



One of the issues that was a central focus for me during the legislative session was the bill I sponsored to provide funds to the Department of Health to give grants to support mental health and suicide prevention programs. The funding is to address the mental health crisis impacting South Dakota. We must do more to reduce suicide in South Dakota, especially among youth. The bill provided \$2 million for mental health and suicide prevention peer support training, community mental health and suicide prevention data services, and suicide loss response planning and support services. Seeing the bill signed into law by the Governor was a positive step forward in addressing this problem.

This past week, I received an update on the program from Melissa Magstadt, the South Dakota Secretary of Health, including the organizations awarded the first round of grants. The legislation outlined three key areas to direct the funding toward:

- Mental health and suicide prevention peer support training.
- Community mental health and suicide prevention data services.
- Suicide loss response planning and support services.

According to the Secretary of Health, one or more selected organizations will address all three areas of focus.

The following organizations will be our program pioneers:

• **Lost & Found, Sioux Falls** (<https://resilienttoday.org/>) will focus their activities on the post-secondary population. This includes continuing to implement the Peer2Peer Mentoring Program in 5 post-secondary institutions and expanding to 3 additional institutions. This program aims to

reduce the rate of college student suicide deaths and increase student retention by helping students form connections, find community, and develop a sense of belonging on campus. They will also offer the Campus Resilience Index data service to all post-secondary institutions in the State State, which assesses the suicide prevention capacity of college and technical school campuses and their communities, identifies areas of strength in prevention, and recommends programs, policies, or resources that can reduce suicide risk. Finally, they will provide direct support to survivors of suicide loss and consultation and support services to college campuses, workplaces, and other highly exposed community partners to prepare for and respond to suicide loss in South Dakota.

2. **The Helpline Center, Sioux Falls** (<https://www.helplinecenter.org/>), will focus their activities on the K-12 population. This includes the implementation of the Hope Squad, a school-based peer support team, in nine schools across South Dakota. This program seeks to reduce self-destructive behavior and youth suicide by training, building, and creating change in communities. They will also develop a comprehensive toolkit and assist five pilot schools with implementing appropriate postvention strategies to support those affected by suicide and minimize the risk of further harm. Additionally, they will develop a web-based platform that school officials can access for resources, support, and connections.

3. **Mountain Plains Evaluation, Salem** (<https://www.mtplains.com/>) will conduct a comprehensive assessment, compiling and analyzing existing and ongoing epidemiological data related to mortality, suicide ideation, and mental health. They will also identify existing and ongoing local youth survey efforts and other existing data to enhance the understanding of suicide prevalence. This data and information on state and local training and prevention efforts will be compiled to determine suicide prevention capacity across the state.

The first round of contracts will be effective from August 1, 2023, through May 31, 2024. We will initiate a new contract for FY25 beginning June 1, 2024, through May 31, 2025.

In addition, the Department of Social Services also has contracts in place with their community partners to support our collaborative efforts.

I will continue to update you as I learn more about the efforts being put in place to support our state's suicide prevention strategy, especially for youth and young adults. This is an opportunity to do more to help address this mental health care crisis.

I appreciate your continued support as we work together to benefit our state.

I depend on your opinions, questions, and concerns about our State's business. Contact me at Sydney.Davis@sdlegislature.gov.