



**JIM DESMOND**  
SUPERVISOR, FIFTH DISTRICT  
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

**AGENDA ITEM**

**DATE:** May 23, 2023

**22**

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

**SUBJECT:**

**PREVENTING SUICIDE IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

**OVERVIEW**

Suicide and self-harm are serious public health concerns that affect individuals, families, and communities. In San Diego County, there were 7,630 emergency room discharges and 719 hospitalizations for suicide attempts and self-harm in 2021, with 364 deaths by suicide. These statistics highlight the need for a comprehensive approach to suicide prevention and mental health care services in the community.

Mental health conditions such as depression, bipolar disorder, and anxiety disorders, as well as substance abuse, relationship problems, and life stressors, are among the factors that can contribute to suicidal behavior. The stigma surrounding mental health issues and suicide can make it difficult for individuals to seek help, leading to further isolation and exacerbating their condition.

Veterans, men, young adults, and seniors are especially at risk for suicide. The COVID-19 pandemic has further intensified these risks by disrupting social and community engagement, limiting access to healthcare, and exacerbating feelings of loneliness and isolation. Therefore, the need for mental health and suicide prevention services for the at-risk populations is more important now than ever before. There is a need for comprehensive and evidence-based suicide prevention efforts that are tailored to meet the needs of specific populations.

Today's action recommends a review of all existing suicide prevention efforts by the County, the identification of any gaps in service and underserved populations, and direction to identify and apply for any funding opportunities for suicide and mental health services.

**RECOMENDTIONS SUPERVISOR JIM DESMOND**

1. Direct the CAO to review all existing suicide prevention efforts by the County with a comprehensive overview of existing programs, contracts, campaigns, and any other efforts to prevent suicide in San Diego County.

**SUBJECT: PREVENTING SUICIDE IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

2. Direct the CAO to complete a needs assessment of gaps in services and identify any underserved populations.
3. Direct the CAO to identify and apply for additional funding opportunities for suicide prevention and mental health services.
4. Report back to the Board within 180 days.

**EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

Mental health disorders can affect anyone, but certain groups are disproportionately affected. Individuals who face social and economic disadvantages, such as poverty, unemployment, and housing instability, are at a higher risk of developing mental health conditions. Additionally, individuals who belong to marginalized communities, such as people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and individuals with disabilities, may also face higher rates of mental health disorders due to systemic discrimination, stigma, and lack of access to healthcare. Veterans and individuals who have experienced trauma or abuse are at an increased risk of developing mental health disorders.

**SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

This proposed action contributes to the County of San Diego's Sustainability Goal of protecting the health and well-being of all San Diegan residents.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact associated with this action. There may be future impacts based on recommendations. Any such recommendations would return back for consideration and approval by the Board. Upon return by staff, funding for future costs will need to be identified by the department and will proceed once identified. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

**BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

N/A

**ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT**

N/A

**BACKGROUND**

Suicide and self-harm are serious public health concerns that affect individuals, families, and communities. In San Diego County, there were 7,630 emergency room discharges and 719 hospitalizations for suicide attempts and self-harm in 2021, with 364 deaths by suicide. These statistics highlight the need for a comprehensive approach to suicide prevention and mental health care services in the community.

There are several factors that contribute to suicidal behavior, including mental health conditions, substance abuse, relationship problems, and life stressors. The issue is complex, and it can be difficult for individuals who are struggling with suicidal thoughts or feelings to find the help they

**SUBJECT: PREVENTING SUICIDE IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY (DISTRICTS:  
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need. Furthermore, the impact of suicide extends beyond the individual to their loved ones and the community at large.

Suicidal ideation is often an isolating and stigmatized experience. Veterans, men, young adults, and seniors are especially at-risk. Seniors specifically are suffering due to lower rates of socialization, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. A survey conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that 47% of seniors reported that their mental health had been negatively affected by social distancing and pandemic-related stress. Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental health and well-being of seniors, particularly in terms of increased loneliness and isolation, which are both factors of suicide.

We have come a long way with our suicide prevention and intervention programs in San Diego County such as our Mental Health First Aid initiative and our Suicide Prevention Council which offers trainings like “Question, Persuade, Refer” (QPR) and Creating Opportunities in Preventing and Eliminating Suicide (COPES). It is clear that more needs to be done to address the underlying issues that contribute to suicidal behavior. It is essential for individuals, families, and communities to have open conversations about suicide and mental health to reduce the stigma and promote understanding. By acknowledging the severity of the issue and working together to address the root causes of suicidal behavior, we can make progress towards reducing the number of suicides in San Diego County.

Today’s action recommends a review of all existing suicide prevention by the County, the identification of any gaps in service and underserved populations, and direction to identify and apply for any funding opportunities for suicide and mental health services.

**LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN**

Today’s proposed action supports the Equity (Health) and Community (Quality of Life) Strategic Initiative in the County of San Diego’s 2023-2028 Strategic Plan by helping to ensure safe communities that improve the quality of life for all residents.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Desmond', with a stylized, cursive script.

**JIM DESMOND**  
Supervisor, Fifth District