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## **Reach Out PA: Suicide Prevention Task Force Calls for Removing Stigma and Barriers to Care**

**Harrisburg, PA** – Governor Tom Wolf today announced the initial report of Pennsylvania's [Suicide Prevention Task Force](#) based on the statewide listening sessions held throughout fall 2019. The work of the Suicide Prevention Task Force is a complement to the goals and strategies surrounding the governor's Reach Out PA: Your Mental Health Matters initiative [announced](#) earlier this month and his Executive Order to protect [vulnerable populations](#) signed last year.

“My administration is committed to developing a comprehensive suicide prevention plan that will save precious lives, support people in crisis, and help loved ones of attempt survivors and those we've lost,” Gov. Wolf said. “We've taken a giant first step toward that goal by opening this dialogue with Pennsylvanians across the commonwealth, and I want to thank the members of the Suicide Prevention Task Force for their hard work and all who shared their stories, insights, and experiences at a listening session last year.”

Informed by the testimonies and suggestions of people affected by suicide, mental health professionals, and other stakeholders from across the commonwealth, the report will be used to develop a comprehensive, long-term strategy of significantly reducing the number of suicides in Pennsylvania.

In August, the task force announced a series of 10 public listening sessions to be hosted throughout Pennsylvania. Over the next several months, Pennsylvanians gathered to talk about how suicide has affected their lives and to help inform the task force's draft prevention plan and work to reduce stigma around discussing topics such as mental health and suicide. More than 800 people – community members, state and local officials, representatives from county suicide prevention organizations, and stakeholders from other sectors of government – attended the sessions.

As a direct result of these listening sessions, the Pennsylvania Suicide Prevention Task Force has identified the following key themes to inform the commonwealth's four-year suicide prevention strategy:

- Stigma associated with mental health, suicide and suicide attempts can affect the likelihood of individuals seeking help or continuing treatment, and how policymakers make decisions that affect mental health systems.

- Resources needed to elevate mental health as a public health issue, incentivize the integration of physical and behavioral health, and improve suicide prevention resources at the local level.
- Barriers to treatment such as cost and insurance gaps.
- Access to more detailed suicide and suicide-attempt data to help policymakers make effective, meaningful decisions.
- Issues within the mental-health workforce, such as pay and barriers to entry, to improve quality of care.
- With proper resources, Pennsylvania's schools and educators are uniquely positioned to save lives with suicide prevention strategies and resources.
- The Legislature could take direct action to prevent suicides through the passage of a Red Flag law (to provide a means to remove firearms from someone at risk for suicide) or safe storage requirements for firearms.

“On behalf of the entire task force, we are grateful to everyone who took time to share their stories, experiences, recommendations, or even just showed up to listen and learn themselves. The themes and recommendations outlined in this report give us a clear path forward for actionable ways to support and enhance suicide prevention efforts across the commonwealth,” said Department of Human Services Secretary Teresa Miller. “I truly believe elevating this issue and utilizing this meaningful, collective approach to prevention efforts will save lives across Pennsylvania.”

According to a 2018 report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. In 2017, more than 47,000 individuals died by suicide nationwide. In Pennsylvania alone, 2,023 individuals died by suicide that year.

Gov. Wolf announced the first-of-its-kind statewide task force in [May 2019](#) with the goal of developing a four-year plan to reduce suicide in Pennsylvania. The Task Force is made up of leadership and staff from multiple state agencies, members of the General Assembly, and Prevent Suicide PA. State agencies include the departments of Human Services (DHS), Health (DOH), Corrections (DOC), Aging (PDA), Education (PDE), Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA), Transportation (PennDOT), Agriculture (PDA), Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP), the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD), and the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP). Task Force members brought forth a wide array of knowledge of constituencies they represent or serve professionally, from their own lived experiences as loss survivors or attempt survivors of suicide, or as individuals who experience or support someone facing mental-health challenges.

The task force anticipates releasing a comprehensive four-year statewide suicide prevention plan in the first quarter of 2020 that will be available for a public comment period. Following updates based on public comment, the task force will publish the final 2020-2024 Pennsylvania statewide suicide prevention plan, which will include:

- The landscape and gap analysis of detailed suicide statistics nationwide and in Pennsylvania.
- Guiding principles for suicide prevention in Pennsylvania.
- Goals and objectives to reduce suicide and suicide attempts in Pennsylvania, including reducing stigma associated with suicide, suicide attempts, and mental health challenges.
- Recommendations for local and state policymakers, including public and elected officials, as well as cross-sector partners.

- A structure for the implementation and evaluation of Pennsylvania’s statewide suicide prevention plan.

The task force is represented on the Governor’s Special Council to Reduce Gun Violence and the Reducing Suicide by Firearm workgroup and will continue to provide input on the recommendations included in the Council’s report.

“This is just the beginning, and we will deliberately continue on this path of reducing stigma around mental-health issues and encouraging Pennsylvanians in crisis to seek help when they need it,” Gov. Wolf said. “Everyone’s life has value, and things can and will get better.”

To read the task force’s initial report, [click here](#).

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