



## Learning from Loss: Using Suicide Fatality Reviews for Effective Prevention Activities

**The Suicide Prevention Center of New York (SPCNY)** was recently awarded a grant from the New York State Health Foundation to develop, test, and refine a formal in-depth suicide review process in four counties greatly impacted by suicide: Erie, Onondaga, Suffolk, and Westchester. The purpose of the grant is twofold: first, to ensure accurate and complete data collection by medical examiner investigations of suicide deaths; and second, to conduct in-depth community reviews of suicide deaths looking for systemic patterns.

The innovative model being piloted in NY is based on a program successfully implemented in Oregon where a multidisciplinary team of representatives (e.g. the medical examiners team, healthcare providers, law enforcement, crisis workers, clergy, and other community partners) share information during in-depth reviews of suicides after obtaining permission from next of kin. Using this approach, one trend the Oregon review team discovered was that several individuals had dropped off their pets at animal shelters just before dying by suicide. Based on that data, they trained animal shelter staff, who have since been able to intervene in several instances. The county in Oregon where this model has been implemented has seen the number of suicides drop over each of the last three years.

Dr. Jay Carruthers, director of the Suicide Prevention Office at OMH, who is partnering with SPCNY on this grant stated that "the power of this model is that it allows communities to target scarce resources where they can have the most impact in saving lives. Where that is will likely vary by county and what the data show."

SPCNY is working closely with identified Project Coordinators and Suicide Prevention Coalitions from each of these four counties. SPCNY will track systemic patterns at the county level and assist in implementing system wide interventions to address these trends. The project is still in its implementation phase, but based on the pilot results, SPCNY will seek to disseminate this model statewide.

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