



# NEWS RELEASE

[www.marincounty.org/news](http://www.marincounty.org/news)



For Immediate Release

February 7, 2020

## County's Suicide Prevention Plan Brought to Light

*Marin HHS presents Board with strategies to reduce attempts and prevent deaths*

**San Rafael, CA** – Marin County, which has the highest suicide rate of any Bay Area county, is making a statement about its commitment to shatter the stigma and increase awareness of mental health crises. The County of Marin released its Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan to the Board of Supervisors on February 11.

Dr. Jei Africa is director of the [Marin County Department of Health and Human Services](http://www.marincounty.org) (HHS) [Behavioral Health and Recovery Services](http://www.marincounty.org) (BHRS) Division. In the opening statement of the report, he issued a challenge to community play a part in eliminating suicide. Africa encouraged residents to attend a suicide prevention training, help others find support in times of crisis, or simply be willing to talk openly about mental health and suicide with loved ones.

"Throughout the development of this Strategic Plan, we experienced an outpouring of support and enthusiasm from community members who want to be involved in this effort," Africa said. "As we now turn toward the implementation of this plan, continued involvement and support of community members and partners will be essential for our success."

The plan is the culmination of the efforts of diverse stakeholders from across Marin and provides a roadmap for reducing suicide attempts and deaths. Critical components of reaching those goals are:

- Preparing individuals, communities, organizations to recognize warning signs for suicide and gain confidence to intervene with somebody at risk
- Strengthen proactive factors, including building connections and reducing stigma around the discussion or seeking help for thoughts of suicide

Furthermore, the plan will amplify the available resources available to those in crisis by increasing the availability of crisis supports. This increase will include expansion of Mobile Crisis Team hours to support the entire school day and exploring the existing crisis response system and how it can be improved.

-more-

### Contacts: Dr. Jei Africa

DIRECTOR  
Behavioral Health  
and Recovery Services  
Department of Health  
and Human Services

20 North San Pedro Road  
San Rafael, CA 94903  
415 473 6769 T  
CRS Dial 711  
[jafrica@marincounty.org](mailto:jafrica@marincounty.org)  
[www.marinhhs.org/mhsus](http://www.marinhhs.org/mhsus)

### Chandrika Zager

PROGRAM MANAGER  
Behavioral Health  
and Recovery Services  
Department of Health  
and Human Services

20 N. San Pedro Road  
San Rafael, CA 94903  
415 473-6844 T  
CRS Dial 711  
[czager@marincounty.org](mailto:czager@marincounty.org)  
[www.marinhhs.org](http://www.marinhhs.org)

The plan squarely confronts Marin's reputation as one of the healthiest and wealthiest counties in America with the reality of its ratio of 14.1 suicides per 100,000 people between 2015 and 2017. That figure from the California Department of Public Health is well above the statewide average of 10.7 over the same period. Marin's suicide rate also is the highest among all metropolitan counties in California, trailing only more rural and isolated regions where suicide rates are structurally higher. However, Marin's rate is lower than the 15.1 deaths per 100,000 in Marin tallied between 2014-2016.

In 2018, the most recent year for which Marin HHS has comprehensive statistics, there were 34 deaths by suicide among Marin residents – 22 male and 12 female. The figure does not include Marin residents who recently moved out of the county, such as college students. The collective grief from three suicides by high school students in December 2017 prompted many stakeholders to get involved with Marin HHS on preventative measures.

Middle-aged and older white men die by suicide at the highest rates, but there are many other people at heightened risk for suicide such as adolescent and transition-age youth, people of color, LGBTQ+ residents, military veterans, and others.

In summer 2019, BHRS convened a suicide prevention Strategic Planning Committee consisting of: professionals in medical and behavioral health, education, and social services; leaders and representatives from marginalized and underserved communities; and community members with lived experiences of suicide loss. The committee developed strategies, objectives, and activities while guided by the findings of a needs assessment and evidence-based practices in suicide prevention. HHS is implementing a coordinated support system to provide follow-up care for individuals experiencing suicide ideation and following a suicide attempt.

"We would like to thank the many people – the survivors, community members, professionals, and consultants who contributed their time and expertise to the development of the plan," Africa said. "Together we can build hope, foster resiliency and connections, and save lives."

Marin HHS collaborates with San Rafael-based Buckelew Programs to provide suicide prevention services. The hotline – 415-499-1100 – provides around-the-clock free and confidential support for people in distress. It offers crisis support for those in distress, resources for loved ones, and best practices for professionals. In 2018, the hotline received 6,424 calls (over 17 calls per day) from residents reaching out for support. The program can be reached at [hotline@buckelew.org](mailto:hotline@buckelew.org) as well.

Marin HHS maintains a [webpage about suicide prevention](#) and has much more information about mental health on [www.marinhhs.org](http://www.marinhhs.org). The Board

presentation on February 11 is to take place shortly after the meeting begins at 9 a.m. Viewers may watch it [online](#).

**All public meetings and events sponsored or conducted by the County of Marin are held at accessible sites. If you are a person with a disability and require information or materials in alternative formats – or if you require accommodation to participate in a county program, service or activity – please [contact department staff by email](#) or at 415-473-7331 or 415-473-4381 (voice/TTY).**

###