

**CASTING THE NET UPSTREAM: PROMOTING WELLNESS TO
PREVENT SUICIDE**



ALASKA STATE
SUICIDE PREVENTION PLAN
2012-2017

ANNUAL REPORT
2017

Statewide Suicide Prevention Council
Sharon Fishel, Chairperson ❖ Bill Walker, Governor

Statewide Suicide Prevention Council Members, 2017

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Statewide Suicide Prevention Council Staff

Alison Kulas, Executive Director

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Introduction

The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council [“Council”] was established in 2001 by the Alaska Legislature. The Council is responsible for advising legislators and the Governor on ways to improve Alaskans’ health and wellness by reducing suicide, improving public awareness of suicide and risk factors, enhancing suicide prevention efforts, working with partners and faith-based organizations to develop healthier communities, creating a statewide suicide prevention plan and putting it in action, and building and strengthening partnerships to prevent suicide. The Council was reauthorized by the Legislature in 2013, with a sunset date of June 30, 2019.

Casting the Net Upstream: Promoting Wellness to Prevent Suicide is a **call to action**. It acknowledges the most current research and understanding of the “web of causality” of suicide. Suicidal behavior results from a combination of genetic, developmental, environmental, physiological, psychological, social, and cultural factors operating in complex, and often unseen, ways. Specific strategies were identified to achieve the goals and objectives of the suicide prevention system. These strategies come from the **wisdom and experience of Alaskans**. They are based on the most current and credible data and research available. Individuals, communities, and the State of Alaska can act together to implement these strategies to prevent suicide.

Casting the Net Upstream is a uniquely Alaskan endeavor. It is aligned with the [National Strategy for Suicide Prevention](#) and the [American Indian and Alaska Native National Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan \(2011-2015\)](#). *Casting the Net Upstream* encourages Alaskans to think about preventing suicide by promoting physical, emotional, and mental wellness and strengthening personal and community resilience. This is the sixth and final annual implementation report of suicide prevention efforts toward the *Casting the Net Upstream* goals. The Council released an updated 5-year plan in January 2018, *Recasting the Net* to continue building on the accomplishments of the previous plan.

2017 Annual Report

In addition to the activities and efforts described in this implementation report, the Council engaged in the following activities in calendar year 2017:

- ✓ The Council held four public meetings: in person in Anchorage (October, 2017) and by video/teleconference in January, 2017, April, 2017 and July, 2017.
- ✓ The Council revised and rewrote its new 5-year State Suicide Prevention Plan throughout 2017, as is required under state statute. The plan was released to the public in January 2018.
- ✓ The Council partnered with the Department of Education and Early Development to continue the competitive [Suicide Awareness, Prevention, and Postvention](#) [SAPP] grant program for school-based suicide prevention. Nine school districts were funded in 2017.
- ✓ The Council partnered with the [Alaska Community Foundation](#) and Alaska Children's Trust to continue the GCI Suicide Prevention Grant Program. Nine grants were funded in 2017 across the state, totaling \$100,000.
- ✓ The Council helped secure funding for a 5-year grant from the National Institute of Mental Health to create the Alaska Native Collaborative Hub for Resilience Research, which will help Alaska Native communities share knowledge, guide research, and identify culturally-relevant suicide prevention strategies in rural Alaska.
- ✓ The Council provided bracelets with the Careline number, Careline magnets, and thousands of Careline brochures for suicide prevention events sponsored by community coalitions, the Alaska State Troopers, the Rotary Club of Anchorage, Alaska Federation of Natives Convention, and others.

Recasting the Net Upstream Goals (Revised in 2017)



Goal 1: Alaskans Accept Responsibility for Preventing Suicide



Goal 2: Alaskans Prevent and Mitigate the Impact of Trauma, Substance Abuse, and Other Risk Factors Contributing to Suicide



Goal 3: Alaskans Communicate, Cooperate, and Coordinate Suicide Prevention Efforts



Goal 4: Alaskans Have Immediate Access to the Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Services They Need



Goal 5: Alaskans Support Survivors in Healing



Goal 6: Quality Data and Research is Available and Used for Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation of Suicide Prevention Efforts

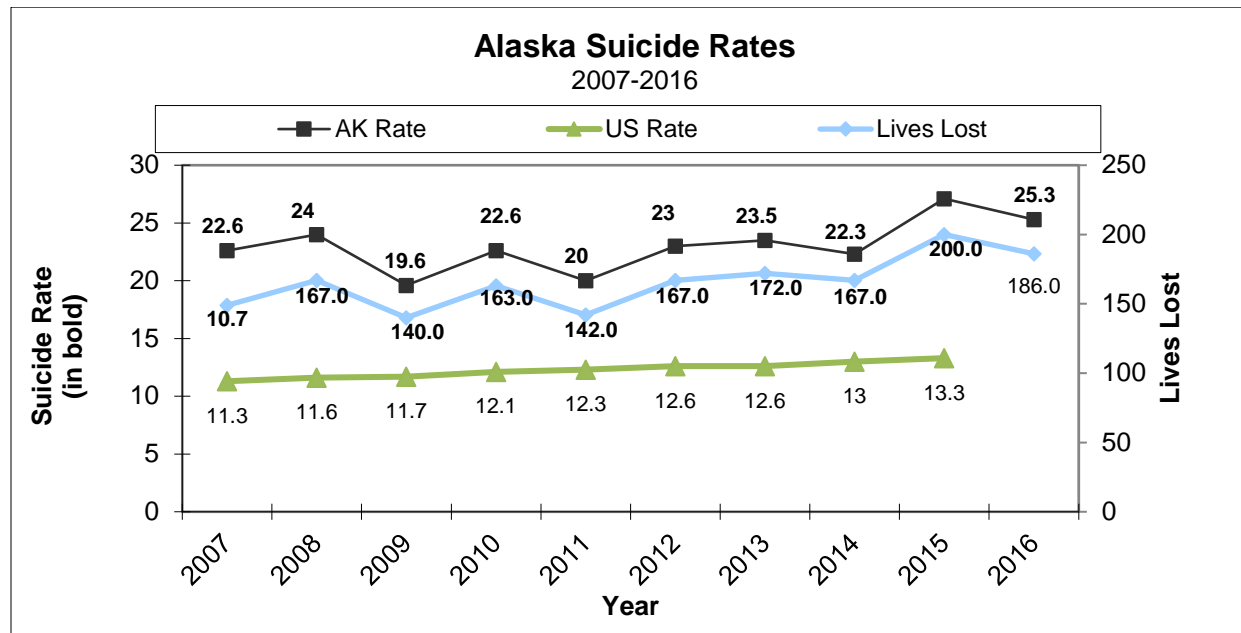
Suicide Rates in Alaska

Data from the Health Analytics and Vital Records shows that **186** Alaskans died by suicide in 2016, resulting in a statewide suicide rate of **25.3/100,000**.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Rate	19.2	19.6	22.6	24.0	19.6	22.6	19.5	22.8	23.4	22.7	27.1	25.3
Number	127	132	149	167	140	163	141	167	171	167	200	186

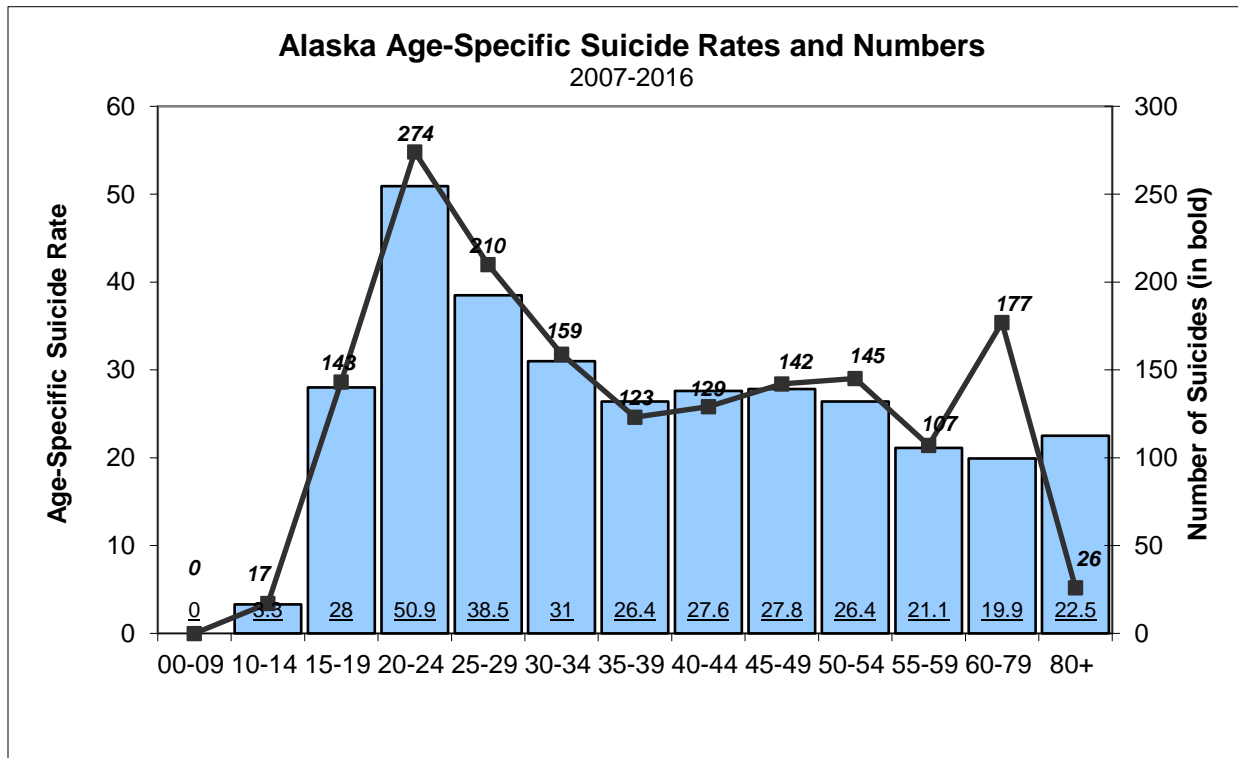
Source: Department of Health and Social Services, Health Analytics and Vital Records

Fourteen fewer Alaskans died by suicide in 2016 than in 2015. However, Alaska’s rate remains nearly double the national average (13.3/100,000 in 2015), and it was the second highest number of deaths by suicide in the past decade. The contributing factors to the high rate of suicide deaths in Alaska are as complex as the “web of causality” that influences risk of suicide.



Age-Specific Suicide Rates in Alaska

The population most at-risk of suicide in Alaska over the past decade continues to be youth ages 20-24, with a rate of 50.9/100,000, according to Health Analytics and Vital Records.



Not sure if someone needs help? ASK.

A Ask if they are thinking about ending their life.

S Share that you care.

K Keep them company & connect them to Careline.

CARELINE 877-266-HELP (4357)

Call 24/7, 365 days a year

Text 4help to 839863

3-11 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday

Statewide • Confidential
Alaskans helping Alaskans

Summary of Suicide Prevention Activities

New 5-year State Suicide Prevention Plan

The number of community-based suicide prevention activities has grown steadily over the course of the 5-year plan *Casting the Net Upstream: Promoting Wellness to Prevent Suicide 2012-2017*. This summary of projects and activities provides a *sample* of Alaska's evolving suicide prevention system that expanded over the life of *Casting the Net*. The Council intends to build off of the successes of the previous 5-year plan and expand suicide prevention efforts across Alaska with *Recasting the Net: Promoting Wellness to Prevent Suicide 2018-2022*.

Recasting the Net builds on the 2012-2017 state plan, with a wealth of information and resources and six similar goals. Each goal lists strategies that individuals, communities, and the state can use to promote wellness and reduce suicide risk.

The Council has made tremendous progress in public understanding related to suicide prevention in Alaska since the release of its previous plan in 2012, including substantial increases in trainings across the state and thousands of more annual calls to the Careline crisis line. There has also been a significant increase in the number of wellness and suicide prevention coalitions across Alaska since 2012.

The Council is statutorily obligated to release a five-year plan. The Council revised the new state plan through several public meetings and two 30-day public comment periods in 2017.

New Statewide Suicide Prevention Council Executive Director

The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, as well as the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse and the Alaska Mental Health Board, hired Alison Kulas as their new executive director in 2017. She officially started Jan. 9, 2018. The boards advise the governor, legislature, and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority on behavioral health policy and programs that promote overall wellness for Alaskans, as per federal and/or state statutes. Kulas replaces Kate Burkhart who left the position after nearly 10 years to become the state's ombudsman.

Ms. Kulas has more than 10 years' experience in health education, prevention, and treatment fields. Most recently she was a fellow in Washington D.C with the National Academy of Medicine, at the U.S. Food and



Drug Administration. Previously she worked in Alaska Department of Health and Social Services' Division of Public Health as the tobacco program manager, helping set statewide policy in Alaska around prevention and treatment. She also worked for RurAL CAP where she partnered with rural and frontier communities around the state gaining an understanding of the health issues impacting villages with populations under 1,000 people.

Ms. Kulas holds a master's degree in Public Health from Tulane University and a bachelor's degree in human biology from Michigan State University.

Suicide Prevention Outreach

The Council partnered with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Alaska Chapter (AFSP-AK Chapter) for a Lunch and Learn presentation to the Alaska Legislature in March of 2017 to provide information on prevention, intervention, and postvention efforts in Alaska.

Council members and staff hosted an information booth at the Alaska Federation of Natives Convention and gave out thousands of suicide prevention brochures, magnets, pens, and other resources.

In 2017, the University of Alaska Fairbanks was awarded a \$5 million grant by the National Institute of Mental Health to launch the Alaska Native Collaborative Hub for Resilience Research (ANCHRR). The 5-year project will help Alaska Native communities share knowledge, guide research, and identify culturally-relevant suicide prevention strategies in rural Alaska.

The goals of the ANCHRR are: to establish a central hub in Alaska that anchors and supports the collective efforts to reduce Alaska Native youth suicide; use scientific methods to recognize and understand Alaska Native community-level strengths and protections that reduce suicide and other harmful behaviors, and translate the information into community tools for wellness; and, develop capacity to conduct and use research findings to promote Alaska Native youth and community wellbeing.

For more information contact Dr. Stacy Rasmus, UAF's principal investigator on the ANCHRR grant at: smrasmus@alaska.edu.

The You Are Not Alone youth suicide peer-led suicide prevention program continued to expand in Alaska high schools in 2017. The program, which was created by the former Council youth member in 2014, went from having four youth trainers in 2014 to more than 20 in 2017. Every student in YANA is trained at the beginning of the school year, they connect with the teachers to let them know they are a resource, provide trainings at schools around the community, and distribute prevention information,

including the Careline number on bracelets. They discuss with students statistics and work on stigma reduction to help reduce the suicide rates among youth in the state. They are hoping to replicate the program in other area high schools in the future.

Community Suicide Prevention

The number of suicide prevention and wellness coalitions continues to grow throughout Alaska. The Council continues to work with and support the coalitions to help locally-led suicide prevention efforts.

The Anchorage Suicide Prevention Coalition continues to support suicide prevention efforts in Alaska's largest city. In 2017, the Anchorage Coalition attended numerous events to provide resources, including the Out of Darkness Walk in May, International Survivor of Loss Day in November, as well as supported numerous trainings across the community. The Coalition also held a large event at Bear Tooth Theater that attracted hundreds of participants. The Coalition also supported the suicide prevention training of all staff at North Star Behavioral Health.

The Juneau Suicide Prevention Coalition continues to support suicide prevention in the Juneau School District, including the Sources of Strength Program in all three high schools. The Coalition also continues to support Signs of Suicide at all three high schools.

The Kivalina Wellness Coalition was created in 2017 in Northern Alaska. The coalition began its first year of work on a 5-year Native Connections grant awarded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The coalition began training its coalition and community members and is working to get the youth involved as much as possible. The coalition has sponsored to have the Winter Bear play come to Kivalina in 2018 and provide resources to the community. The Coalition presented at the Council's October quarterly meeting in 2017.

The Central Council Tlingit Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska was also awarded a Native Connections grant from SAMHSA and began work in 2017 to create a culturally based suicide prevention program in Southeast Alaska. The goals for the program are to create planning and systems development that are culturally based and empower families; and, create culturally competent services and to evaluate those services with traditional protocols and groups of elders. The grant focuses mainly on Haines, Wrangell, Kasaan, Klawock, Saxman, and Craig. CCTHIT presented to the Council at its April quarterly meeting in 2017.

The Kenaitze Indian Tribe, located in Kenai, began a suicide prevention program in 2017. It also was awarded a 5-year Native Connections grant through SAMHSA over the next five years. The tribe is focused on building sustainability to ensure there are ongoing services available for those at risk in its community. The tribe held an event in January of 2017 to increase awareness and

reduce stigma, which included a partnership with the Alaska State Troopers for a gun lock giveaway. The tribe presented to the Council at its April quarterly meeting in 2017.

[Drew's Foundation](#) in Bethel continues to promote suicide prevention awareness, youth development, and wellness. For the sixth year, Drew's Foundation sponsored and produced the "Place of Memory" at the Cama-i Dance Festival. The room is a safe place for people to talk and remember loved ones that have died by suicide. It also supports healthy youth activities and public awareness events, including the 7th annual Walk For Life and 5K Run.

The Division of Behavioral Health (DBH) funded 19 comprehensive behavioral health prevention grantees in 2017. These grantees are all community coalitions focused on data-driven prevention activities:

Nome Regional Wellness Forum	\$150,000
North Slope Substance Abuse Prevention & Intervention Coalition	\$134,942
Fairbanks Wellness Coalition	\$260,000
Nulato Wellness Coalition	\$95,848
Hooper Bay Community Planning Group	\$150,000
Alaska Alternative Schools Coalition	\$350,000
Bethel Healthy Families Coalition	\$150,000
Thrive Mat-Su	\$260,960
Anchorage Communities Mobilizing for Change on Alcohol	\$264,458
Spirit of Youth Coalition	\$257,092
Anchorage Youth Development Coalition	\$342,473
Kenai Prevention Coalition	\$150,680
Seward Prevention Coalition	\$150,000
Tatitlek Community Coalition	\$74,853
Juneau Suicide Prevention Coalition	\$284,000
Ketchikan Wellness Coalition	\$150,000
Prince of Wales Behavioral Health Coalition	\$224,802
Petersburg Prevention Coalition	\$123,480
Wrangell Early Prevention Coalition	\$95,582

Grantee coalitions are required to address behavioral health issues that contribute to the “web of causality” for suicide through strict adherence to the [Strategic Prevention Framework](#) prevention model from SAMHSA. Coalitions began with assessment of community needs, readiness, and resources related to behavioral health prevention. Based on the results of those community assessments, the coalitions will implement at least one environmental strategy (community-level prevention activities) and collect, monitor, and report local data related to grant activities. Coalitions that had developed and/or implemented suicide prevention strategies under past DBH prevention grant programs have sought funding from local and other organizations to maintain their efforts. The Council used information gathered from the grantees and incorporated it into the revision of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan in 2017.

Community coalitions, the Alaska chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, and local organizations hosted suicide prevention awareness walks/runs across the state. The University of Alaska Anchorage hosted multiple events for Suicide Prevention Awareness Month (September).

The [Alaska Community Foundation](#) and the Alaska Children’s Trust funded 9 grantees in 2017 for the GCI Suicide Prevention Grant Program, totaling \$100,000. Grants were awarded to:

- | | |
|--|--|
| AK Child & Family - \$12,500 | Native Village of Paimiut - \$15,000 |
| Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium - \$5,000 | Native Village of Tununak - \$9,500 |
| Covenant House Alaska - \$15,000 | Perseverance Theatre, Inc. - \$5,000 |
| Juneau Youth Services - \$8,000 | Wellspring Revival Ministries - \$10,000 |
| Kenai Peninsula Borough School District - \$15,000 | |

School-Based Suicide Prevention

FY2017 was the fifth year of the [Suicide Awareness, Prevention, and Postvention](#) [SAPP] grant program, implemented by the Department of Education and Early Development [DEED] in partnership with the Council. Nine school districts were funded to provide evidence-based suicide prevention in their high schools. All school districts receiving SAPP grants provide services to students at-risk of suicide.

The Juneau, Anchorage and Mat-Su Borough School Districts are implementing suicide prevention programs in alternative schools. The Petersburg School District is partnering with a local behavioral health provider to expand students’ access to mental health services. The Lower Yukon, Kenai Peninsula Borough and Bering Straits School Districts base their suicide prevention efforts on peer leadership and support.

DEED's [Safe, Supportive, and Successful Schools Initiative](#) is supported by the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, School Safety and Health, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Suicide Awareness and Prevention, and eLearning efforts, among others. This comprehensive approach furthers the objectives of Alaska's youth suicide prevention efforts and the goals of *Casting the Net Upstream*. DEED, with the support of a grant from the Department of Health and Social Services, continued the [Alaska Alternative Schools Coalition](#) in 2017.

Increasing Access to Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Services

With a grant from SAMHSA, DEED has funded mental health professionals in the Anchorage, Mat-Su Borough, and Kenai Peninsula Borough school districts through Project AWARE. These counselors provide immediate access to mental health intervention, services, and referrals for students at risk. School-based mental health professionals funded by Alaska Project AWARE made almost **14,000** student contacts during the third year of the program. These contacts occurred in many different settings and contexts, but their combined effect is profound. They contributed meaningfully to establishing a more positive school climate, to students building meaningful relationships with caring and healthy adults, and to providing students with vital mental health services.

Project AWARE includes the specific objective of increasing the number of students referred to and accessing community behavioral health services by 25%. These mental health referrals were provided by almost 50 different community mental health providers. Our AWARE counselors collaborated with existing services with community providers approximately 550 times. An additional 325 other community health enhancing service referrals were made to over 70 community partners. With the exception of 25, each referral resulted in services being delivered.

In other communities, long-standing collaborations help meet the behavioral health prevention, treatment, and recovery needs of students. [Family Centered Services](#) in Fairbanks and [Juneau Youth Services](#) partner with local school districts to offer mental health and substance abuse screening and treatment services to students at risk of suicide or severe emotional disturbances (these projects are supported by grants from the DEED SAPP program and DBH).

Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium funds a Rural Aftercare Coordinator at Alaska Psychiatric Institute. This coordinator supports patients admitted from rural Alaska connect with treatment and support services in their home community after discharge. This culturally relevant form of discharge and transition support is designed to increase the likelihood of success in the home community and reduce the need for repeat acute hospitalizations.

Careline Crisis Line

Careline is Alaska’s nationally accredited statewide suicide prevention and crisis call line. While Careline activity, including incoming and outgoing calls and texts, was relatively stable from 2012 through the second quarter of 2014. Contacts since then have nearly tripled. More Alaskans are reaching out for help, due in large part to coordinated and consistent media and outreach efforts statewide. Careline strives to keep up with this demand, but the number calls transferred to the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) network is increasing.

Careline received 20,856 calls – including hang ups and wrong numbers – in 2017, compared to 15,323 total calls in 2016, a 36% increase in the number of calls. Of these, 18,886 were answered by trained staff in Fairbanks. The remainder were transferred to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline because Careline staff were already responding to a call.

Careline tracks the nature of the calls received (domestic violence, parenting, suicide, loneliness, etc.), and reports that the vast majority of callers disclose a mental health and/or substance use disorder. Careline also conducts follow-up calls to monitor the safety of callers and gauge the outcome (reduced risk, acceptance of follow-up, engagement in services, etc.) of the interventions and information provided. A person does not have to be in immediate crisis to call Careline. Careline is a resource for anyone needing someone to talk to or resources during a difficult time.



Conclusion

The Council is grateful for the work of individuals, communities, and the State of Alaska for the work between 2012 and 2017 to implement *Casting the Net Upstream*. While there has been a tremendous amount of progress since *Casting the Net Upstream* was first published, including large increases in the number of suicide prevention trainings and calls to Careline, it is vital that Alaskans understand we all play a role in preventing suicide. There is still a great deal of work ahead for all Alaskans, and the Council is encouraged by the progress made since 2012 and will continue to work toward further progress over the next 5 years with the revised goals and strategies in *Recasting the Net* statewide suicide prevention plan.

This report was prepared by the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council with content contributions from many stakeholders. The Council expresses our thanks to everyone who assisted in preparing this report.

The *Casting the Net Upstream Annual Report, 2017* is exclusively web-published, at a savings of more than \$5.50 per color copy. It is available online at:

www.StopSuicideAlaska.org

<http://dhss.alaska.gov/SuicidePrevention/>



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