



## News Release

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For more information, contact:

Tim Lineaweaver, Director of Behavioral Health

508 477-7090, ext. 127

[www.chcofcapecod.org](http://www.chcofcapecod.org)

### **Community Comes Together to Prevent Youth Suicide**

Mashpee – The Cape and Islands top many lists for Massachusetts’ most beautiful scenery, charming villages and favorite vacation destinations, but its rank as the region with one of the highest youth suicide rates in the Commonwealth is a concern of many. According to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health’s most recent figures, the Cape and Islands region has 1.5 times higher rate for suicide for youth ages 10-24 as compared to the rest of the State.. There is one homicide for every 6 suicides on the Cape and Islands.

Recognizing this as a community-wide problem, the Cape and Islands Community Health Network (CHNA 27) and Community Health Center of Cape Cod have created the Cape & Islands Youth Suicide Prevention Project. With funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration through the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, the aim of the project is to improve the community’s ability to identify at-risk youth and intervene quickly.

The focus population of the Project includes: youth in the community who are engaged in or at risk of engagement with the foster care or juvenile justice program; sexual minority youth, including those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender; youth who experience dating violence, bullying, community violence, or other forms of victimization; Native Americans and other priority populations to be identified.

“Our communities are all too familiar with this problem and many people struggle with a sense of helplessness,” says Health Center Director of Behavioral Health Tim Lineaweaver. “This Project has been designed to provide the entire community with strategies that will improve our response to children and families at risk for suicide.”

The initial phase of the Project will be to expand the capacity of the suicide prevention coalition that encompasses all of Barnstable County, Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket. This group includes consumers; school superintendents; school counseling associations; providers; youth social and recreational organizations; police and fire chiefs; emergency responders; representative of NAMI, the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill; and anyone that interacts with youth.

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In addition to creating the coalition, the Project will complete a thorough assessment of the region's problem of youth suicide; and design and implement a regional prevention and postvention plan to combat it.

Several area State representatives expressed their support for the Project's funding, including Senator Robert O'Leary and Representatives Sarah Peake and Cleon Turner. "Too many people look at the Cape and the Islands as a happy resort destination and fail to look any further to see that we are communities, just like anywhere else, with real problems," said Senator O'Leary (D-Barnstable). "Awarding this grant brings to light the real tragedies that the Cape and Islands have faced with an increased number of youth suicides over the past few years and will hopefully bring a better understanding and support system to these communities to prevent further losses."

Ninety percent of all suicides are preventable. The goal of the Project is to teach people to recognize the signs of suicide and what to do when they encounter a youth that may be in danger. Postvention refers to a plan to deal with completed suicides (help for family and other survivors) as well as a plan to adequately support youth who have gone to treatment after a suicide attempt and then return to the community.

The grant was awarded to CHNA 27, a coalition of health and human service providers and consumers across Cape Cod and the islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket, who work together to enhance access to care and improve health indicators in the region. The Health Center, a CHNA 27 member, has been designated as the lead agency to implement the grant, under the direction of Mr. Lineaweaver. Eight CHNAs in the Commonwealth were eligible to apply and only three received funding.

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