

Washington state is a leader in suicide prevention legislation, but our suicide rate is still higher than the national average and could increase due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nearly 6,000 Washingtonians died by suicide since 2015, disproportionately impacting youth, rural, Native American, Veteran and LGBTQ populations. Washington must improve our behavioral health crisis response and suicide prevention systems to support individuals in crisis.

During the 2021 Legislative Session, Forefront urges lawmakers to pass legislation that will improve behavioral health outcomes in Washington, especially HB 1477 (SB 5209) and HB 1181.

HB 1477: Enhancing and expanding behavioral health and suicide prevention crisis response services. *(Companion Bill SB 5209)*

Currently, Washington's crisis response system does not ensure coordinated crisis care, and individuals in crisis are often unable to access the resources they need.

- Adopt the 988 crisis hotline and call center system to respond to all behavioral health crisis calls by July 2022, per the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act and FCC rules.
- Ensure crisis responders have the tools to provide triage and follow-up support, including real-time information about bed availability.
- Create a culturally competent crisis response system for youth and adults, including mobile response teams, facilities and next-day behavioral health appointments.
- Install a new statewide behavioral health crisis response implementation group to oversee the development of the new system.
- Establish funding for the new system through a phased-in tax on phone lines, as authorized by the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020.

HB 1181: Establishing programs and measures to prevent suicide among Veterans and military members.

Military service members, Veterans and their families are at increased risk of being affected by suicide. Veterans make up only 7% of Washingtonians but account for 19% of all suicides in our state. This bill supports the official Washington Department of Veterans Affairs suicide prevention plan.

- Require health care providers and state agencies (DSHS and DYF) to ask about Veteran and military status and make referrals to the VA.
- Establish a grant program for organizations serving Veterans, including non-profit organizations engaging in peer support.
- Extend the Safer Homes task force until 2024.
- Create a Veterans suicide prevention account to fund suicide prevention efforts.
- Increase protections for Veterans in crisis by providing civil protections for firearm retailers who provide temporary storage for firearms.
- Create a database of mental health, well-being and suicide prevention resources for military members, Veterans and their families.
- Provide on-line WDVA suicide prevention and training information for military members, Veterans and their families.