Youth Suicide in NC:
A Critical Public Health Challenge

North Carolina’s youth are attempting suicide and harming themselves at twice the national rate. According to the most recent Youth Risk Behavior Survey, nearly 17% of North Carolina high school students had seriously considered attempting suicide in the prior 12 months, and 13% had planned an attempt. Alarmingly, slightly more than 5% of N.C. youth attempted suicide and required resultant medical treatment for an injury, poisoning, or overdose.

Suicide is a critical public health problem with traumatic effects on individuals, their families and friends, and communities. Suicide is now the leading cause of injury death in North Carolina; non-fatal self-inflicted injuries from suicide attempts requiring hospitalization or an emergency department visit are far more prevalent still.

NC Youth Suicide Rate Doubles from 2010 to 2014

North Carolina youth suicides increased from 23 in 2010 to 46 in 2014. According to the N.C. Division of Public Health, the most common method of suicide among the state’s youth is

Featured Website:
Watch “It’s Okay 2 Ask... about suicide,” aimed at tackling the stigma of talking about suicide.

Featured Data:
View data on N.C suicide rates.

Featured Video:
Are you a parent of a teen? Watch this video from the Mayo Clinic on how to talk to teen about suicide.
firearms (56%); followed by hanging, strangulation, or suffocation (32%); and poisoning (7%).

**Teen Motivations for Suicide**

It is not always clear why a teen decides to take his or her own life. In fact, among North Carolina youth and young adults ages 10 to 24, only 31% of females and 23% of males left behind a suicide note (2004–2012). Evidence suggests, however, that large numbers of teens who attempt suicide suffer from existing mental health concerns (49% of female and 31% of males) or relationship woes (36% of females and 35% of males). Age also seems to play a factor, as studies suggested ninth grade students were significantly more likely than 12th grade students to consider attempting suicide and to make a plan for how to do it.

---

**Infographic made using Piktochart software**

In response to this critical public health challenge, the N.C.Division of Public Health’s [Youth Suicide Prevention Program](#) and the N.C.Youth Suicide Prevention Task Force partnered to launch the [It’s OK 2 Ask...about suicide](#) campaign to reduce the stigma associated with mental health disorders, to increase adolescents’ desire to get help, and to
provide opportunities to get involved.

**Policy Efforts**

The N.C. Child Fatality Task Force plans to focus on youth suicide in a February 2016 N.C. General Assembly committee meeting, and will provide recommendations to the legislature in April. The good news is that they won’t have to start from scratch. The 2015 N.C. Suicide Prevention Plan, a comprehensive 16-month plan jointly devised by state government officials and UNC researchers, provides community-based strategies to prevent suicide. The plan features more than 500 examples of what groups, collectively and individually, can do to address suicide in their communities. The Plan complements the clinically focused 2012 Suicide Prevention and Intervention Plan: A Report of the NCIOM Task Force on Suicide Prevention and Intervention. While these examples are not limited to youth, they do include age-specific program illustrations.

![Image courtesy of itsokaytoask.com](image)

**It's Okay to Ask**

The Mayo Clinic has created a powerful video about how to talk to teens who may be contemplating suicide and how to help keep them safe. It’s worth a watch for anyone who lives with, works with, or cares about a teen. It caused me to reflect on my favorite quote by author Leo Buscaglia, “Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around....”
What interests you about the state of health in North Carolina? Let us know, and it could be a topic for a future IEI Health newsletter.

Sarah Langer Hall
Health Policy Manager
sarah_langer@ncsu.edu