



Pennsylvania
Department of Human Services



Pennsylvania
Department of Military
and Veterans Affairs



Pennsylvania
Department of Health

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Shapiro Administration Recognizes Suicide Prevention Month, Discusses Multi-Agency Approach to Strengthen Behavioral Health Supports and Save Lives

*Pennsylvanians can contact the national Suicide and Crisis Lifeline 24/7 by calling or
texting 988*

Harrisburg, PA – Today, **Department of Human Services (DHS) Secretary Dr. Val Arkoosh** joined leaders from multiple state agencies, the Governor’s Advisory Commissions on LGBTQ Affairs and African American Affairs, and suicide prevention advocacy groups, to recognize September as Suicide Prevention Month. Although behavioral health and suicide prevention are important to address year-round, this month provides a dedicated time to offer resources, information, and support to those who have been affected by suicide and honor survivors and lives lost to suicide.

“DHS is proud to work alongside our agency colleagues and suicide prevention organizations to raise awareness about how to get help, reduce stigma, and to offer hope. The Shapiro Administration is working collaboratively on suicide prevention efforts to address the unique behavioral health needs of those we serve, and I encourage any Pennsylvanian to reach out when they need support or they are looking to help a loved one,” said **Secretary Arkoosh**. “When a person dies by suicide, that loss has lasting effects on families, friends, and communities who may grapple with unanswered questions, complex emotions, or fears of being stigmatized or isolated. There is always an opportunity to check in with our loved ones, so they know that people care, their lives matter, and they are not alone.”

Since taking office in January 2023, **Governor Josh Shapiro** has prioritized increasing funding for behavioral health services throughout the Commonwealth. The bipartisan 2024-25 budget built on the previous year’s budget investments by providing an additional \$20 million for county mental health programs, \$5 million for crisis stabilization walk-in centers, with a focus on geographic areas that may not have a center, and continues the \$100 million investment in mental health funding available for K-12 schools. In addition, Governor Shapiro [signed an executive order](#) creating a

Behavioral Health Council to foster collaboration among stakeholders and increase accessibility of behavioral health services across the Commonwealth.

“It may seem difficult to talk about, but preventing deaths from suicide may come down to a single person asking a caring question and then seeking help,” said **Dr. Debra Bogen, Pennsylvania Secretary of Health**. “Don’t be afraid to talk with your loved ones openly about suicide and to offer support and help. Talking about suicide does not increase thoughts of suicide or cause people to act on their thoughts. Acknowledging and talking about suicide lets people know you care.”

Pennsylvania has 12 call centers affiliated with the national Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, which is available 24/7 for free by calling or texting 988. Any Pennsylvanian experiencing a behavioral health crisis or who needs help for a loved one, can contact 988 at any time and be connected to highly trained staff or volunteers who will provide free and confidential support and, if needed, referrals to additional community resources.

Nearly 11,000 calls were made to 988 in Pennsylvania alone in August 2024. More than 90 percent of calls are resolved by call center staff without the assistance of EMS or law enforcement.

“The message today is clear: if you are struggling with your mental health, please reach out for help. You are never alone,” said **Pennsylvania Insurance Department Policy Director Caroline Boehm**. “Access to mental health and substance use disorder services have proven to be a highly effective tool when it comes to suicide prevention, and our Department will continue to prioritize ensuring that insurance companies are covering mental health and substance use disorder benefits in parity with physical benefits. Lives depend on it.”

“Depression or other mental health issues are not a normal part of growing older that we should just accept as part of the aging process. They are often triggered by significant underlying causes that could lead an older adult to take their own life,” said **Secretary of Aging Jason Kavulich**. “Good mental health is crucial to an older adult’s overall well-being, and we all must eliminate any stigma that would deter older adults from seeking support. We encourage any older adult who is experiencing social isolation, loneliness, or depression to contact their local Area Agency on Aging, call 988, or talk with a loved one or friend to get connected to the help they need.”

“The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs recognizes that we cannot raise awareness of veteran suicide alone. We are grateful for all our community partners who work tirelessly every day to improve the lives of veterans and help to keep them safe,” said **Maj. Gen. Mark Schindler, Pennsylvania’s adjutant general and head of the DMVA**. “Together, we have the power to raise awareness, share valuable information, and ultimately, save lives.”

[Veterans and service members](#) can contact 988 to receive resources tailored specifically to them and their behavioral health needs. In addition, [988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org) offers information for a variety of audiences who need help for themselves or a loved one, including young people, members of LGBTQIA+ communities, people with neurodivergence, and more.

If you or a loved one are experiencing a behavioral health crisis, call or text 988 to contact the [Suicide and Crisis Prevention Lifeline](#). Additional ways to contact the Lifeline via chat or American Sign Language are also available at www.988lifeline.org. More information on behavioral health and crisis resources in Pennsylvania is available on [DHS' website](#).

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**Election Day
Nov. 5, 2024**



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