



# Fact Sheet

7 key answers about  
South County  
Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds

## Zero Suicide

### 1. What is Zero Suicide?

Zero Suicide is an international effort by which healthcare leaders strive to make suicide a “never event”. Patients are actively engaged and supported to talk about suicide and despair. They are also supported to rediscover hope and find ways to survive. Visit <http://zerosuicide.sprc.org/>.

### 2. Why do we need it in South County?

Two reasons. One, Washington County must confront several troubling statistics:

- Washington County has the highest rate of suicide – 13.9 deaths/100,000 people (2015) among Rhode Island’s five counties.
- The rate grew 20% (11.5 deaths/100,000 to 13.9 deaths/100,000) in just two years, from 2013 to 2015.
- Three of the State’s five towns with the highest suicide rates (23.8, 26.6, and 31.8 per 100,000 population) are in Washington County.
- 19 young people between the ages of 10-24 took their lives between 2008-2017.
- Roughly 25% of Washington County’s youth report they felt “sad or hopeless” for at least two weeks in 2017.

Two, as one of the few – if not the only – county-wide Zero Suicide efforts in the nation – we may prove to be a model for both Rhode Island and other regions of the country.

### 3. Isn’t “zero suicide” an impossible goal?

People said the same about eradicating polio, tuberculosis, and smallpox. But we are committed. Targeting zero is a common business practice and is neither controversial or innovative in healthcare. Healthcare organizations are committed to zero medication errors, zero infections, zero surgical mistakes. So why not zero suicides? Could there be a more important goal?

#### 4. What will Zero Suicide in South County look like?

It will have a five-year implementation. Major components will include:

- Work with hospital leaders to establish systems or “clinical pathways” to not only identify and assess suicide risk among all patients receiving care, but provide treatment linkages and follow up to assure identified patients receive the care they need.
- Implement routine depression screening as a regular part of health care... from emergency room settings to primary care offices.
- Increase the confidence and comfort of staff and patients in talking about mental health concerns as a normal part of their health care.
- Train healthcare staff in utilizing evidence-based practices and interventions for use with patients presenting with depression and suicidality.
- Develop protocols for tracking individual and system-level progress and facilitate quality improvements as needed.

#### HEALTHCARE PARTNERS

South County Health  
Yale New Haven Health/  
Westerly Hospital  
Thundermist Health Center  
Wood River Health Services  
Block Island Health Services  
WellOne Primary Medical  
& Dental Care  
URI Health Services  
Gateway Healthcare

#### 5. Who is leading the effort?

Every major health institution in South County has committed to implement Zero Suicide and will be members of our Leadership Team. The Zero Suicide initiative will be led by Project Director Robert Harrison, MD.

#### 6. Will you be including survivors and/or family members who have experienced the pain of suicide or suicide attempts?

No question about it; that’s why our county-wide leadership team will be co-chaired by Dr. Harrison and Cindy Duncan, from Harvest Acres Farm, who lost her daughter to suicide. We believe strongly that our work should be guided by the needs and experiences of attempt and loss survivors.

#### 7. Who will manage Zero Suicide?

South County Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds (HBHM). We are one of the state’s 10 Health Equity Zones working to address health disparities and improve behavioral health outcomes in the region. Visit us at [bodiesminds.org](http://bodiesminds.org) and like us at Facebook. For more information contact Susan Orban, HBHM Director at 401-788-2347 or [sorban@southcountyhealth.org](mailto:sorban@southcountyhealth.org).



SAMHSA provides Zero Suicide funding, with special support from the Rhode Island Congressional delegation. Financial administration by South County Health.

