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Social Services | Public Health | Mental Health

news release

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This single question can save a life

Nearly 45,000 people lost their lives to suicide in the United States in 2016, according to new information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Almost 4,300 of those were in California.

The CDC says between 1999 and 2016, suicide rates went up more than 30 percent in half the states across the country. While Humboldt County's rates between 2005 and 2016 stayed steady, they continue to be higher than the state and national average. In 2016, Humboldt's rates were 2.3 times that of California.

"Suicide is a community health problem," said Kris Huschle, a senior health education specialist with the Humboldt County Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS). Huschle added that resources are available.

"Knowing how to help and where people can get help can be lifesaving. We must be proactive versus reactive."

DHHS offers two free suicide prevention trainings that Huschle said are valuable for anyone who wants to learn more about how to help. Mental Health First Aid provides a general overview and basic skills to better identify, understand and respond to mental health and substance use issues.

A second training, Question-Persuade-Refer teaches participants to recognize forms of suicidal communication. Ask the question clearly and directly: "Are you thinking about suicide?" Begin the conversation and then link to community resources.

"A key piece of prevention is getting people trained to recognize the signs of when someone is in distress and how to offer help," Huschle said. "It could be about suicide or not. It's important to listen."

Suicide warning signs can be direct such as a person saying, "I'm going to kill myself," or indirect like, "People would be better off if I was gone." It's important to take all talk of suicide seriously. Other warning signs can include sudden mood changes, withdrawal or giving away possessions. They may also include an increase or decrease in sleep or appetite. A person

thinking about suicide may increase their use of alcohol or other drugs. Signs differ for each person. Most people who die by suicide communicate their distress in some way.

If you are concerned for yourself or someone else, contact the 24-hour Mental Health Crisis Line at 707-445-7715 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255. For a list of resources, visit humboldt.gov/2096/Suicide-Prevention-Resources.

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