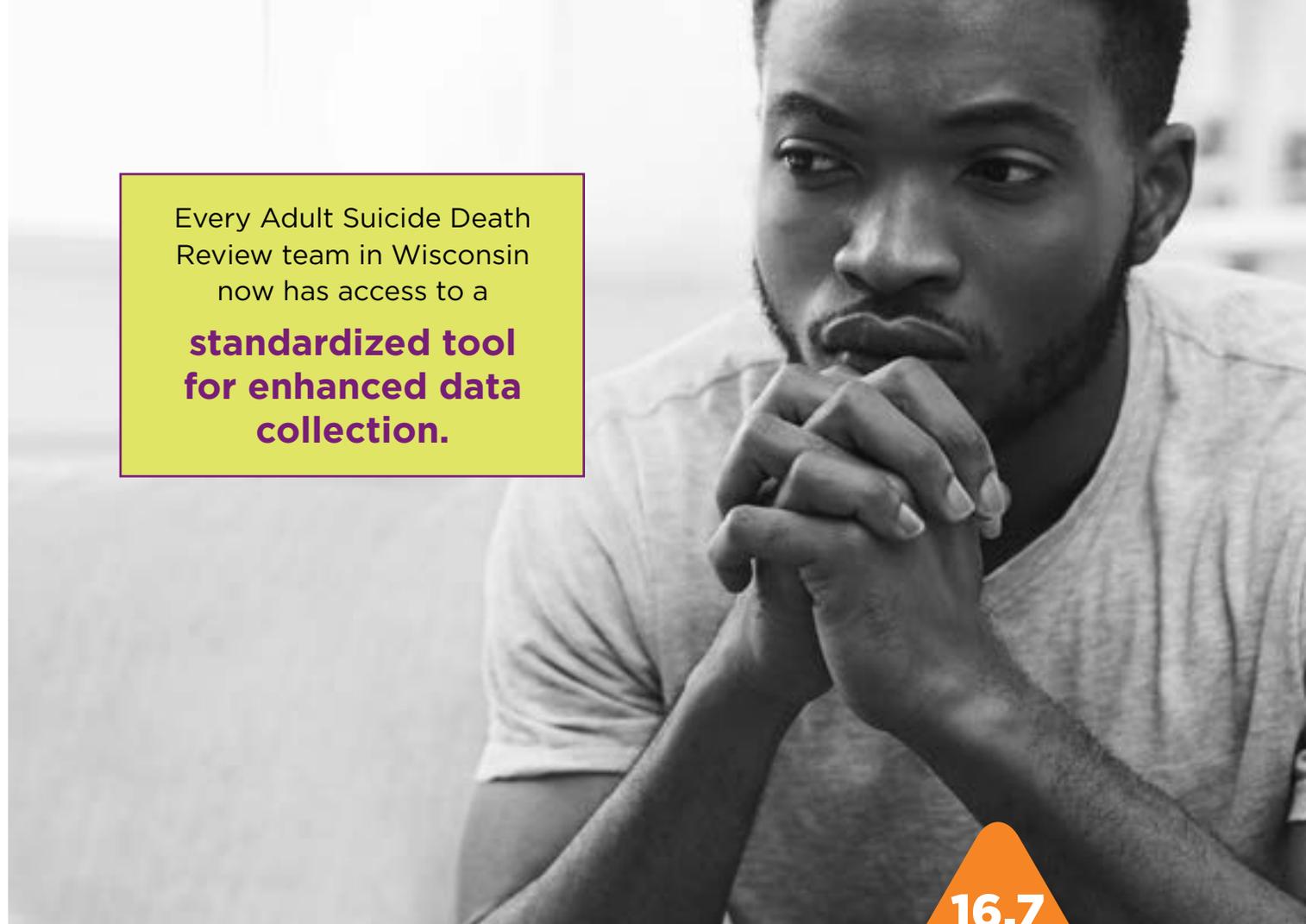
The Winnebago County Medical Examiner's Office, in partnership with the Winnebago County Public Health Department, was the first statewide to use this tool which

### Partners Who Created the Suicide Investigation Form

- Winnebago County Health Department
- N.E.W. Mental Health Connection / Project Zero
- Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin
- Winnebago County Coroner's Office
- Winnebago County Human Services
- Law Enforcement
- Outagamie County Public Health Department
- Calumet County Public Health Department
- Suicide Prevention Organizations:
  - Community for Hope
  - Prevent Suicide Fox Cities

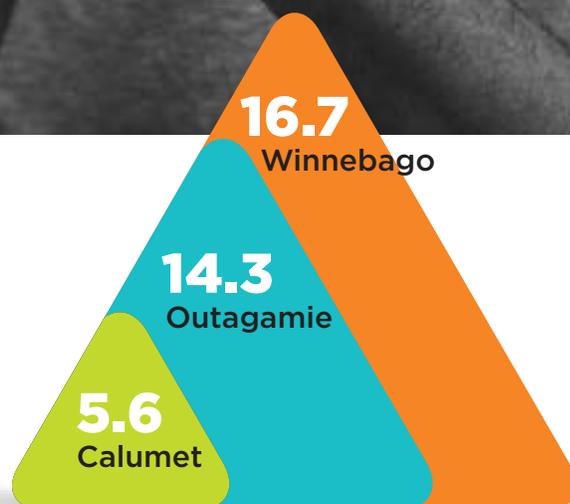
Every Adult Suicide Death Review team in Wisconsin now has access to a

**standardized tool for enhanced data collection.**



has become known as the “Suicide Investigation Form”. This tool was included as a recommendation in the State of Wisconsin 2020 Five-Year Suicide Prevention Plan for improving data collection. Today, it is recognized as the statewide standard and has been incorporated into the Medical College of Wisconsin’s Suicide Review Teams: Guiding Principles and Best Practices (2023), as a best practice for data collection. In addition, the State of Wisconsin 2025 Five-Year Suicide Prevention Plan again includes recommendations related to the importance of standardized data reporting and collection.

Every Adult Suicide Death Review team in Wisconsin now has access to a standardized tool for enhanced data collection.



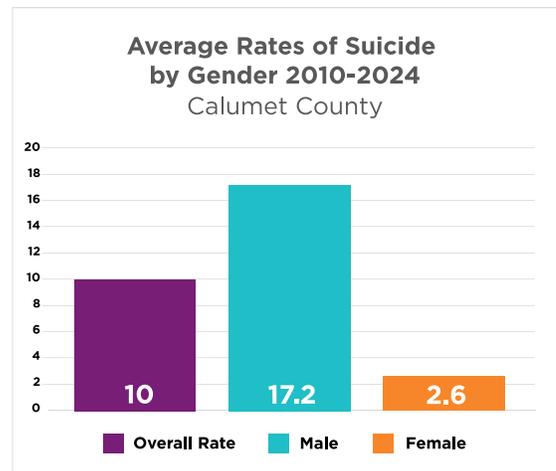
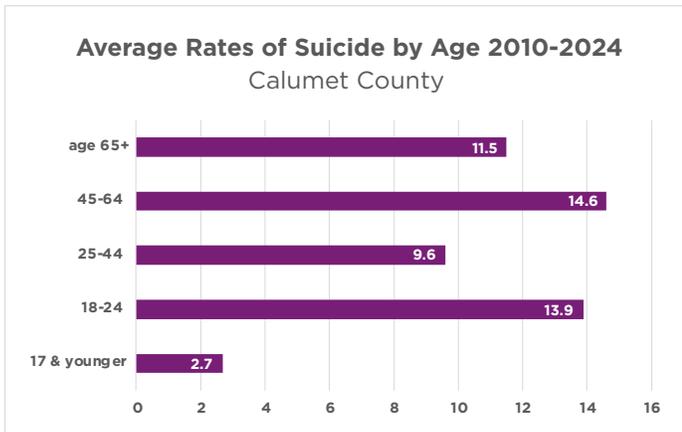
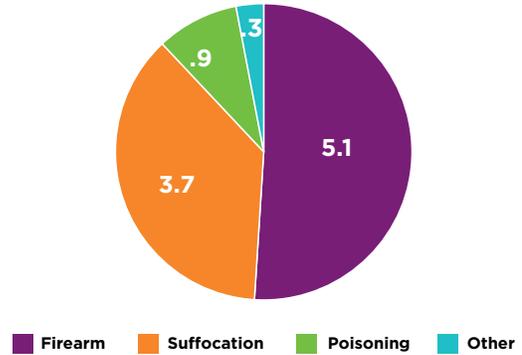
*2024 Rates of Suicide per 100,000 people.*



# CALUMET COUNTY

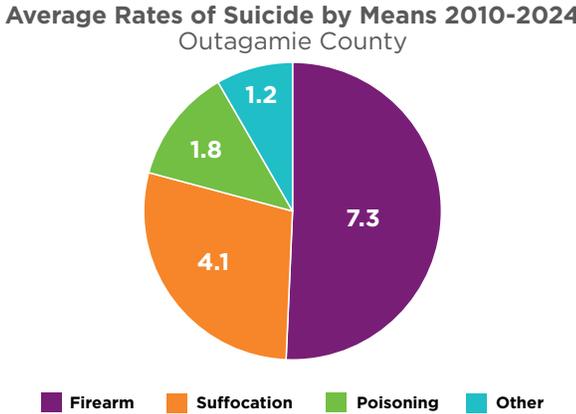
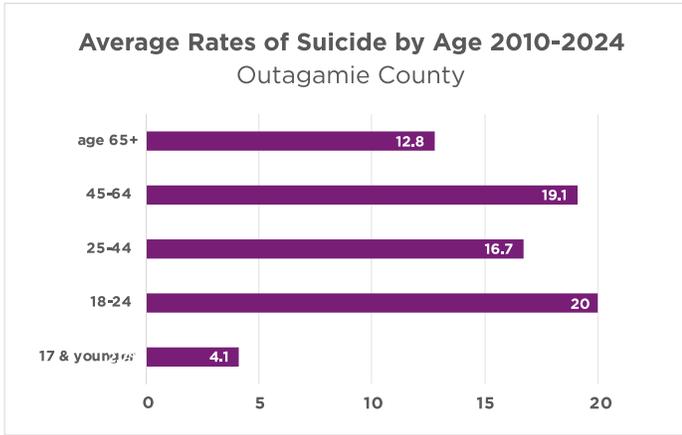
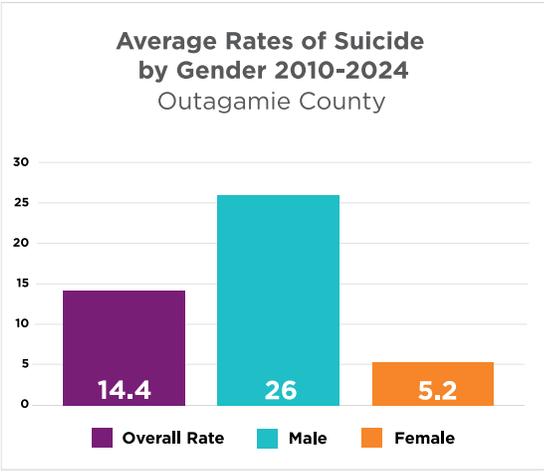
In 2023, The Connection’s Project Zero partnered with Calumet County Public Health and Medical Examiner’s offices to begin annual adult death reviews. Because of the county’s smaller population, suicide and overdose deaths are reviewed together. Unlike larger counties that conduct reviews multiple times each year, Calumet holds one review at the end of each calendar year. These reviews are currently led by Project Zero’s Community Suicide Prevention Coordinator in partnership with Calumet County Public Health Department and the county’s Medical Examiner’s Office. While the data collected is more limited — the Suicide Investigation Form is not yet in use — the reviews still provide an opportunity to look at trends, identify system gaps and consider suicide prevention recommendations. To date, no formal prevention recommendations have been developed, but the foundation for stronger reviews in the future is in place.

**Average Rates of Suicide by Means 2010-2024**  
Calumet County



# OUTAGAMIE COUNTY

Outagamie County has been engaged in the process of building an Adult Suicide Death Review (ASDR) team since 2020. Implementation has been slower due to staff turnover and other organizational changes, but the county has remained committed to exploring this model as an evidence-based best practice to reduce the number of suicides within the county. Outagamie County plans to launch its team in 2026, expanding the reach of suicide fatality reviews across the Tri-County region.



Every death by suicide is a tragedy that sends ripples through families, communities, and systems.

When Adult Suicide Death Review Teams unite to uncover gaps, strengthen connections, and identify systemic opportunities to protect and support every life, we not only honor those we've lost — we take meaningful steps to prevent future tragedies. Suicide prevention is everyone's responsibility."



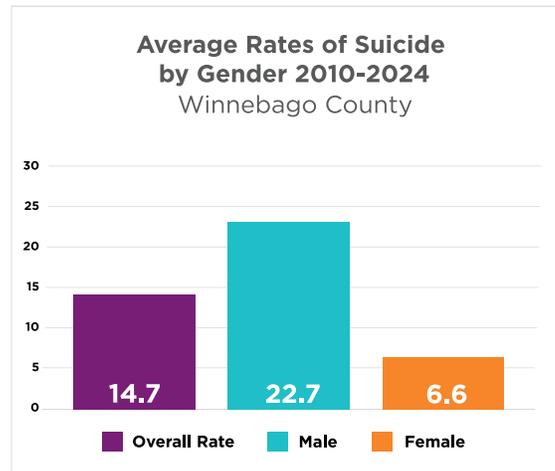
**SARAH BASSING-SUTTON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
N.E.W. MENTAL HEALTH CONNECTION

# WINNEBAGO COUNTY

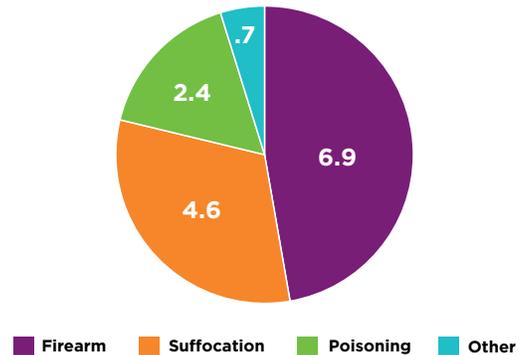
Winnebago County was the first in the region to launch an (ASDR) team. In 2022, the Winnebago County Public Health Department, Project Zero, the Medical College of Wisconsin, and Community for Hope came together to pilot the county's first Adult Suicide Death Review. This early experience underscored the value of the process and revealed the need for broader system participation.

Later in 2022, a full multidisciplinary team was assembled, bringing to the table public health, health care, behavioral health, law enforcement, social services, and community agencies (for full list of partners, see page 9). With more partners engaged, the team began conducting comprehensive system analyses. These multidisciplinary reviews provided deeper insights into the system gaps and opportunities for improvement.

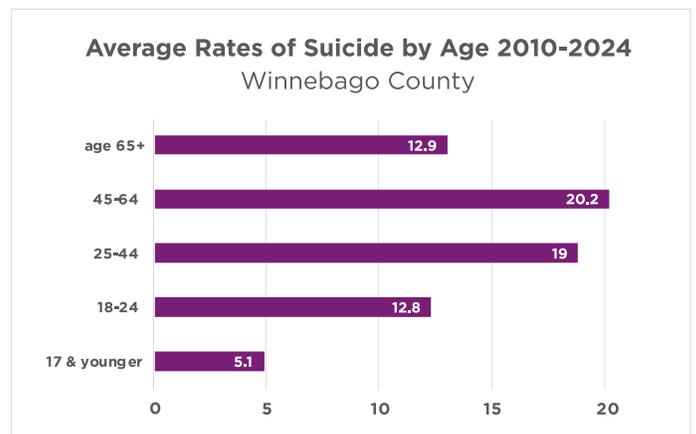
In 2023 and 2024, the team met quarterly and by 2025, had grown in experience and capacity, and began meeting every two months. This evolution reflects how a small pilot has grown into a sustainable, collaborative system for learning and strengthening suicide prevention across the county.



Average Rates of Suicide by Means 2010-2024 Winnebago County



Average Rates of Suicide by Age 2010-2024 Winnebago County



In **2022**

Winnebago County was the first in the region to launch an Adult Suicide Death Review (ASDR) team.

## Summary

Together, these efforts represent important progress toward a unified regional approach to suicide prevention, as individuals in the Tri-County regularly live, work, and play across these county lines. By working together, we can identify opportunities to implement prevention strategies across all three counties.

While each county's path looks different, the shared commitment is the same: to use the knowledge learned to prevent future deaths by suicide. With Winnebago leading the way, Calumet adapting the model to fit its rural context, and Outagamie preparing to launch, the Tri-County is building a comprehensive system for suicide prevention.



CHAMPIONS OF PREVENTION:

## Winnebago County Adult Suicide Death Review Team

Current Winnebago County ASDR partners include:

- Advocate Aurora Medical Center of Oshkosh
- Ascension
- City of Menasha Public Health
- Community for Hope
- Fox Crossing Police Department
- Gold Cross Ambulance
- John H. Bradley Department of Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic
- Medical College of Wisconsin
- Menasha Police Department
- Neenah Police Department
- Northeast Wisconsin Mental Health Connection
- Oshkosh Community Church
- Oshkosh Fire Department-EMS
- Oshkosh Police Department
- ThedaCare
- University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh Police Department
- Victim Crisis Response
- Winnebago County Health Department
- Winnebago County Human Services
- Winnebago County Medical Examiner's Office
- Winnebago County Sheriff's Department

# RECOMMENDATIONS



The Winnebago County Adult Suicide Death Review (ASDR) Team has generated over 60 suicide prevention recommendations since 2022. The Tri-County Suicide Prevention Action (SPA) Team is the action arm of the ASDR team tracking and advancing these recommendations. (See page 12 for more information on the SPA Team).

## Themes

- **Prevention Training** – Expand evidence-based trainings such as Question, Persuade and Refer (QPR), Mental Health First Aid, Youth MHFA, and Emotional CPR for a variety of community audiences.
- **Lethal Means Safety** – Promote secure storage practices; integrate checklists for probation and parole; include suicide warning signs in residential settings.
- **Improved Systems Communication** – Strengthen coordination across justice, health care, and social service systems (example: release of information forms between providers).
- **Education & Awareness** – Provide targeted suicide prevention education for employers, faith leaders, health care providers, and school staff.
- **Postvention Care** – Postvention = Prevention. Ensure consistent follow-up resources for families, peers, and workplaces affected by a suicide loss.
- **Stigma Reduction** – Normalize help-seeking behaviors, promote public campaigns that encourage “reaching in” and out, and use best-practice suicide language.
- **Policy Change** – Address state laws and funding gaps related to mental health access, inpatient bed capacity, and evidence-based best practices for suicide care embedded across systems.
- **Access to Care & Resources** – Expand peer support specialists, wrap-around services, culturally-informed strategies, and continuity of care during care transitions.

Since 2022, over

**60**

### Recommendations

have been generated by  
the Winnebago County  
Suicide Death Review Team



## Prevention Recommendations

The following is a sample of the suicide prevention recommendations along with key findings from data analysis to support the importance of this work. The recommendations have been organized by sector to help promote local action.

*Note: Not all suicides in Winnebago County are reviewed by the ASDR team. The recommendations below are a sample of the recommendations created by the Winnebago County ASDR team. For a complete list, please scan the QR code at right.*



### Healthcare

- Continue to promote Zero Suicide’s framework as the leading evidence-based best practices for suicide prevention within healthcare systems to enhance patient safety and outcomes.
  - Including implementation of the suicide safe care protocols to ensure timely follow-ups between an emergency department visit and next medical appointment for individuals presenting with suicidal ideation.
- Ensure medical staff have the proper training in the administration of screening instruments to support clinical decision making and the early detection of suicide risk.
- Recommend referral for substance use assessment when substance misuse is a repeated part of patient’s history.
- Establish a process for healthcare providers to maintain and annually distribute up-to-date information on community resources and free support groups.

### Employers

- Promote education within the workplace on sleep wellness (as insomnia has been identified as a significant risk factor).
- Provide education for workplace human resources on the importance of providing resources to retirees with social support groups to aid in the transition to retirement.
- Offer education on suicide risk and warning signs for employers of 3rd shift employees, particularly those in the food/beverage industry or jobs with non-livable wages.
- Provide education for employers: Educate Human Resource Departments on mental health resources and referrals.

### Community

- Promote and expand access to Mental Health First Aid and QPR trainings to equip community members with the knowledge and skills to recognize and respond effectively to mental health challenges.
- Implement targeted suicide prevention education initiatives for key community stakeholders, including District Attorney’s offices, employers, faith leaders, and primary care providers.
- Provide assistance in navigating essential services and basic needs systems, including housing, healthcare and food, to promote overall well-being.
- Expand and deepen the role of peer support specialists and community health workers to provide stronger social support for individuals who are not thriving.
- Increase accessible, inclusive and substance-free social opportunities to support resilience, belonging and community health.

## Key Findings from Data Analysis

24% of suicides in Winnebago and Calumet counties were reviewed from 2022-2025. The data below present key findings on local suicides, along with opportunities to save lives and improve systems:

- 63% of decedents saw a healthcare provider within 3 months of their death, 47% saw a provider within 30 days of their death.
- 53% of decedents had problems with sleep and/or insomnia.
- 73% of decedents had substance use challenges, however only 17% of decedents were impaired at time of death.
- 53% of decedents had financial concerns.



## Suicide Prevention Action Team

**The Suicide Prevention Action Team (SPA Team)** is the action arm of suicide death reviews. The SPA team is a Tri-County effort that includes representatives from public health departments, health care and mental health care systems, veterans' services, school districts, identity-based organizations, nonprofits and local suicide prevention groups. The SPA team emerged in 2022 as a reboot of the longstanding Tri-County Zero Suicide Coalition, which was brought to our region by now retired Ascension Director of Behavioral Health Sue Jungen, which dissolved during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2024, the SPA team engaged in a strategic planning process guided by the evidence-based Community Led-Suicide Framework. Through the planning process, several objectives and subcommittees were created including one to review, prioritize, and implement recommendations from the Adult Suicide Death Review teams.

The mission of the Suicide Prevention Action Team is to “Engage Tri-County community suicide prevention stakeholders to create a culture of connection and collaboration to reduce suicides and increase collective knowledge of evidence-based approaches to prevention with a vision of zero suicides in the Tri-County.”

### Mission

### Vision

**The Mission** of the Suicide Prevention Action Team is to “Engage Tri-County community suicide prevention stakeholders to create a culture of connection and collaboration to reduce suicides and increase collective knowledge of evidence-based approaches to prevention.”

**The Vision** is Zero Suicides in the Tri-County.

Through this work, the SPA Team serves as the bridge between the insights gained from suicide death reviews and the community action needed to prevent future tragedies. By combining evidence-based strategies, strong partnerships, and a shared vision of zero suicides, the team is helping drive meaningful change across the Tri-County region.

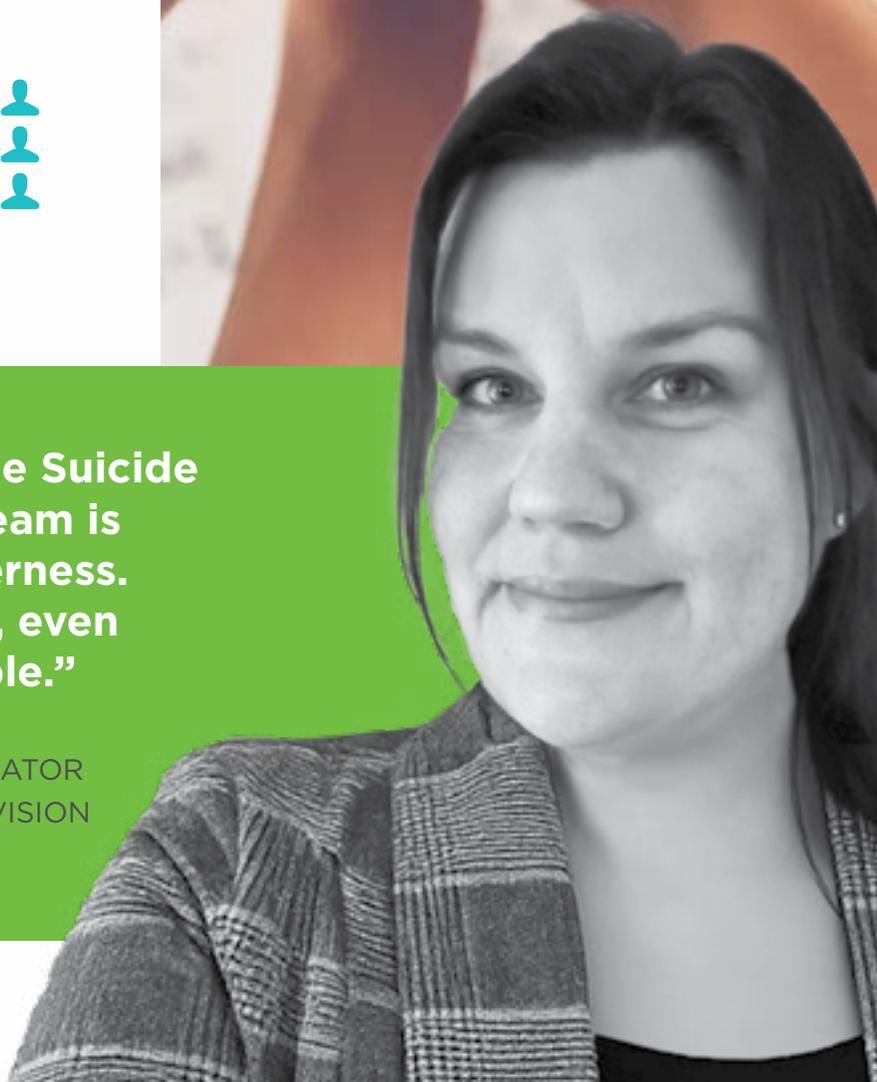


# A Community of Care and Support

Alongside and in collaboration with the Suicide Prevention Action Team, there are many community members and partner agencies working to reduce suicide in our Tri-County region. Just as suicide is not caused by a single factor, suicide prevention requires the work of many to improve the well-being and quality of life for all in our community.

We strive to uplift the important prevention work happening in the Tri-Counties through support and advocacy so that efforts are not duplicated and instead enhanced and made more accessible.

**30**  
Number of SPA  
Team Members



**What I love about the Suicide Prevention Action Team is the sense of togetherness. When we act as one, even the hardest work feels possible.”**

**CARRI CISKE, COMMUNITY HEALTH EDUCATOR  
OUTAGAMIE COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION**

# A CALL TO ACTION

**Suicide prevention is everyone's business and there are many ways to get involved.**

**1. Use the data and recommendations in this report** to guide your own organizations strategies for suicide prevention.

**2. Get involved:** Interested in being more directly involved? Consider joining the Suicide Prevention Action Team. Reach out to the N.E.W. Mental Health Connection to learn more.

**3. Recognizing the risk and warning signs\*:**

## Common Warning Signs

- Feeling unbearable pain
- Death or a recent fascination with death
- Feeling hopeless, worthless, or trapped
- Feeling guilt, shame, or anger
- Feeling like they are a burden to others

## Changes in behavior or mood:

- Recent suicide attempt
- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Losing interest in personal appearance or hygiene

- Withdrawing from family, friends, or community
- Saying goodbye to friends and family
- Giving away prized possessions
- A recent episode of depression, emotional distress, and/or anxiety
- Changes in eating and/or sleeping patterns
- Becoming violent or being a victim of violence
- Expressing rage

## When to Seek Professional Help Immediately



Some behaviors may indicate an emergency is happening or that a person is in crisis. **If you observe the following behaviors, you should immediately connect the person with professional help, such as the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, emergency medical services, or a mental health professional.**

- Talking about immediate harm to oneself or others
- Planning to attempt suicide (for example, searching online for information about how to attempt suicide)
- Acting in such an erratic manner that you are concerned about their safety



\*SOURCE: <https://sprc.org/warning-signs-of-suicide/>

## **Acknowledgments**

*This work would not be possible without the dedication and collaboration of so many partners who have given their time, expertise, and energy to the development of adult suicide fatality review teams and the Suicide Prevention Action Team in our region. We are deeply grateful to the agencies, professionals, and community members who continue to support this effort and share in the vision of preventing suicide and saving lives. In particular, we wish to thank:*

***Winnebago County Public Health, Outagamie Public Health, Calumet Public Health, Winnebago County Medical Examiner, Outagamie Coroner, Calumet Coroner, Medical College of Wisconsin/Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment, Dr. Sara Kohlbeck, Teresa Paulus, Sue Jungen***





A collaborative effort also made possible by:

