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MENTAL HEALTH

Cayuga County leads NYS in key suicide statistic, but local services improving

1 hr ago 0



The Cayuga County Community Mental Health Center in Auburn.



By David Wilcox

Executive editor

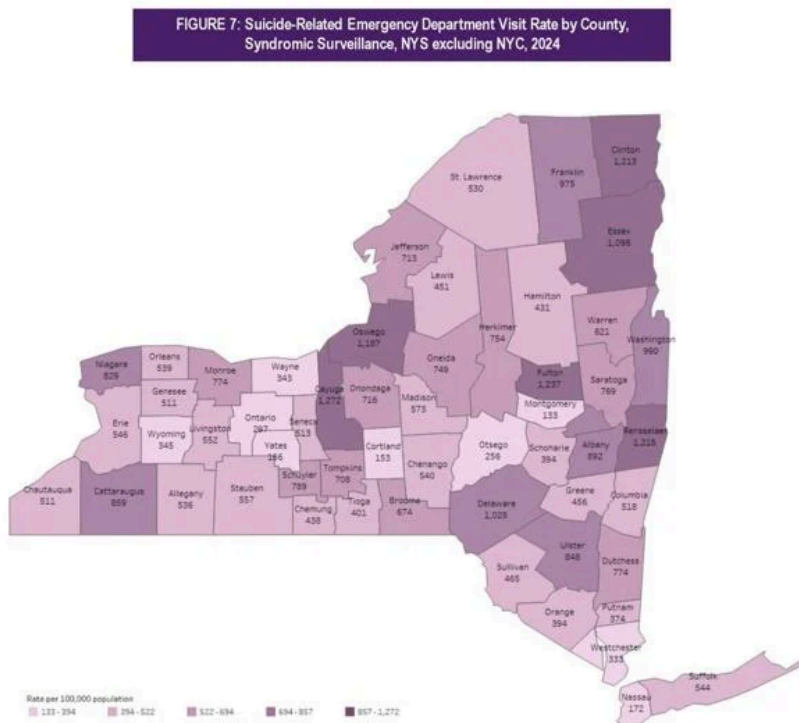


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While a recent statistic might suggest there is a suicide crisis in Cayuga County, other statistics paint a less dire picture and officials say local mental health services are improving after COVID-19.

According to New York State Department of Health data, Cayuga led all counties statewide (not including New York City) in suicide-related emergency room visits in 2024, with 1,272 per 100,000 people.



New York State Department of Health

The data was reported by the Cayuga County Department of Health in its **2025 Community Health Assessment**. The department went on to say the county has failed to meet any state Prevention Agenda goals for mental health. Its suicide rate of

16.9 per 100,000 people is more than double the goal of 6.7, and the 15.1% of local adults experiencing frequent mental distress is over the goal of 12%.

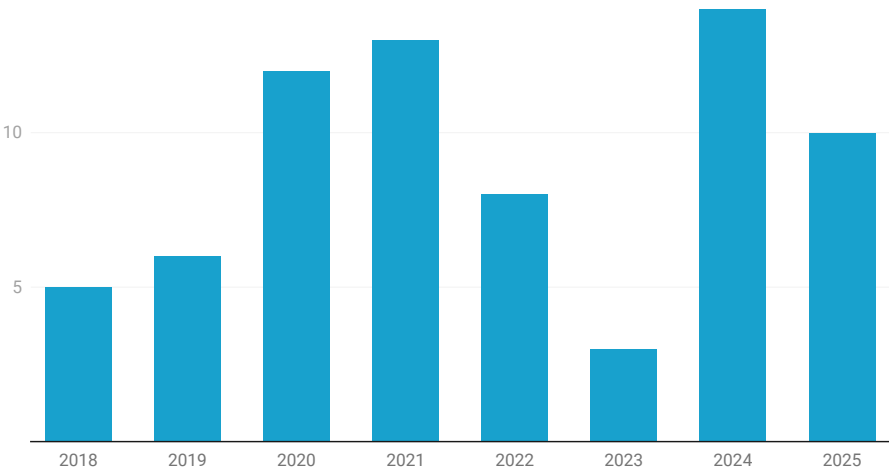
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"Mental health services remain limited due to multiple barriers including provider shortages as well as a persisting stigma associated with seeking assistance and diagnosis," the department said.

The county's suicide rate, however, is not the highest in the state. According to [2016-2020 data](#) from the state health department, Cayuga's rate of 11.6 over that time was above the average of 9.9 (not including New York City) but below 23 other counties. More recent data, to compare to the 2024 ER visit rate, was not available.

Suicides in Cayuga County, 2018-2025



**For year 2025, with five pending cases with only preliminary findings*

Local suicide data, meanwhile, has been up and down. Cayuga County Coroner Dr. Adam Duckett told The Citizen there were five in 2018 and six in 2019, followed by [pandemic-era spikes](#) of 12 in 2020 and 13 in 2021. They dropped to eight in 2022

and just three in 2023, then spiked again to 14 in 2024. There were 10 last year, with five more pending cases that might not be conclusive for months.

The number of suicide investigations by the Auburn Police Department follows a clearer trajectory, spiking at 245 in 2021 before receding. There were eight-year lows of 152 in 2024 and 159 in 2025.

One possible reason suicide investigations dropped over the last two years is rising awareness of Cayuga County's mobile crisis services.

Lauren Walsh, the county's director of community services, told The Citizen that its daytime team and the after-hours team operated by Liberty Resources have seen more community buy-in lately. Referrals to the teams come from law enforcement, school districts, service providers and the individuals themselves who need help.

"The goal of mobile crisis is to meet people where they're at in the community and safety plan as best as we can," Walsh said.

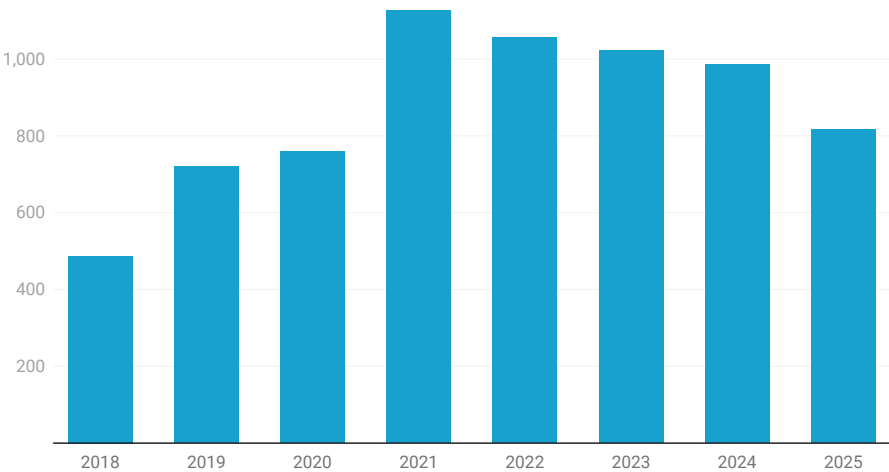
The daytime team made 143 face-to-face visits in 2024 and 215 in 2025, but the percentage of those people who needed a higher level of care at the hospital was just 14% and 7%, respectively.

That made Walsh somewhat surprised by the state's data showing Cayuga had the highest rate of suicide-related ER visits in 2024.

"All of the work we do is to divert people from the ER," she said.

"Making sure services are available so it doesn't rise to that level," she continued. "It's about not having family and kids sit in the ER for hours when there's no guarantee of a person being admitted."

Cayuga County Community Mental Health Center crisis visits, 2018-2025



Crisis visits, which include phone calls and visits to the Community Mental Health Center on North Street, are also receding after reaching highs during the pandemic. They jumped from 720 in 2019 to 1,126 in 2021, but dipped back to 816 last year. Total intakes at the center have followed a similar pattern. It saw 1,267 last year, the lowest number since at least 2018, after years around 1,500.

'It changes people's lives'

Walsh said the **spike in mental health needs** during COVID-19 was particularly challenging because it coincided with a workforce shortage.

The county's center was no exception — but it is back to full strength, she continued, with about 20 therapists and five full-time nurse practitioners. Two recently created openings have already been filled.

The most common services provided at the center are based on cognitive behavioral therapy and dialectical behavioral therapy, Walsh said. Every therapist there is comprehensively trained in the former. It involves a therapist helping someone recognize the relationships between their thoughts, feelings and behaviors that cause them problems — and work on ways to respond to them more constructively.

"It does really work for people," she said. "It changes people's lives."

Staff additionally conducts multiple outreach events a week at places like local schools, where they teach students as young as elementary age everyday life skills in a non-clinical way.

"COVID had a big impact on kids. The isolation took a toll," Walsh said.

"We're talking about treatment but also prevention," she continued. "Sometimes you don't immediately see results because it takes time. It might be years before we see how much that's impacted kids."

The center is working to establish more satellites in local school districts as well, Walsh said, to make transportation less of a barrier for those who need therapy before their situations worsen.

Walsh said one trend staff have noticed in recent years is more complex situations and more cooccurrence with substance use disorders. The county's harm reduction strategies like making Narcan more available have helped the latter, and resulted in **fewer overdose deaths**. But economic factors that influence mental health, like the **availability and affordability of housing**, have worsened.

The stigma of seeking help for mental health continues to be a barrier as well, Walsh said. But she encouraged anyone in need to visit the county's center for services that day, or pick up the phone.

"Nobody needs to wait for a crisis point. A lot of resources are available in our county," she said. "It's a matter of knowing about them and not seeing it as a weakness but a sign of strength."

Local mental health resources

Cayuga County Community Mental Health Center, 146 North St., Auburn: (8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Mondays through Fridays): (315) 253-0341 or mentalhealth@cayugacounty.gov

Daytime mobile crisis (9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Fridays): (315) 253-0341, prompt No. 9

After-hours mobile crisis (5 p.m. to midnight Mondays through Fridays and 6 a.m. to midnight weekends and holidays): (315) 251-0800

Cayuga Counseling Services, 17 E. Genesee St., Auburn: (315) 253-9795, cayugacounseling.org

East Hill Medical Center, 144 Genesee St., Auburn: (315) 253-8477, easthillmedical.com/behavioral

National Alliance on Mental Illness of Cayuga County: (315) 916-3610, namicayuga.org



Gov. Kathy Hochul spoke at Hamburg High School to announce new proposals about student mental health.

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