The Path Forward
This strategic plan is envisioned to be a starting point for local efforts.
Introduction

Santa Cruz County Suicide Prevention Task Force Strategic Plan

Suicide is a delicate subject, riddled with taboo and shame, and a topic often avoided in discussion. As suicide rates continue to increase, community members often experience feelings of powerlessness and uncertainty as to the path forward toward effective intervention. In September 2018, Santa Cruz County Behavioral Health Services launched the Santa Cruz County Suicide Prevention Task Force with the overarching goal of preventing suicide deaths. The Task Force aimed to develop a strategic plan to identify action steps for our community.

Santa Cruz County currently experiences a suicide death rate that is higher than state and national averages. The state age-adjusted rate per 100,000 people is 10.7, while Santa Cruz County has a rate of 16.4. The goal of the Suicide Prevention Task Force is to focus our efforts on identification, research, and review of models within three specific realms of prevention, intervention, and postvention to affect change within the community.

The Task Force includes members of the community, health care organizations, local law enforcement, the faith-based community, contracted behavioral health agencies, community peer support services, local school personnel, hospice services, County Public Health, veteran advocates, and others. The Task Force is co-chaired by statewide suicide prevention expert Noah Whitaker, who brought a breadth of experience, having been directly responsible in the creation of highly regarded suicide prevention efforts in Tulare and Kings Counties and more recently in the great work accomplished with the Fresno County Suicide Prevention Collaborative.

The attached plan contains information based on in-depth monthly Task Force meetings, community key informant surveys, and stakeholder feedback to provide a strategic direction for our county to approach, prevent, respond, and understand the actions and behaviors that lead to suicidal thoughts and actions. The purpose of this document is to provide a framework for the county-wide suicide prevention plan and the future of those goals. In this plan we offer suggestions of clinical models that we, as a Task Force, have thoroughly discussed and reviewed in the understanding of commitment to sustainability for our community. Many of these models, for example the LOESS (Local Outreach to Suicide Survivors) team, will require long-term commitment to implementation and will happen over time and reiteration. Some of these models, such as community-based service supports, are focused initiatives that can be built upon existing community resources, including, for example, Suicide Prevention Services, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), and Mental Health Client Action Network (MHCAN), thereby creating additional opportunities through existing resources for enhanced clinical understanding and response to suicide within the community.

We hope this plan becomes a starting point and an invitation for continued conversation and growth. We recognize the importance of suicide prevention in our community and take pride in our commitment to the health and well-being of our community.

Cassandra Eslami
Santa Cruz Behavioral Health Services
Co-Chair, Santa Cruz Suicide Prevention Task Force
A Framework For Action

Task Force Values

The Santa Cruz County Suicide Prevention Task Force is composed of community members, representatives from behavioral health, public health, education, law enforcement, community-based organizations, mental health consumers and peers, suicide attempt and loss survivors, family members, and others.

The mission of the Santa Cruz County Suicide Prevention Task Force is to create an initial suicide prevention strategic plan to help coordinate and direct suicide prevention activities throughout the community.

Group objectives included:
1. Adopt a framework to examine strategies relating to suicide prevention before November 10, 2018.
2. Gain a basic understanding of the issue of suicide in Santa Cruz County by January 18, 2019.
3. Review programs, training, interventions, and campaign’s potential adoption by May 15, 2019.
4. Generate a draft strategic plan for community review and input by April 15, 2019.
5. Have the initial strategic plan adopted by the Santa Cruz Mental Health Advisory Board as well as the Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors before June 30, 2019.

During the planning process the task force examined the topic of suicide, adopted goals and objectives for action from the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention, explored data made available by the Santa Cruz County Sheriff’s Department, conducted outreach to gather input and information about local attitudes and opinions on the subject, and worked to establish a unified vision for the future.

The intent of this document is to distill a wide array of complex information into a summary that can be useful for guiding initial implementation and action. The following information is a macro-overview of key concepts and information that helped guide our path toward the creation and adoption of this strategic plan as well as future endeavors.

In our initial meetings, the Task Force established a collective foundation of values to guide how we approached practices/interventions and ensured they would be appropriate for inclusion in the Santa Cruz County suicide prevention plan:

1. Culturally and linguistically appropriate services (CLAS); cultural sensitivity
2. Identify and understand existing resource or similar resource in community
3. Fills a gap/need (general population vs. targeted services); prioritizing populations to serve
4. Accessibility; ease of linking to services
5. Cost-effective
6. Seek subsides/leveraging other resources
7. Long-term sustainability or with understood launch strategy
8. Operationally effective and yield future data
9. Broad-based community representation
10. Broad-based community input
11. Supports infrastructure development; Senior management buy-in

Strategic Areas

Our three strategic areas are:

Prevention: a strategy or approach that reduces the likelihood of risk of onset or delays the onset of adverse health problems, or reduces the harm resulting from conditions or behaviors

Intervention: a strategy or approach that is intended to prevent an outcome or to alter the course of an existing condition

Postvention: a response to and care for individuals affected in the aftermath of a suicide attempt or suicide death. These programs seek to respond to deaths to time additional longitudinal outcomes, and can range from individual to community-wide.

Timeline

To help drive action toward the development of our strategic plan, the Task Force established a brief roadmap to chart our course, commencing in September of 2018.

September: The Task Force convened to create a shared vision, discuss foundational parameters, and engaged in an initial discussion of information relating to suicide and suicide prevention.

October: The group affirmed our values, agreed to mirror the goals of the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention, and continued an informative discussion of information relating to suicide and prevention efforts.

November: Overview of suicide prevention programs by Prevention, Intervention, and Postvention. We identified a subset of selected programs of interest, and prioritized the programs that were desired for more depth in future meetings. Initial discussion of data and limitations.

December: Delved deeper into a handful of programs identified in the November meeting. Entertained brief discussions of these programs and/or local-level programs that are currently underway. Engaged in ongoing discussion of goals and objectives as well as data.

January: Examined in greater depth programs ranging prevention, intervention, and postvention from the November meeting. Discussed which programs fit our established values, goals, and resources, and might be leveraged with existing local-level programs. Began circulation of key informant interview survey.

February: Narrowed the focus of our examination of programs identified in the November meeting. Examined additional data available from local sources. Discussed making recommendations of the selected programs for implementation, tabling, or indefinite postponement. Expanded circulation of key informant interview survey.

March: Revised the narrowed pool of identified programs. Based on final recommendations from the Task Force as to the programs and interventions that are desired for initial implementation to feed directly into the draft suicide prevention strategic plan for community discussion and feedback.

April: Initial draft of the strategic plan circulated for Task Force and stakeholder review and comment at the April 15 Task Force meeting; opened the 30-day public comment period.

May: Continue circulation of draft plan for 30-day public comment period to conclude at the May 31 Santa Cruz County Mental Health Advisory Board meeting. Discuss any emergent needs relating to the strategic plan and focus upon communication efforts. Incorporate any public comment/feedback.

June: Submit the draft plan for potential adoption by the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors. If adopted, encourage additional partners to review and adopt the strategic plan.

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Priority Populations

Suicide is a complex phenomenon. Some populations have an elevated risk compared to the general population. It is therefore important to keep these groups in mind when selecting strategies to ensure representation from these groups, sensitize to their unique cultural needs, and that programs and interventions address their specific needs. In adherence with our CLAS values and existing research on suicide, the following priority populations were identified for consideration:

- LGBTQ
- Older Adults
- Tribal Communities
- Veterans
- Middle-aged White Males
- Trauma-Exposed (such as first-responders)
- Those with a mental illness

To facilitate the selection of specific programs, trainings, communication, and actions, it was helpful to categorize programs into three programmatic areas, including prevention, intervention, and postvention. Across and underlying these three areas is promotion, which is common across all areas of suicide prevention, and offers hope-seeking behaviors, recognizing risk, positive factors, and instruction information on helping others and accessing care.

Prevention: a strategy or approach that reduces the likelihood of risk of onset or delays the onset of adverse health problems, or reduces the harm resulting from conditions or behaviors.

Intervention: a strategy or approach that is intended to prevent an outcome or to alter the course of an existing condition.

Postvention: a response to and care for individuals affected in the aftermath of a suicide attempt or suicide death. These programs seek to respond to deaths to time additional longitudinal outcomes, and can range from individual to community-wide.
The Santa Cruz County Suicide Prevention Task Force has identified immediate and ongoing prioritizes:

- Encourage dissemination and adoption of this strategic plan by local organizations and governing boards.
- Explore opportunities for collaboration and partnership on a regional level.
- Create subcommittees to implement the three recommended, initial programs.
  - Community-based Supportive Services
  - C-SSRS & Safety Planning
  - LOSS Team
- Conduct system mapping around service delivery, capacity, and future growth to better understand strengths, needs, and gaps.
  - Identify local experts who can be leveraged for cost savings.
  - Develop an inventory of all trainers currently in the area who are certified to offer training such as safeTALK, ASIST, QPR, MHFA, as well as additional training capacity and willingness to engage.
  - Leverage established programs and opportunities for enhancement and integration associated with preventing suicide and supporting those who are struggling.
- Create a system for sharing information via existing committees to stimulate a local learning collaborative.
- Encourage the development of a coalition of peer-based service-delivery providers.
- Identify existing local data collection systems and methods for accessing and assessing data as key indicators for suicide prevention efforts.

The Path Forward

This is an initial plan and is not foreseen to be comprehensive or to have fully examined every partnership, resource, opportunity, and obstacle in Santa Cruz County. This strategic plan is envisioned to be a starting point for local efforts. Preventing suicide is a continuous improvement process, as our environment is constantly changing and adapting.

The intent of this plan is to provide a set of guidelines for decision-making and cohesive action, encourage outreach and support from existing activities and partnerships, provide indicators for success, stimulate a vision of increased peer supports, motivate local experts and other community members to engage in critical, important, and specific projects of developing a suicide safer community. It is the hope of the Task Force that many others will see a place for themselves as a partner in this movement.

The 2012 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention

The 2012 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention: Goals and Objectives for Action establishes a baseline from which local goals and objectives can be established. The national strategy proposes four areas for strategic direction, each of which has goals and supporting objectives.

Local-level goals and objectives can directly mirror or be adapted from the National Strategy. This approach helps to bring local efforts into alignment with national priorities and to support those efforts. The strategic directions and associated goals are as follows:

1. Healthy and Empowered Individuals, Families, and Communities
   - Goal 1: Integrate and coordinate suicide prevention activities across multiple sectors and settings.
   - Goal 2: Implement research-informed communication efforts designed to prevent suicide by changing knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.
   - Goal 3: Increase knowledge of the factors that offer protection from suicidal behaviors and that promote wellness and recovery.
   - Goal 4: Promote responsible media reporting of suicide, accurate portrayals of suicide and mental illness in the entertainment industry, and the safety of online content related to suicide.

2. Clinical and Community Preventive Services
   - Goal 5: Develop, implement, and monitor effective programs that promote wellness and prevent suicide and related behaviors.
   - Goal 6: Promote efforts to reduce access to lethal means of suicide among individuals with identified suicide risk.
   - Goal 7: Provide training to community and clinical service providers on the prevention of suicide and related behaviors.

3. Treatment and Support Services
   - Goal 8: Promote suicide prevention as a core component of health care services.
   - Goal 9: Promote and implement effective clinical and professional practices for assessing and treating those identified as being at risk for suicidal behaviors.
   - Goal 10: Provide care and support to individuals affected by suicide deaths and attempts to promote healing and implement community strategies to help prevent further suicides.

4. Surveillance, Research, and Evaluation
   - Goal 11: Increase the timeliness and usefulness of national surveillance systems relevant to suicide prevention and improve the ability to collect, analyze, and use this information for action.
   - Goal 12: Promote and support research on suicide prevention.
   - Goal 13: Evaluate the impact and effectiveness of suicide prevention interventions and systems, and synthesize and disseminate findings.

In addition to the categories listed here, it can be helpful to further categorize for suicide prevention programs into more broad areas identified by RAND Corporation in their Technical Report. This categorization is extremely helpful in framing and prioritizing activities and helps to more simply a plethora of programs.

1. Training on Coping Skills and Self-referral
2. Marketing Campaigns
3. Gatekeeper Trainings
4. Crisis Hotlines
5. Postvention programs
6. Screening Programs
7. Provider training in suicide risk assessment and management
8. Mental Health Interventions
9. Social/Policy Interventions (such as access to care and means restriction)

NOTE

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The Social-Ecological Model

The prevention of suicide necessitates an understanding that suicide includes individual-level and population-level risk and protective factors. Interventions will be more successful when they span multiple layers (e.g., public policy, community, organizational, interpersonal, and individual) to address the determinants of health and outcomes such as the decision to die by suicide. It is therefore valuable to approach this issue through the lens of the Social-Ecological Model (SEM), which explores the relationship between an individual, his/her environment, and the social systems that influence everyday life. We’ll explore this model through the fictitious character Mateo, who in his mid-30s, white, male, identifies as bi-sexual, is single, a high school graduate, has a history of childhood trauma, and was once diagnosed with Bipolar II Disorder three years ago (individual). He has few close friends, as he is new to the area, and he often feels isolated and alone. He has been struggling since his last relative died six months ago. A trusted co-worker and his manager encouraged him to seek counseling services (interpersonal). Luckily, his work has an employee assistance program (EAP) that offers access to mental health counseling and provides paid time off for appointments (organizational). The EAP counselor assisted Mateo in receiving high-quality care and treatment. Even his engagement in services, he might not access them and therefore would receive no benefits from those systems. An additional way to explore the Social-Ecological Model is to view negative outcomes such as suicide, overdose, and violence as being highly visible, such as the tip of an iceberg. There are a host of contributing factors, often hidden beneath the surface, that contributed to those outcomes, including living conditions, social factors, and behavioral health problems. If the underlying contributing factors are not addressed, then the resulting problems will continue to break the surface and result in ongoing negative outcomes such as suicide.

The Social-Ecological Model in conjunction with our values, priority populations, strategic areas, RAND’s conceptual model, and the goals and objectives of the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention created the foundation for the program selection criteria for the Santa Cruz Suicide Prevention Task Force. We examined dozens of programs and discussed the ways in which they could integrate into existing systems, address unique needs and gaps in the community, have the potential to function across multiple environmental layers, are sustainable, and have the potential to have the greatest impact with currently available resources.

This example illustrates that Mateo interacts with numerous environmental layers that influence his individual risk and protective factors. Each layer in his environment also influences other layers, such as the legislation providing for enhanced clinical training and providing easier access to services, both of which supported Mateo in receiving high-quality care and treatment. Even so, if Mateo’s interpersonal relationships and work were not supportive of his engagement in services, he might not access them and therefore would receive no benefits from those systems.

Santa Cruz County

The County of Santa Cruz is beautiful and diverse, with a varied landscape including the redwood-dotted Santa Cruz Mountains, golden flower-covered rural areas, and vast stretches of sandy beaches. This is the epitome of the “sunshine state,” with approximately 300 days of sunny skies per year. The community is located roughly 65 miles south of San Francisco and occupies the north point of Monterey Bay. The county contains four incorporated cities, namely Santa Cruz, Watsonville, Scotts Valley, and Capitola, and additional, smaller unincorporated areas. The population is roughly 276,675 people (2016). The local economy is fueled primarily by technology, agriculture, and tourism. One of the greatest challenges in the community is a disparity between the cost of living and the prevailing wage as supported by the local job market. Although the economy has grown, the largest job growth has come in low-wage, low-skill occupations. This creates a disparity between the average wage and the living wage, and places individuals and families under economic strain.

Examining the distribution of age in Santa Cruz County compared to the state and nation reveals some slight difference. Santa Cruz and California both have a dramatically higher proportion of youth aged 17 and younger as compared to the nation. Of note, Santa Cruz also differs from the state in young adults aged 18 to 24 but lags the US average in that age group. Santa Cruz is nearly identical to national averages for adults aged 25 to 44, 45 to 54, and those aged 60 to 64.

Data for race and Hispanic-origin reveals that Santa Cruz has unique characteristics when compared to California and the nation. Santa Cruz is near national averages for White (not Hispanic or Latino) (57.2% and 60.7% respectively), but it is overrepresented in that population when compared to the state (37.2%). This difference is due primarily to Santa Cruz’s having a slightly lower Hispanic or Latino population and larger differences in Asian and Black populations. Santa Cruz and California have much higher Hispanic or Latino (33.9% and 31.1% respectively) representation than the national average (18.3%).

Suicide & Santa Cruz County

Suicide is a public health problem that has been growing in significance in the US. The impact of suicide is diverse and far-reaching, as it affects intimate relationships, families, coworkers, schools, and work environments, and can ripple across generations.

Age-Adjusted Suicide Rate by State, 2017

Santa Cruz County

The age-adjusted suicide rate for all states shows a pattern in which rural states tend to have higher rates of suicide when compared to more urban states.
Suicide & Santa Cruz County

Suicide

United States

From 2014-2016, Santa Cruz averaged 45.7 suicide deaths per year, with a crude death rate of 16.6 per 100,000 and an age-adjusted death rate of 16.3. The suicide rate for the entire US was 13.9, with California having an age-adjusted death rate of 10.4. The suicide rate for Santa Cruz is above both state and national averages. By comparison, during the same time period, Santa Cruz averaged 7.7 homicides, with a crude death rate of 2.8 and an age-adjusted death rate of 2.7. This indicates that Santa Cruz experienced nearly six suicides per homicide, whereas in the United States there were 44,965 suicide deaths with a rate of 13.9 per 100,000 and 19,362 homicides with a rate of 6.9, with an age-adjusted rate of 6.1 or 2.3 suicides per homicide.

NOTE

Suicides

Santa Cruz

In California, as with the national trend, suicide rates have been increasing since 1999. Despite this, California’s suicide rates have been consistently lower than the national average since 1993. California’s suicide rates continue to rank as one of the lower states. This effect might be moderated by an increased access to care, lower access to highly lethal means, and additional population-specific characteristics.

NOTE
Comparing the distribution of suicides by age in 2017 across Santa Cruz, California, and the US shows slight differences. Santa Cruz experienced 50% of its suicide deaths among those aged 45 to 64, compared to 34.76% for California and 35.07% for the US. By contrast, Santa Cruz had a reduced volume of deaths among those aged 25 to 44, with 22.73% of deaths compared to California’s 30.91% and the US’s 32.40%.

By examining the annual distribution of deaths by age, it helps to further reveal the year-by-year fluctuation that takes place within the community. This can make evaluation work challenging when targeting specific age groups.

California experiences fluctuations in suicides by age year-by-year but tends to have a more moderated fluctuation due to population size. Of note, both California and Santa Cruz experience the most deaths in the 45–64 age group.

Another indicator of suicide risk in the community is emergency department visits for self-inflicted injuries with suicidal intent. It is interesting to note that suicide deaths had a higher rate of increase than did emergency department visits, which warrants further exploration. Unfortunately, data available via EpiCenter is only available for 2006 to 2014 and does not reveal more recent trends.

The number of emergency department visits for California saw a more pronounced elevation of visits during the same time period. It remains to be examined if there are differences in the lethality or severity of attempts leading to hospital visits in Santa Cruz County as compared to the state or what other variables might be influencing these differences. Additional investigation into these differences might better inform local efforts, such as through the Suicide Prevention Resource Center’s Emergency Department Means Restriction Education program.

Viewing emergency department visits in Santa Cruz County by age and year helps to reveal underlying risk for suicide death via non-completions. This doesn’t reveal any stark shifts on a year-by-year basis but tends to indicate changes in overall volume of visits across ages.

Looking at the change in emergency department visits for suicide attempts across California shows greater annual stability than at the local level and shows sustained annual growth in visits. It is unknown whether those who visited the emergency department for a suicide attempt had multiple visits or subsequently died by suicide.

Hospitalizations show an elevated risk for death compared to emergency department visits, as indicated by a higher level of care. Santa Cruz had year-by-year fluctuation but overall had a slight sustained growth during this time period. Those requiring hospitalization are typically utilizing a more highly lethal means and might be at greater risk for subsequent death. Some communities have follow-up programs to reduce future risk.

California non-fatal hospital visits had substantially larger annual fluctuation compared to Santa Cruz, as well as a sustained decrease in visits.

Non-fatal hospitalizations by age over time shows annual fluctuation in the age of those being hospitalized. The greatest changes are occurring in those aged 25–44, 45–64, and to a lesser extent those aged 15–19. In recent years, there were large declines in visits among those aged 25–44, while there have been increases among those aged 15–19 and 45–64. Similar changes appear to be occurring in state non-fatal suicide attempt hospitalizations.

NOTE

(14) http://followupmatters.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/Follow-up starts here/
Key Informat Survey

The Santa Cruz County Suicide Prevention Task Force developed and distributed an electronic key informant survey from January to March 2019. This survey was first distributed to a targeted list of community stakeholders across law enforcement, education, health care, and mental health service providers and was expanded to include members of the distribution lists of NAMI Santa Cruz and Family Services Agency of the Central Coast for a total of 111 responses. As this was a targeted distribution, the demographics of the respondents are not fully representative of the population of Santa Cruz County. This survey was primarily utilized to gauge perceptions of the issue of suicide, inform the Task Force as to possible service-delivery mechanism, and highlight strengths and weaknesses within the existing system of care.

**Student-Reported Suicidal Ideation**

### Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>California</th>
<th>Santa Cruz</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2013</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th Grade</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th Grade</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Traditional</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-2015</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9th Grade</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th Grade</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Traditional</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*What types of issues do you or other people face regularly in life that make you or them feel suicidal?*

- Financial, cost of living, disparity between income and expenses
- Eating disorders, academic pressures
- Substance abuse, mental illness, depression, anxiety
-PTSD, financial stress, lack of meaningful relationships, isolation
- Fear when someone communicates risk, suicide
- Lack of coordinated services, stigma
- Care for family members, children, friends

*Do you agree with the statement “suicide is preventable”?*

- Yes
- No
- Don’t know

*How does Santa Cruz’s suicide rate compare to state & national rates?*

- Significantly lower
- Lower than average
- Average
- Higher than average
- Significantly higher

*Has the rate of suicide deaths in Santa Cruz County changed over the last 10 years?*

- Decreased
- Increased
- No change

**Student Response:**

- Yes
- No

*NOTE*

- N/A means that data are not available.
Feedback included a belief that suicide is most often preventable if the right systems and supports are in place. A common theme was the need for compassionate welcoming and interaction with representatives of the systems of care. There was an emphasis on learning the signs and symptoms of risk and having access to resources. The factors most often identified for suicide not being preventable were a fixed desire to die, that not all suicides are preventable, critical timing of interventions to assist those in crisis, a strong desire to die overcoming support systems, and that it is crucial to have access to both mental health and substance abuse services.

When asked about training, 43% of respondents were not interested in participating in training on suicide prevention. Among the 47% that were interested, the majority preferred short-duration training offerings of 90 minutes to 4 hours, or 4 hours of training on two separate days. Respondents also preferred training to take place in a community setting or at their organization, with a lower number desiring self-driven learning mechanisms such as self-study or podcasts. There was a sufficiently high desire for online training offers as well.

The majority (84%) of respondents were knowledgeable of one or more resources currently available in Santa Cruz County, with most respondents being familiar with the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Some respondents shared that they either carry this hotline number in a wallet card or similar fashion or could easily locate it via search engine. Availability of licensed mental health clinicians tended to be high, as well as knowledge of support groups. It is interesting to note that while knowledge was high for this resource, respondents reported a preference for mental health counseling above the use of the hotline.

Respondents listed additional services, including: 24-hr. crisis hotline, Suicide Prevention Services through the Family Services Agency, the Crisis Text Line, Telecare, mental health liaisons (Sheriff’s Dept), NAMI Santa Cruz, Community Connection, HoPE services, Santa Cruz County Behavioral Health, Dominican Hospital for assessment, Crisis Intervention Team, MHCAN, the Trevor Project, the Family Acceptance Project, the Access Team, UCSC’s campus health services, Second Story through Encompass Community Services, Mobile Emergency Response Team (MERT), Wings grief support group at Suicide Prevention Services of the Central Coast, QPR training, churches, and Mental Health First Aid training.

Key Informant Demographics
1. Primary language: 100% English.
2. Age: 47.7% aged 60+, 51.2% aged 26-59, 1% aged 16 to 25.
3. Race/Ethnicity: 64.5% declined to answer, 28.2% Caucasian/European, 4.5% Latino, 0.9% East Asian, 0.9% multiethnic.
4. Military status: 73.6% never served, 22.7% declined to answer, 2.7% veterans, 0.9% grew-up military dependent.
5. Sex at birth: 82.6% female, 16.3% male, 1.2% declined to answer.
6. Gender identity: 63.6% female, 23.6% declined to answer, 11.8% male, 0.9% questioning/unsure.
7. Sexual orientation: 56.7% heterosexual, 26.1% declined to answer, 4.5% bisexual, 4.5% homosexual (lesbian or gay), 3.6% questioning, 2.7% queer, 0.9% pansexual.
8. Disabilities: 43.2% no disability, 24.3% declined to answer, 21.6% mental or behavioral health condition, 22.6% chronic health condition or chronic pain, 0.9% physical/mobility, 6.1% other, 0.9% difficulty hearing, 3.6% learning disability.

Format of Training Delivery
Training is currently available in Santa Cruz County through existing programs funded through local Mental Health Services Act funding. This training can be delivered widely throughout the community by partnering with other organizations to host training at the organizations’ sites as well as in natural community settings such as libraries, facilities owned by service clubs, meeting halls, and other public spaces.

Personal preference for services if in need
Respondents listed additional services, including: 24-hr. crisis hotline, Suicide Prevention Services through the Family Services Agency, the Crisis Text Line, Telecare, mental health liaisons (Sheriff’s Dept), NAMI Santa Cruz, Community Connection, HoPE services, Santa Cruz County Behavioral Health, Dominican Hospital for assessment, Crisis Intervention Team, MHCAN, the Trevor Project, the Family Acceptance Project, the Access Team, UCSC’s campus health services, Second Story through Encompass Community Services, Mobile Emergency Response Team (MERT), Wings grief support group at Suicide Prevention Services of the Central Coast, QPR training, churches, and Mental Health First Aid training.

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General Considerations for Future Data Collection

Data is the major driver of sound decision-making and is a core function of ongoing strategic planning. Data places an issue such as suicide in an appropriate context and helps us understand the extent of the local problem. It is essential to develop a consistent framework for data collection, review, and communication. Examining national, state, and local data sets will enable decision-makers to have a better understanding of the risk and protective factors prevalent or lacking in the community. This enables an approach that enriches the understanding of what drives local suicide attempts and completions.

Evaluation of efforts is another key consideration in the area of data. What are the goals of any programs and interventions selected for implementation? A reduction in suicide deaths and completions is the primary goal of suicide prevention efforts, but what are the intermediary goals? An understanding of the existing problem in the community facilitates the identification of desired outcomes for evaluation. However, it is important to recognize that: suicide is a complex phenomenon; a reduction in suicide completions might not take place immediately; and numbers can have significant annual fluctuations due to the size of the population in Santa Cruz.

Each program implemented through this plan should have clearly identified goals that are tied to data measures to gauge the success and impact of those initiatives. However, it is important to note that the rate of suicides in the community can still fluctuate significantly on a year-by-year basis, and the relatively small number of suicides in Santa Cruz County can make statistical analysis challenging. A longitudinal lens should be utilized rather than viewing the success or failure of these efforts on an annual basis. Over time, the rates of suicide can be reduced through consistent and integrated service delivery that spans the levels of the Social-Ecological Model.

Below is a brief listing of aspects of data collection that should be considered. In an ideal world we would have robust data systems that are easily accessible, highly valid, accurate, and actionable. In the real world, data can be difficult or impossible to obtain, time-consuming, and not helpful to the decision-making process. Before pursuing a data set, the value of that information should be weighed, as not all data will be necessary or beneficial. A few key considerations are:

- Who will request the data?
- Who will input it?
- Who will analyze it?
- Who will report it and how?
- How will the data be utilized?
- How do the costs of obtaining data compare to the benefits of having the data?

The tables below provide potential data sources. The identification, development, and utilization of local data is an essential step in local planning efforts. A strength of a diverse collaborative is the potential for the identification of and access to data sources that would be otherwise unknown or inaccessible. It is not necessary for individual-level data to be utilized if aggregate reporting is possible.

### Data Source Details

**Data Source**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hospital (DSHPD)</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Possible to obtain ED/ER visit diagnosis codes (ICD) and supplemental data (E-codes). Coding can indicate self-harm.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Issues to Consider**

- Local hospitals might not submit E-codes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMS (911) / Law Enforcement</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Possible to obtain data reports for suicide attempt data.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Issues to Consider**

- Data may be restricted by state law or local command.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>California Poison Control Center</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calls are received relating to suicide overdoses. Some calls received by individuals asking about lethal dosages.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Issues to Consider**

- Data is only accessible to County Health Officer or designee. Data may be duplicative through multiple sources reporting the same call. High time consumption to review and prepare data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis Response Team</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data including date and time of call, expression of suicidal ideation, and demographics.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Issues to Consider**

- Restricted data. Aggregate reports may be possible depending upon the records management system.

### Ideation (Thoughts)

**Data Source**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suicide Prevention Lifeline</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County-level call data should be available and can be divided by language of calls and veteran status. Data should include date and time of call, crisis center call was routed to, number of calls answered, not answered, busy, and abandoned.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Issues to Consider**

- Can have some underreporting due to cell use and blocked numbers. Data must be requested. Some calls might not be related to suicide but may reflect a broader crisis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis Response Team</th>
<th>Details</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Issues to Consider**

- Restricted data. Aggregate reports may be possible depending upon the records management system.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS)</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) is an anonymous, confidential survey of school climate and safety, student wellness, and youth resiliency. Limited to grades 5, 7, 9, and 11.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Issues to Consider**

- This data source is not currently available in Santa Cruz, as there is no established CHKS Team. Data is limited to what the local response team collects.

### Completions

**Data Source**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County Coroner</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Coroner can be the best source of suicide death data in real-time or on a regular basis. Access to data at the discretion of the S.O. Additional training such as Psychological Autopsy is possible. Record of recorded suicide deaths including age, sex, cause/mechanism, race/ethnicity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Issues to Consider**

- Nationally it is estimated that suicide deaths are underreported by approx. 30%. Single-vehicle accidents, drug overdose, and difficulty determining between accidental/intentional contribute.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>California EpiCenter</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Issues to Consider**

- Data can vary from Coroner’s data due to deaths occurring in other communities or reports circumventing the Coroner’s office. Known underreporting issues.
Prevention

Community-Based Supportive Services

Overview: This is not a specific program but rather an approach to providing necessary services in the community to help increase supports, interventions, access to care, and to reduce risk for suicide. Community-Based Supportive Services are primarily provided by trained professionals and paraprofessionals such as behavioral health providers, educators, law enforcement, medical providers, community-based organizations, jails and prisons (including juvenile justice), inpatient services, and others. These services can and should include peer-based supports such as peer support specialists, peer support groups, and similar resources.

Services in this area can include individual and group counseling, medication, Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), Crisis Intervention Teams, school-based mental health supports, substance abuse support and recovery services, and similar support systems and models.

Purpose: To develop and provide services that address systemic gaps and meet local level needs associated with increased risk for suicide.

Audience: At-risk groups identified in the community. Service population can be universal, selective, or indicated, depending upon the program being developed.

Training: Training is dependent upon the specific programs selected for development and implementation. Training should be strategically linked to other training provided in the community, such as Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR), Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST), and similar training.

Cost: Program costs must be developed during strategic discussion and implementation and are dependent upon available allocations and resources. This can be facilitated through either sole-source agreement, through request for proposal (RFP), or similar processes.

Website: The document provided below outlines specific elements and strategies to develop successful community-based programs, which should also be applied to Community-Based Peer Support programs.

Postvention

Local Outreach to Suicide Survivors (LOSS) Team

Overview: LOSS Teams follow the Active Postvention Model developed by Dr. Frank Campbell, in which trained loss survivors and other trained individuals respond in the aftermath of a suicide death to provide information, linkage, and referral to the newly bereaved. Each LOSS Team tends to have a unique structure that is dependent upon available resources, political will, and local help-providing systems. Some teams are grassroots, and some fall within community-based organizations such as crisis response centers or hospices, while others are housed within governmental entities. The center of LOSS Teams is the inclusion of suicide loss survivors who are often paired with clinicians or paraprofessionals on response. LOSS Teams can engage in active postvention in which they immediately dispatch to an incident scene, or they can be delayed responses that take place days, weeks, months, or even years after a suicide death.

Purpose: Reduce the elapsed time between the experience of a suicide loss to engagement in supportive services, increase positive coping skills to aid in recovery rather than maladaptive coping skills, and provide a network of care and support for the newly bereaved. These teams link the newly bereaved with peer support groups, counseling services, and other coping supports.

Audience: Individuals who have experienced the loss of an individual to suicide.

Training: Initial training called Sudden & Traumatic Loss is available via Campbell & Associates as well as others. Additional training is developed by each team to cover local response protocol with law enforcement and trauma processing, and should include additional training supports such as Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST), Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR), Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), and other models.

Cost: Costs are fully dependent upon the structure of the LOSS Team. Each LOSS Team tends to be uniquely structured, depending upon the availability of resources. Consultation fees depend upon the depth and duration of consulting and training desired. Additional training costs should be considered, such as offering ASIST, MHFA, QPR, CISM, or other training identified as essential to the local team.

Website: http://www.losssteam.com

Selected Program Information

The Santa Cruz County Suicide Prevention Task Force examined more than 35 different programs, training options, communication campaigns, and resources. We utilized the elements set forth in our Strategic Direction to select a subset of 10 initiatives for greater discussion and examination. This process resulted in three program areas across prevention, intervention, and postvention to focus on three initial programmatic areas for community discussion and potential implementation. The tables provided need to be revised in the future as public policy evolves and additional partners, funding streams, and resources become available.

Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS)

Overview: A crucial first step in preventing suicide is to identify people who are most at risk for dying by suicide. In 2012, the FDA made the Columbia–Suicide Severity Rating Scale, also known as the Columbia Protocol, the “gold standard” for measuring suicidal ideation and behavior in clinical trials. It provides definitions and standardized questions to provide a uniform approach to understanding risk. The tool has several versions that are population adapted as well as “community cards” that can facilitate quick initial screening and can lead to interventions and more in-depth assessments by licensed mental/behavioral health care professionals.

The C-SSRS is structured into two sections: suicidal ideation and behavior. The tool examines the types of ideation of increasing severity and then explores the intensity of that ideation. Suicidal behaviors are assessed for actual attempts, interrupted attempts, aborted attempts, and preparatory behavior.

Purpose: Increase the detection of suicidal ideation and behavior across a wide array of individuals and sectors. This screening tool helps to more accurately assess for suicide risk.

Audience: This tool can assist anyone in asking questions about thoughts and behaviors to assess risk for suicide. This tool has been adopted for government health and social services agencies, healthcare, first responders, military, schools, correctional facilities, families, friends, and neighbors.

Training: Available for free online at The Columbia Lighthouse Project website. Training is possible through interactive training modules, pre-recorded webinars, online and downloadable videos, and other formats. In-person training can be offered by anyone competent in the tool. Training should include safety planning.

Cost: Use of the tool is free but costs include printing, staff time, training space, etc.

Website: http://csrcs.columbia.edu

Crisis & Safety Plan or Safety Plan Intervention

Overview: The Safety Plan Intervention was developed by Barbara Stanley, Ph.D., and Gregory K. Brown, Ph.D. To step beyond an assess and refer model to incorporate individuals in planning efforts to reduce and alleviate their own risk for suicide through the development of an individualized safety plan. The Stanley and Brown Safe Plan Intervention is utilized by the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and supported by the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP).

Purpose: Reduce individual risk for suicide using a simple tool to develop a plan of action for current and future suicide risk.

Audience: This tool can be utilized by crisis hotlines, college counseling centers, emergency departments, mental/behavior health systems, veteran support systems, high school counselors, private practices, outpatient clinics, faith-based organizations, and others.

Training: In-person training can be developed or sought. Safety planning is an integral part of other training opportunities, such as Recognizing & Responding to Suicide Risk (RRSR), Accessing and Managing Suicide Risk (AMSR), and others. It is also a core component of Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST), though ASIST utilizes a slightly different model and process.

Training link: http://zerosuicide.sprc.org/sites/zerosuicide.sprc.org/files/sp/course.htm

Cost: Free, though in-person training may come with additional costs.

Website: The links provided below are to resources related to the Safety Plan Intervention.

1. http://suicidesafetyplan.com

Skills Training (ASIST), though ASIST utilizes a slightly different model and process.

Selected Program Information