

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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TENNESSEE SUICIDE NUMBERS HELD CONSTANT IN 2020

Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network urges continued awareness in pandemic aftershock.

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Tennessee suicide rates and raw numbers held steady in 2020, according to the latest data from the Tennessee Department of Health's Office of Vital Statistics.

The Office of Vital Statistics reported 1,220 suicide deaths in 2020, the exact same number as 2019. Meanwhile, the state's population that year grew by roughly 80,000 people, incurring a slight decline in the overall suicide rate, from 17.9 to 17.7 per 100,000 population. Almost all major age groups monitored by the state (ages 10-24, 35-44, 55-64, and 65 and over) saw a slight decline in suicide deaths, as did the state's Veteran and Black populations.

"These numbers represent the first year without an increase in numbers or rates since 2014," explained Misty Leitsch, Executive Director of the Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network (TSPN). "But this is still too many people. Each one of these 1,220 people is a son, daughter, husband, wife, or friend whose loss permanently grieves all those they left behind."

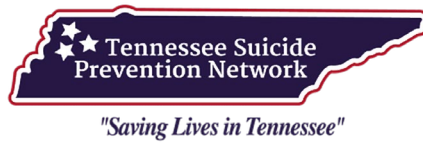
Additionally, the state observed a slight decrease in the number of suicide deaths in April and May of 2020 compared to those months in 2019. "In the first months of the pandemic, people speculated that we would see an immediate increase in suicide deaths," Leitsch said. "The data bears out our earlier prediction that no such increase would materialize, at least not immediately."

"When crises like this strike, people band together to help their neighbors, and they are more aware of the potential for psychological overload. But as the months pass and the headlines become background noise, we may see the development of delayed-onset trauma. The grief of lost loved ones, job losses, underemployment, and the emotional fatigue of wrought by the resurgence of a pandemic many people thought was 'over' may wear people down to their breaking points."

A research study published last year analyzing natural disasters in the United States found that affected counties saw an average 23% increase in suicide rates in the three years following the event. Disaster-related trauma may contribute to depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and substance abuse disorders, all of which could increase a person's suicide risk if not treated.

"We are yet to see the full psycho-emotional ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the world, the nation, and communities here in Tennessee," Leitsch said. "Ultimately it comes down to the resiliency of our support networks—our families, our neighborhoods, and our workplaces. We will also depend more than ever on the mental health, substance abuse, and emergency response agencies that act as safety nets when these other networks fall through."

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If you or a loved one are thinking about suicide, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or text TN to 741-741.

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About the Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network

The Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network (TSPN) is the statewide grassroots public-private organization working to reduce the number of Tennesseans lost to suicide. We pursue our goal of suicide prevention awareness by providing trainings, presentations, resources, literature, and awareness events across the state at no cost.

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