

HCR 58

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION

Hearing Date: April 13, 2021 9:00 AM

Jan Friese

Texas Counseling Association

AUSTIN, TX

The Texas Counseling Association represents more than 6,000 professional counselors working in an array of settings across Texas. Unfortunately, suicide is becoming another pandemic. The challenges of the COVID 19 pandemic has increased the number of people who have attempted or created suicide plans. Unfortunately, we are also seeing more and more children die by suicide. The study created by HCR 58 will allow Texas to evaluate the most effective strategies for suicide prevention, intervention and post-vention and prepare the Legislative for the adoption of additional strategies to address this horrific tragedy. Please support HCR 58.

Sean Walker

Hogg Foundation for Mental Health

Austin, TX

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish a statewide suicide prevention plan that includes required training for health care professionals.
- Permanently expand telemedicine and telehealth coverage, making services Medicaid reimbursable.
- Increase outreach and educational programming on existing suicide prevention and mental well-being resources. Outreach should target communities at risk, given health disparities that often lead to suicide.
- Require school districts to have plans in place to address suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention, especially in the age of COVID-19 and virtual learning. Mandate that new and existing educators receive reoccurring suicide prevention training to better recognize students at-risk.
- Reduce access to lethal means for individuals experiencing suicide ideation.
- Ban mental health providers from engaging in conversion therapy for LGBTQIA+ youth.

Since 2000, the Texas suicide rate has risen nearly 36 percent. In 2019, suicide was the 11th leading cause of death in Texas, and second for those aged 15-34. In 2017, one in eight high school students in Texas reported attempting suicide. In 2017, the national suicide rate for US military veterans was 1.5 times the rate for non-veteran adults. Rural areas see high suicide rates largely due to: residents' lack of access to mental health services, high rates of gun ownership, and long distances to hospitals which makes it difficult to provide timely medical care. Individuals are particularly at risk of suicide after experiencing reductions in health care access.

Mental health parity laws, which facilitate access to mental health services, can reduce suicide rates. Expanding access to broadband, telemedicine, and telehealth services would provide rural Texans and those with accessibility issues with better access to mental healthcare that could reduce the risk of suicide. Policies should not only increase access to care, but should also include outreach efforts to encourage services to be utilized by historically marginalized populations.

While all suicide attempts have an 8.5 percent death rate, those involving firearms are the number one cause of suicide death and have an 89.6 percent mortality rate. Reducing access to lethal means by individuals who pose a danger to themselves or others is fundamental to decreasing suicide death rates. Policies such as safe storage mandates for firearms, expanded background checks on gun purchases, and extreme risk protection orders that assess for dangerousness, not mental health diagnosis, could help prevent access to lethal means by these people.

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The CDC reported that LGBTQIA+ youth are more likely to seriously consider suicide than heterosexual peers. This is largely due to hostile environments, discrimination, prejudice, denial of civil/human rights, harassment, family rejection, and more. Texas should improve mental health outcomes by banning conversion therapy by mental health providers.