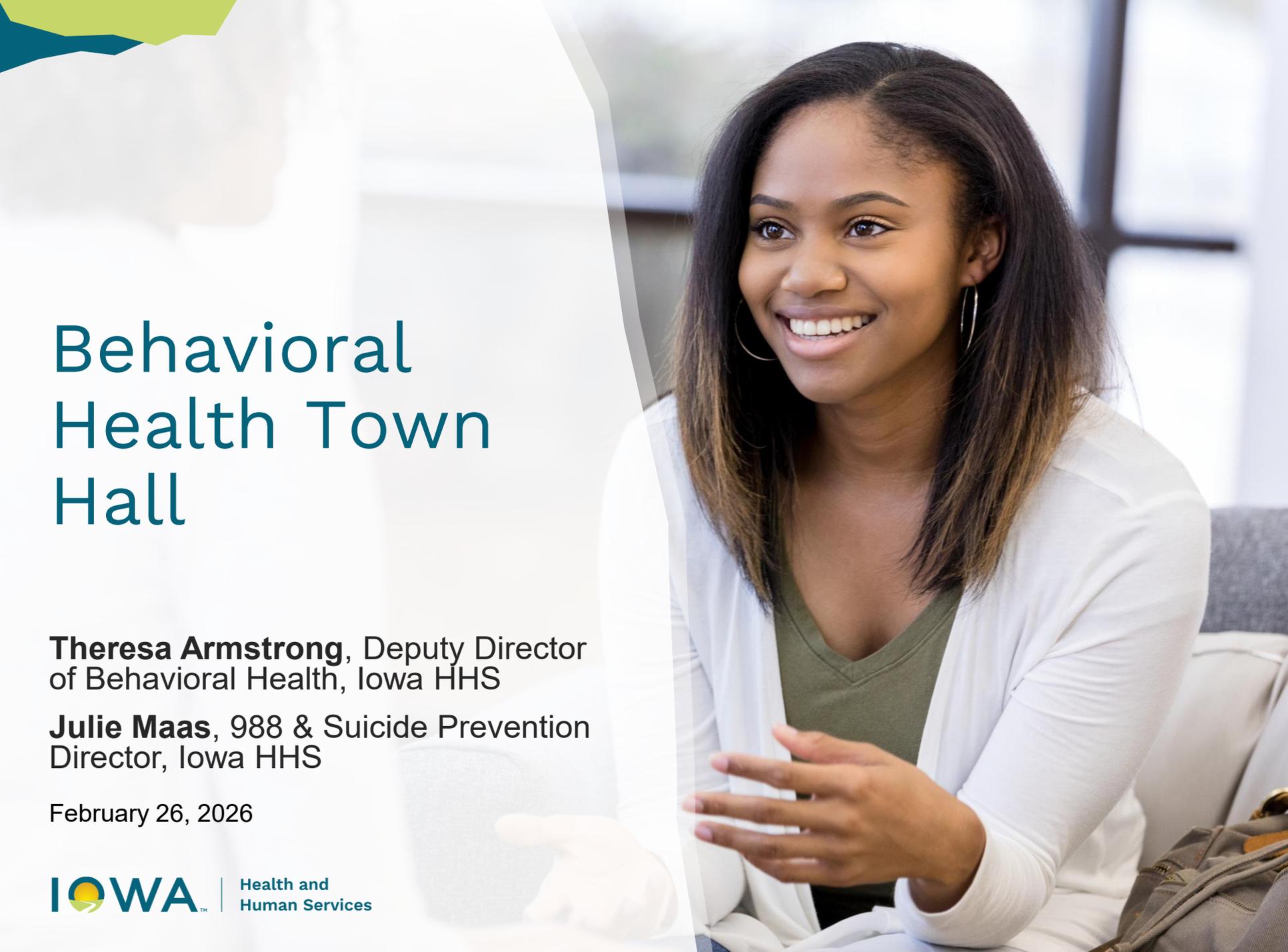


Notes

- ▶ **NO** Behavioral Health Town Hall in March due to the District Advisory Councils.
- ▶ District Advisory Council Dates are the **Week of March 2.**



Scan to find District
Advisory Council links and
information.



Behavioral Health Town Hall

Theresa Armstrong, Deputy Director
of Behavioral Health, Iowa HHS

Julie Maas, 988 & Suicide Prevention
Director, Iowa HHS

February 26, 2026

Help is Available

- ▶ All attendees are welcome to utilize a separate support space to process any thoughts or feelings that arise during this town hall. We recognize that suicide touches the lives of many.
- ▶ You may have lost a loved one to suicide, been part of community grieving after a tragic death, or experienced thoughts of suicide yourself. Trained support staff from Iowa's 988 suicide and crisis line are ready to talk about any - and all - of these difficult topics.
- ▶ <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82273004029>
- ▶ **Joining the Support Space**
 1. Click on the support space link given in several upcoming slides and the webinar chat
 2. The link will ask you to join a separate zoom meeting. Joining the support space will remove you from the town hall (you can rejoin the town hall at any time)
 3. You will be placed for a short period in a waiting room, then admitted into the meeting hub

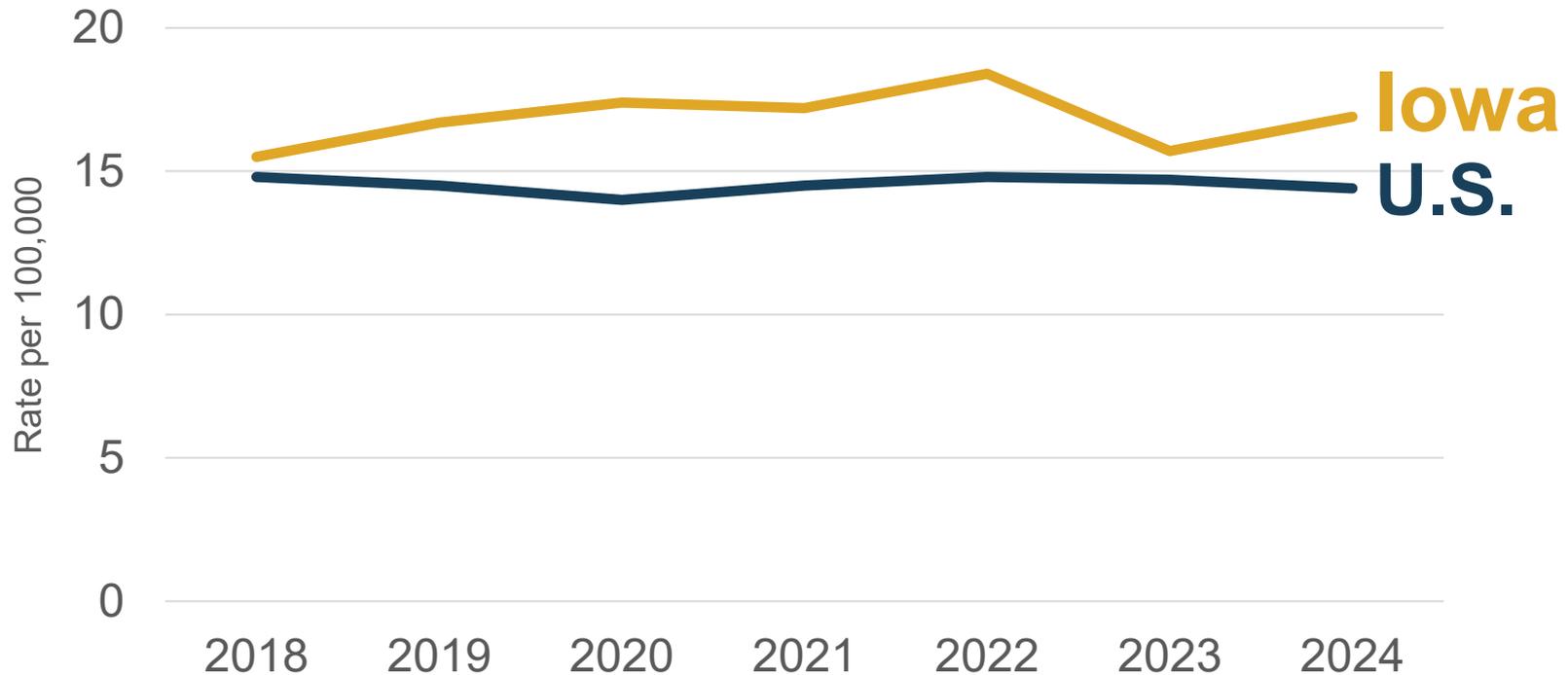
Overview

- ▶ Iowa Suicide Data
- ▶ Understanding Suicide
- ▶ 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline
- ▶ Suicide Prevention Resources

Iowa Suicide Data

Sarah Vannice, Senior Epidemiologist
Iowa HHS

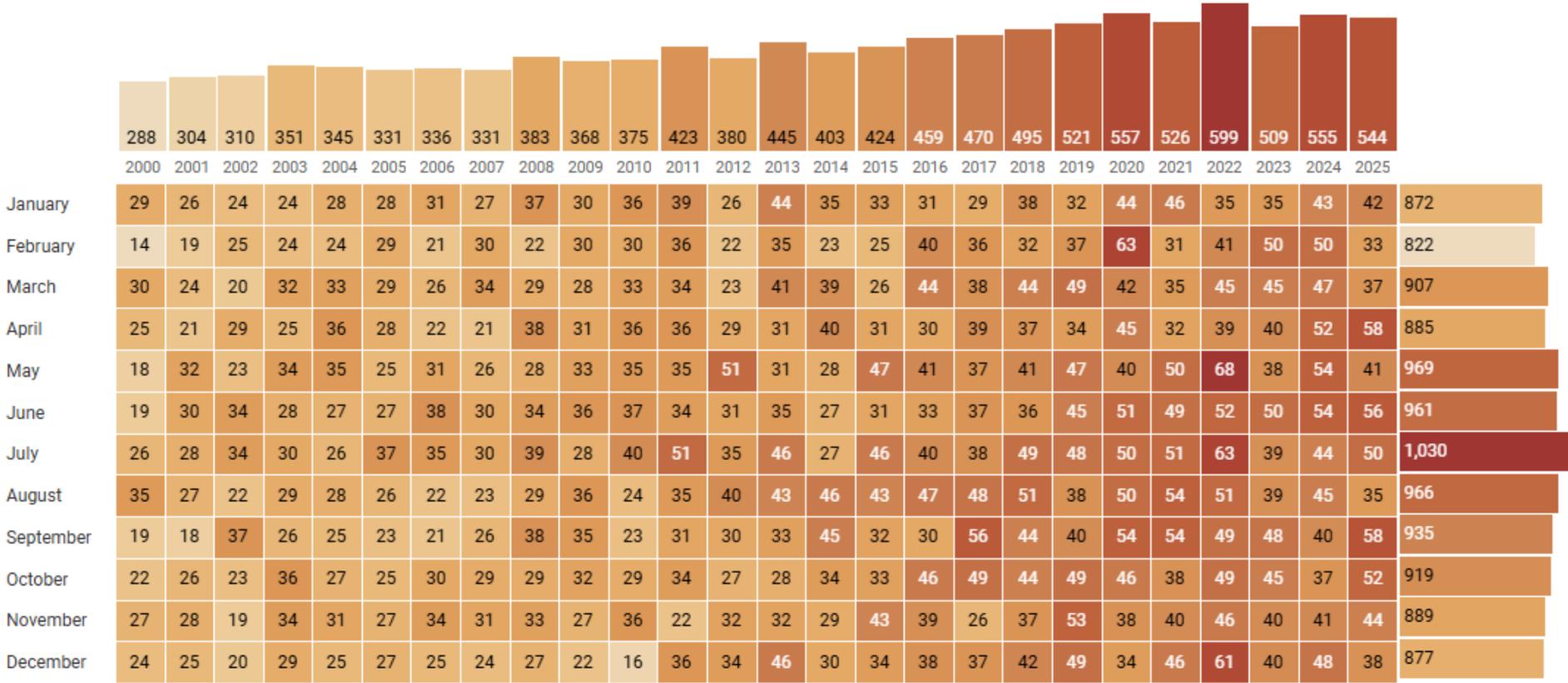
Suicide mortality rates were higher in **Iowa** than the **U.S.**



Data source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. National Vital Statistics System, Mortality 2018-2024 on CDC WONDER Online Database, released in 2026. Data are from the Multiple Cause of Death Files, 2018-2024, as compiled by the 57 vital statistics jurisdictions through the Vital Statistics Cooperative Program. Accessed at <http://wonder.cdc.gov/ucd-icd10-expanded> on Feb 19, 2026

The number of suicide deaths in Iowa have **risen** over time and occur **more often** in the summer months.

Suicide Deaths in Iowa—Heatmap by Month / Year
2000-2025* Iowa Occurrence Data

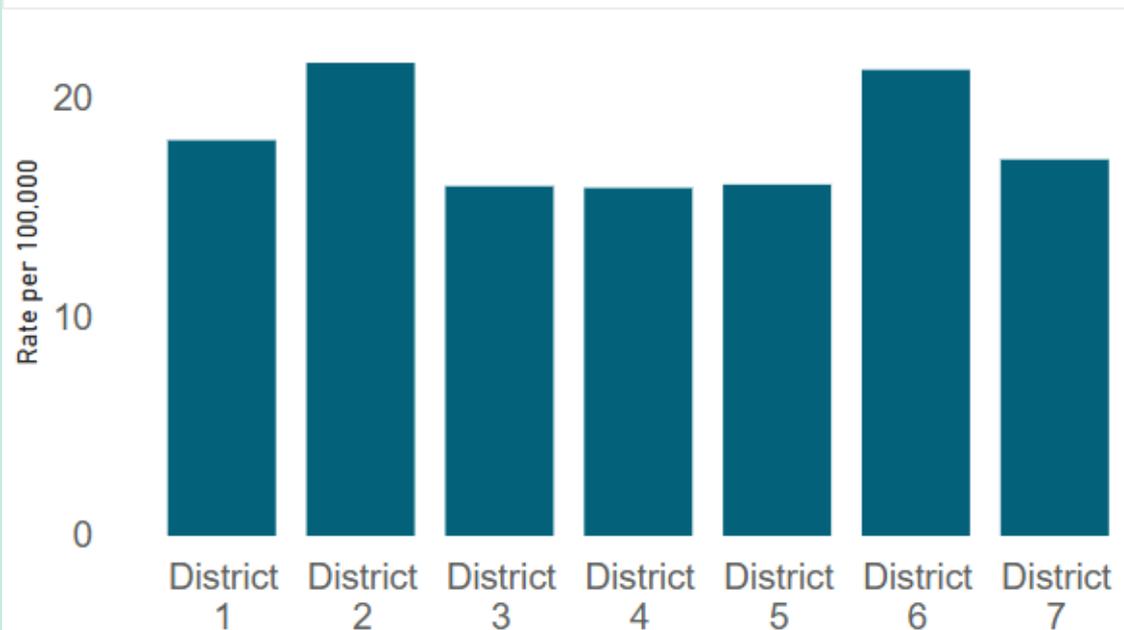


* 2025 data are preliminary and will change as records are registered. Data shown through 12/31/2025.
Preliminary data last updated 2/16/2026. Report generated 2/19/2026 8:27:03 AM.
Data Source: Iowa Department of Health and Human Services, Bureau of Health Statistics

Some parts of Iowa experienced higher rates of suicide mortality.

Rate of suicide deaths in 2024

The rate of suicide deaths was higher in Behavioral Health Districts 2 and 6 in 2024.

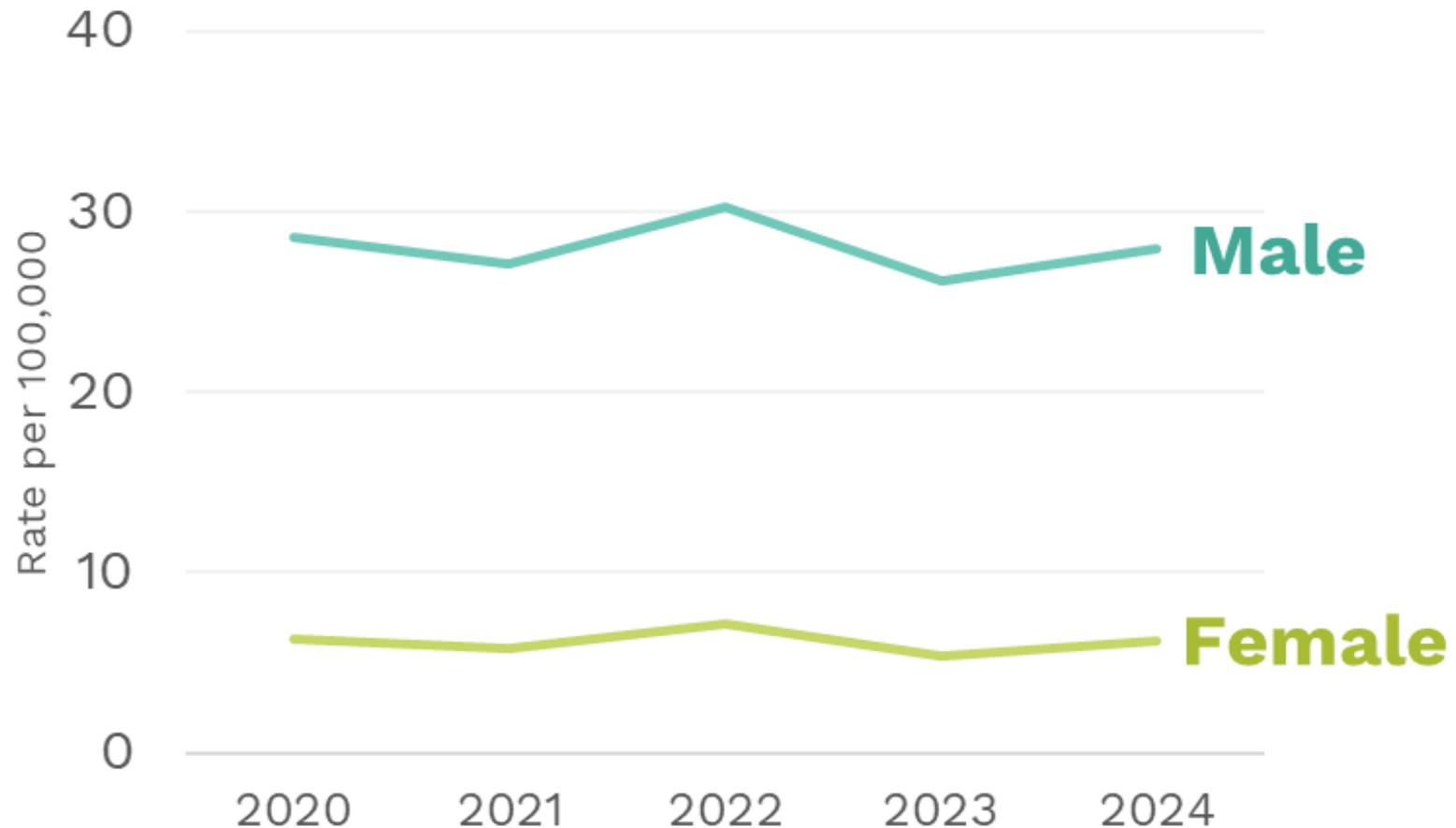


Data source: Iowa Department of Health and Human Services. Bureau of Health Statistics.



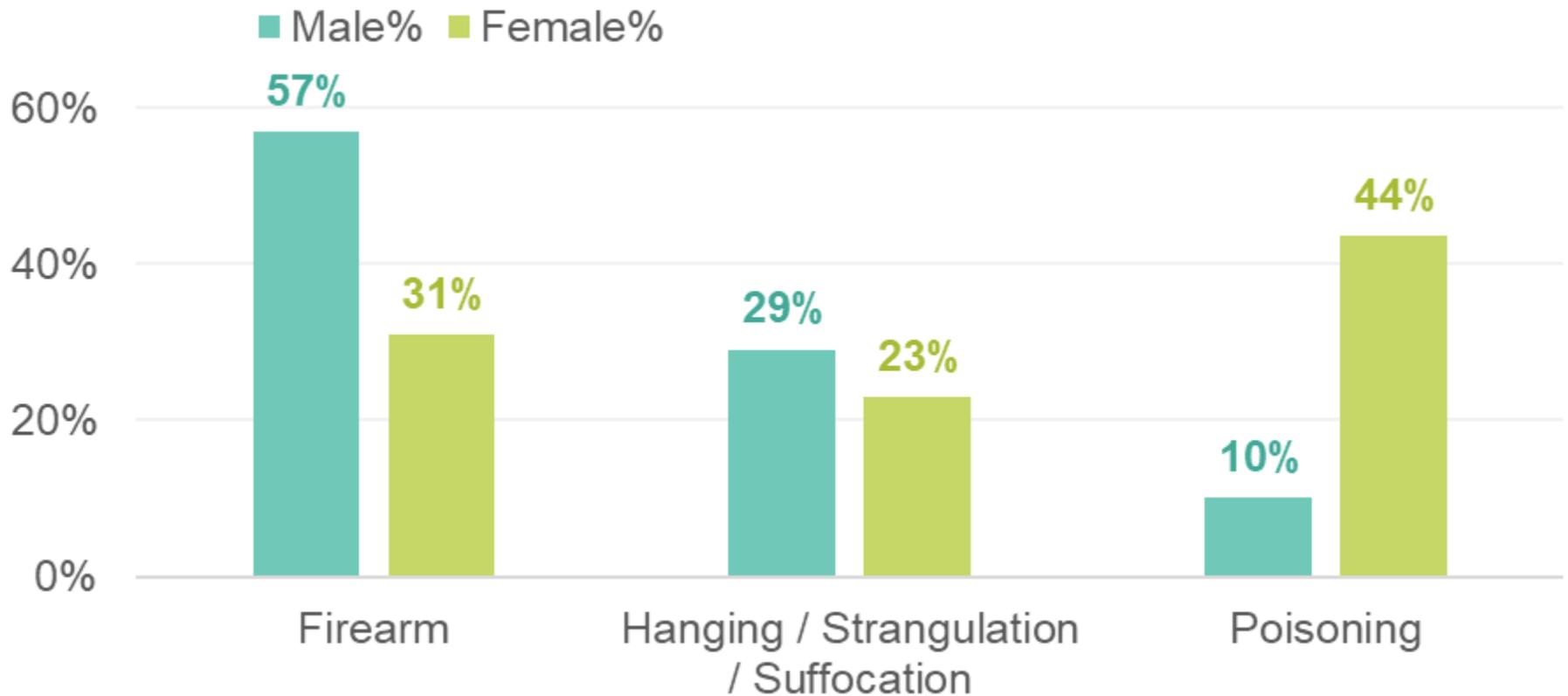
**of suicide
deaths in Iowa
were **Male** in
2024.**

Suicide mortality rates were higher among **males** in Iowa for multiple years.



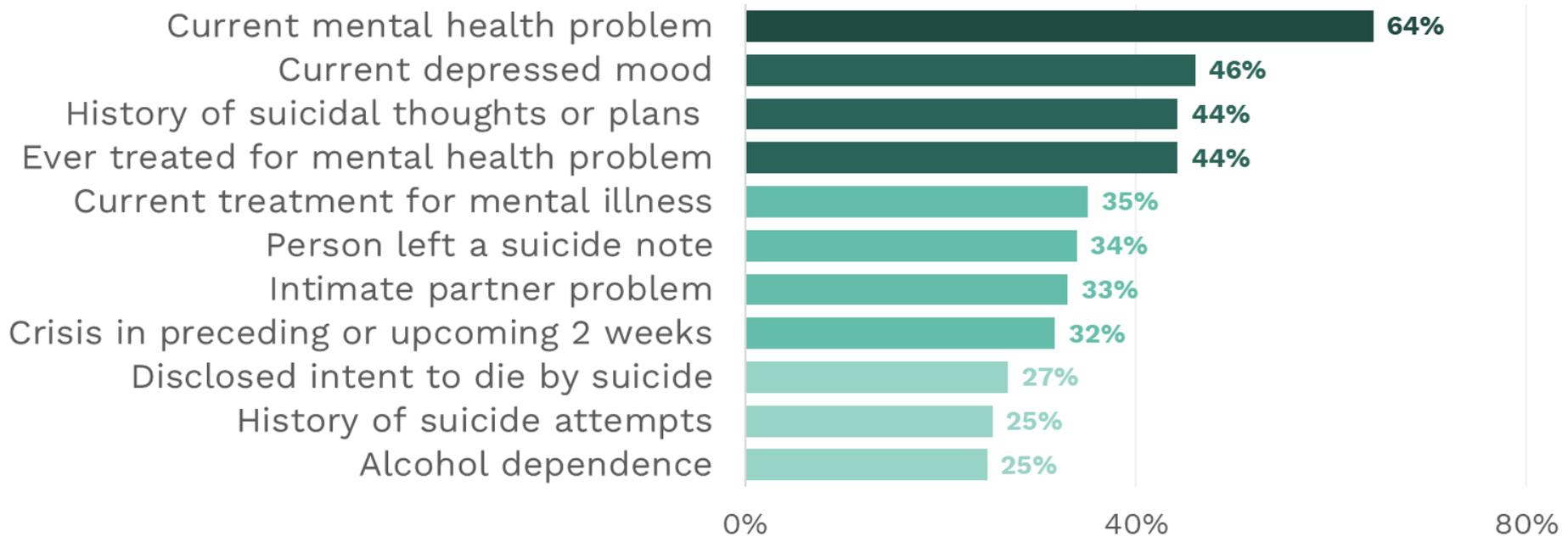
Data source: Iowa Department of Health and Human Services. Bureau of Health Statistics.

Suicide means differed between **males** and **females** in 2023.



Data source: [CDC WISQARS](#), National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS).

Almost two thirds of Iowa deaths in 2023 had evidence of a **current mental health problem** at the time of death.



Data source: [CDC WISQARS](#), National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS),

Understanding Suicide

Julie Maas, 988 Director
Iowa HHS

Common Questions

Is Suicide preventable?

How do I know if someone might be suicidal?

What can I do to help if I am concerned about someone?

What resources are available to support someone in crisis?

How do I cope with loss after suicide?

Safe Messaging Guidelines

Julie Maas, 988 Director
Iowa HHS

Words Matter

Use

“died by
suicide”

“attempted
suicide”

Don't Use

“Committed
suicide”

“Successful” or
“unsuccessful”

Safe Messaging around Suicide



BEST PRACTICES

- Keep information about a suicide general
- Suicide is complex- there is no single cause. Educate on risk and protective factors
- Include resources
- Use appropriate language
- Emphasize help and hope



AVOID

- Graphic details including the method and location of the suicide
- Oversimplifying or speculating on the reason for the suicide
- Negative narratives that perpetuate stigma
- Referring to suicide as an epidemic

What can we do to Prevent Suicide?

Julie Maas, 988 Director
Iowa HHS

What can we do to Prevent Suicide?



- Know the warning signs

- Ask directly “Are you thinking about suicide?”

- Make a safety plan and reduce access to lethal means

- Know your Resources

- Create systems to respond to suicide risk in least restrictive and traumatizing way

Warning Signs & Risk Factors

- ▶ Warning signs: specific behavioral or emotional clues that may indicate suicidal intent.
- ▶ Risk Factors: Conditions or circumstances that may elevate a person's risk for suicide.

An infographic with a central white circle containing the text "SUICIDE WARNING SIGNS" and the logo for the "SMALL SUICIDE PREVENTION NETWORK" with the tagline "Share the Light!". Surrounding this center are 12 red circular icons, each connected to a text label by a white line. The icons include: a marijuana leaf, a thumbs up and heart, a thumbs down, a hand holding a gun, a tombstone with crosses, a warning sign, a hand with a bandage, a person with a speech bubble, a person with a sad face, a person with a speech bubble, a person with a speech bubble, and a person with a speech bubble. The background is a dark red with lighter red diagonal stripes.

SUICIDE WARNING SIGNS

Increased
substance
use

"risk"
taking
behaviour

liking
traps

Negative
self image
/self talk

Drastic changes
in **mood &**
behaviour
such as aggressiveness
and irritability

Isolation or
feeling
alone

Frequently
talking about death
or making funeral
arrangements

Feeling
hopeless

A sense of hopelessness
or no hope for the
future

Avoiding
social
situations

Self
harm
or suicidal
threats

Feeling
trapped
or like a burden
to others

Possessing
lethal means
or being careless with
medications



SUICIDE RISK FACTORS

previous
suicide attempts

relationship
problems

Stressful
life events

ongoing
exposure to
bullying
behaviour

A history of
substance
abuse

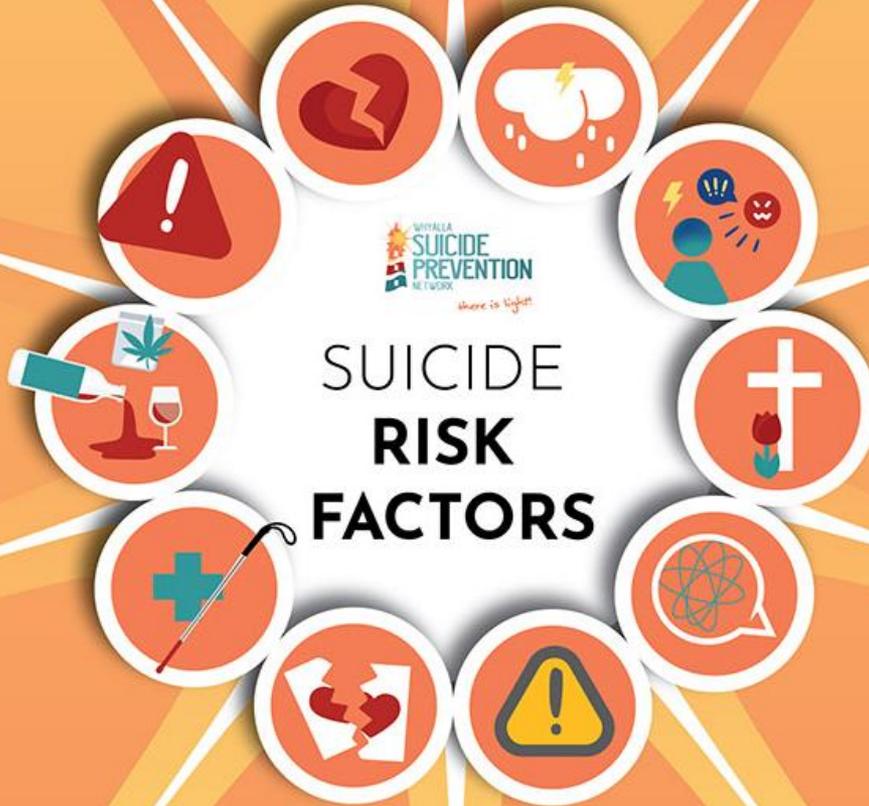
recent **death**
of a **family**
member or
close friend

physical disability & illness
chronic health
conditions

losing
a friend or
family member
to suicide

access to
harmful
means

mental health conditions
depression
/anxiety





social participation

school safety

academic achievement and personal development

feeling connected to family, community & social networks



spirituality and having a sense of purpose

SUICIDE PROTECTIVE FACTORS



neighbourhood & environmental safety



active physical & mental health management



overall resilience



closeness to caring friends



awareness of and access to local health services

Having the Conversation

Julie Maas, 988 Director
Iowa HHS



Health and
Human Services

Getting Ready

You don't have to have all the answers.

The most important thing you can do is listen.

- ▶ Take a deep breath
- ▶ Create a safe environment
- ▶ Give yourself time
- ▶ Have resources ready
- ▶ Listen more than talk
- ▶ Have supports in place for yourself

Starting the Conversation

- ▶ I've noticed you've seemed really down lately, and I'm worried about you.
- ▶ You're important to me, and I want to check in on how you're really feeling.
- ▶ It's not like you to avoid your friends. And I heard you say something earlier today about not being around to see how the next football season goes.

It's OK to be Direct



- ▶ Talking about suicide does not increase suicidal behavior.
- ▶ By talking openly and directly, you are sending the message that you care and want to help

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

Julie Maas, 988 Director
Iowa HHS

What is 988?

A **simple**, convenient three-digit number that connects individuals in need of support with lifeline counselors.

A **network** of more than 200 local crisis contact centers that can handle thousands of contacts each day.

Not just for suicide-related crises. Trained counselors provide support for:

- Substance use disorder
- Economic worries
- Relationships
- Depression
- Mental and physical illness
- Loneliness

988 Call

Emily Bloome, Chief Executive Officer
Foundation 2

What to Expect when Calling 988

Call Begins

- Iowan dials 988
- You'll hear a message to select options based on background and language

Connection to Counselor

- Iowans will hear hold music while they are connected to a live, trained counselor.

Safety Check

- The counselor will greet the Iowan, introduce themselves and ask about safety.

What to Expect when Calling 988

Client-led Support

- Counselors will listen, provide support and share resources that may be helpful.

Evaluation

- Evaluation
 - Would you like to help make 988 better for everyone by completing a survey?

Call End

- Confirming next steps
- Final processing
- Goodbyes

Follow-up

- Follow-Up
 - Check-in
 - Reinforce safety plan

What to know?

- ▶ Calls are routed to the nearest 988 center based on location using geo-routing
 - Calls are directed based on the caller's approximate geographic location rather than area code
- ▶ 988 has answered over 23,000 calls in Iowa since July 2025.
- ▶ Average answer rate is 87%, with an increase to 90% in January
- ▶ Counselors answering:
 - Meet Chapter 24 requirements combining education and experience
 - Various backgrounds
 - Many counselors have lived experience
 - Complete 6 weeks of training prior to independently taking calls



Adult

93%

7%

Youth

Mental Health Crisis 82%

Mental Health Crisis 85%

Suicide 34%

Youth Related 73%

Substance use 15%

Suicide 54%

Total contacts

100%

Contact involves suicide

35%

Mobile Response

6%

EMS activation

1.3%

Suicide in progress

1.2%

988 Text & Chat

Drew Martel, Chief Clinical Officer
CommUnity



Health and
Human Services

What to expect when Texting or Chatting 988?

Conversation Start

- Text 988
- Chat at <https://chat.988lifeline.org>

Service Choice

- Spanish
- Deaf & Hard of Hearing
- Disaster Distress Helpline
- General 988

Pre-Survey

- Zip code
- Suicidal thoughts
- Level of distress

Initial Exploration

- What brings you to talk with us?

Safety Check

- Are you having thoughts of suicide?
- Have you taken action to complete suicide or self-harm?

Client-Led Support

- Situation processing
- Collaborative problem-solving
- Safety planning
- Schedule follow-up
- Resources & referrals

Evaluation

- Would you like to help make 988 better for everyone by completing a survey?

Conversation End

- Confirming next steps
- Final processing
- Goodbyes

Follow-up

- Check-in
- Reinforce safety plan

Chat

5,600 contacts

42%

Text

7,800 contacts

58%

July 2025 – January 2026

Adult

59%

Emotional Support 68%

Suicide 45%

Mental Health Crisis 27%

41%

Youth

Emotional Support 64%

Suicide 49%

Mental Health Crisis 21%

Adult

Anxiety or Depression 48%

Relationship Issues 21%

Family Issues 18%

Financial Issues 8%

Grief & Loss 7%

Youth

Anxiety or Depression 44%

Family 29%

Relationship Issues 16%

Self-harm (NSSI) 14%

School 11%

Total contacts 100%

Contact involves suicide 46%

EMS activation 2.3%

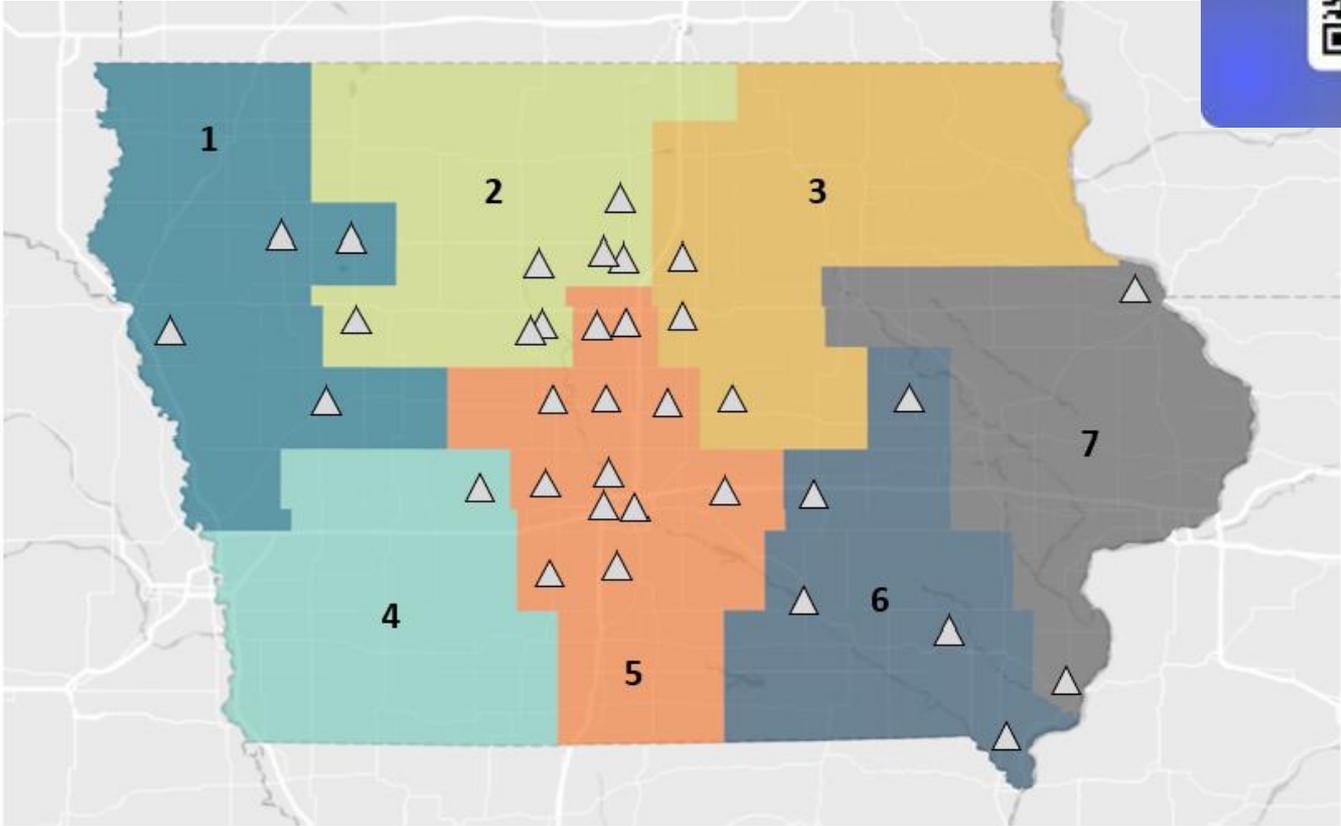
Suicide in progress 1.2%

Suicide Prevention Resources

Julie Maas, 988 Director
Iowa HHS

Suicide Prevention Coalitions

Suicide Prevention Coalition
Contact Form



Coalition name	County(s) Served
Dallas County Suicide Prevention Coalition	Dallas County
Guthrie County Human Resources Coalition	Guthrie County
Veterans' Services & Supports Coalition	Des Moines County, Lee County
Dallas County Suicide Prevention Coalition	Dallas
Polk County Suicide Prevention Coalition- Schools Group	Polk
Polk County Past/Present Service Member Suicide Prevention Coalition	Polk
North Central Iowa Suicide Prevention Coalition	Hamilton, Humboldt, Webster and Wright
Compassion Team.	Story, Boone, Marshall, Jasper, Poweshiek, Wright, Hancock, Franklin, Webster, Hamilton, Hardin, Greene, Madison and Warren Counties.
Polk County Suicide Prevention Coalition	Polk County
Community Coalition meetings	Buena Vista, Crawford, Sac
Dubuque County Wellness Coalition	Dubuque county
Ida County Mental & Behavioral Health Alliance	Ida
Mental Health Roundtable	Siouxland-Woodbury IA; Union SD, Dakota NE
Cherokee County Suicide Prevention Coalition	Cherokee
Benton County Suicide Prevention Coalition	Benton County
Jefferson County Mental Health Alliance (JCMHA)	Jefferson County and surrounding areas

Additional Resources

- ▶ 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: call or text 9-8-8 or chat at [Get Help - 988 Lifeline](#)
- ▶ 988 Partner Toolkit: free downloadable materials [988 Partner Toolkit | SAMHSA](#)
- ▶ Safe messaging recommendations: [Reporting on Suicide](#)
- ▶ Nami Iowa: [NAMI Iowa: Mental Health Support, Education & Resources](#)
- ▶ American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: Iowa Chapter: [Iowa | AFSP](#)
- ▶ Compassionate Friends: [The Compassionate Friends Non-Profit Organization for Grief](#)

Iowa HHS Activities

Julie Maas, 988 Director
Iowa HHS

Youth Suicide Prevention Grant

- ▶ Expand screening, assessment, and referral pathways
- ▶ Youth engagement plan
 - Marketing
 - Training
 - Support groups
- ▶ Youth suicide prevention plan
 - Developed by youth for youth and youth serving entities

Suicide Prevention Trainings

- ▶ Center of Excellence for Behavioral Health (CEBH) upcoming suicide prevention trainings include:
 - Safe Messaging
 - Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM)
 - Livingworks Start
 - Understanding suicide risk, assessment, and safety planning
 - Sources of Strength

[Center of Excellence for Behavioral Health \(CEBH\) Suicide Prevention Trainings](#)

Federal Funding Opportunities

- ▶ SAMHSA has forecasted several suicide prevention related grants including:
 - Garrett Lee Smith Youth Suicide Prevention – Campus and State opportunities
 - Zero Suicide in healthcare
 - National Strategy for Suicide Prevention
 - 988 Improvement and follow up programs
 - [FY 2026 NOFO Forecasts | SAMHSA](#)

You are not alone.
Prevention starts with
connection.