

For immediate release

World Suicide Prevention Day

September 9, 2020

Calgary, AB - September 10, 2020 is World Suicide Prevention Day. This year, more than ever, we acknowledge the importance of suicide prevention, as COVID-19 has presented our community with many challenges. More people express being in crisis and feeling isolated. Distress Centre Calgary and Centre for Suicide Prevention want anyone who is struggling or having thoughts of suicide to know that support is available. Anyone can call (403) 266-HELP 24 hours a day 365 days of the year. Distress Centre also offers online daily chat and text support for youth starting at 3pm on weekdays and noon on weekends.

Suicide is a public health crisis in Canada and Distress Centre's highly trained volunteers and professional staff are consistent, community supports. In 2019, DC recorded 909 emergency interventions and intervened in 194 suicides in progress. While DC's suicide related contacts have increased monthly during COVID-19, they reached an all-time high, an 83.8% increase between August 19 and 24th of this year compared to the same time last year. While we are encouraged that people are reaching out, we are highly concerned by the volume of contacts.

There is never any one reason someone will take their own life; there are a multitude of factors. We don't know if the pandemic will lead to an increase in the suicide rate, but we do know that economic challenges are correlated with an increase in suicides. In July 2020, Alberta's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 12.8%, up from 7.1% in July 2019 and Premier Jason Kenney is predicting that Alberta's unemployment rate could reach 25% during COVID-19. For every 1% increase in Alberta's unemployment rate, 16 more people will die by suicide, according to a new report from the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy.

These are very sobering statistics but the good news is that suicide is preventable and there is support available as one teen caller to Distress Centre stated, "Thank you. You are the only person I have ever told about what is going on in my life, how much it sucks, and how I just wanted to end it all. I now feel much better."

"We all have a role in preventing suicide. Any significant change in behaviour is a sign someone may be struggling. We can reach out to that person, and connect them to help, such as to Distress Centre," said Mara Grunau, Executive Director, Centre for Suicide Prevention. "For those of us who are not considering suicide but may be struggling, we can stay grounded by considering what gives us hope, where we find belonging, how we find meaning and what gives us purpose. This is suicide prevention in extraordinary times."

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About Distress Centre

For 50 years, Distress Centre Calgary has ensured everyone has a place to turn to in a time of crisis, by providing Calgary's only 24 hour crisis support, professional counselling and referrals - all at no cost.



About Centre for Suicide Prevention

Anyone can learn to identify someone at risk of suicide and get them help. For over 35 years Centre for Suicide Prevention has been equipping Canadians with knowledge and skills to respond to people at risk of suicide.