

The Healthcare Consortium

For Your Health

“Be Part of the Effort to Prevent Suicide”

Sydney Keiler, Director of Development and Communications

The month of September is Suicide Prevention Month. Consequently, this is a good moment to focus our attention on this difficult but important topic. Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death nationwide, responsible for the death of 49,316 Americans in 2023. Moreover, it is the *second* leading cause of death among people ages 10–34, suggesting that young people are especially vulnerable. In fact, in 2023 nearly 1 in 5 high schoolers in New York State (18.5%) reported seriously considering suicide, and 1 in 10 (10.9%) reported attempting it. Those are sobering statistics.

Locally, while we know the overall number of people that die by suicide is low, we know that a much higher number visit the emergency department for intentional self-harm. Moreover, we know that there are some groups of people in our community who have much higher rates of intentional self-harm than others. For instance, in both Columbia and Greene Counties, Black non-Hispanic residents experience the highest rates of emergency department visits for intentional self-harm—nearly twice as high as White non-Hispanic residents in Columbia County, and almost 60% higher in Greene County.

These numbers tell us that suicide and intentional self-harm—and the poor mental health that prompt these actions—are serious health issues in our community that are worthy of our attention. That is why these issues are the focus of the Columbia-Greene Suicide Prevention Coalition, which has recently resumed meeting after a pandemic-induced hiatus. Suicide is also the focus of the Out of the Darkness Walk, scheduled for Sunday, October 5th.

The Out of the Darkness Walk is part of a national series organized by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) to build awareness, honor and remember loved ones, support one another, and fund critical efforts to protect mental health and prevent suicide. Each year, our local walk alternates between Columbia and Greene Counties; this year, it will be held in Catskill starting at 10:00 a.m. To register for the walk, visit afspwalks.donordrive.com/ColumbiaGreene.

You can also play a role in preventing suicide *every* day of the year. Suicide is rarely sudden and often follows changes in behavior, mood, or social connections. Risk factors such as mental health conditions, substance use, a history of violence, or social isolation can increase vulnerability. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), warning signs may include increased alcohol or drug use, aggression or agitation, withdrawal from friends and family, dramatic mood swings, impulsive or reckless behavior, collecting pills or buying a weapon, giving away possessions, tying up loose ends, or saying goodbye to loved ones. If someone begins to display these behaviors, it is important to seek immediate help from a healthcare provider or crisis line.

Local Crisis Support:

- Columbia County Mental Health Crisis Line: (518) 828-9446 (Open Access Mon–Fri, 8:30–10:30am)
- Greene County Mental Health Crisis Line: (518) 622-3344 (Ask for On-Call Worker after hours)
- Mobile Crisis Assessment Team (MCAT): (518) 943-5555 (Not 24/7; calls returned the following morning)
- MHACG Warm Line: (518) 567-4186 (Fri–Sun, 4–8pm)

There are also national supports available at any time of day or night. The Suicide & Crisis Lifeline can be reached by calling 988. You can also text 741741 to connect with the Crisis Text Line, or call 1-866-488-7386 for support through The Trevor Project, which serves LGBTQ+ youth.

While suicide is often the result of an individual's mental health crisis, our community can play a role in prevention. Each of us can make a difference by checking in regularly with friends and loved ones, speaking openly about mental health to reduce stigma, and sharing resources so no one feels alone.

This year, let's take those steps together, by joining the Columbia-Greene Out of the Darkness Walk on October 5th in Catskill.

The Healthcare Consortium is a non-profit organization with a mission of improving access to healthcare and supporting the health and well-being of the residents in our rural community. The agency is located at 325 Columbia St. in Hudson. For more information: visit www.columbiahealthnet.org or call 518-822-8820.