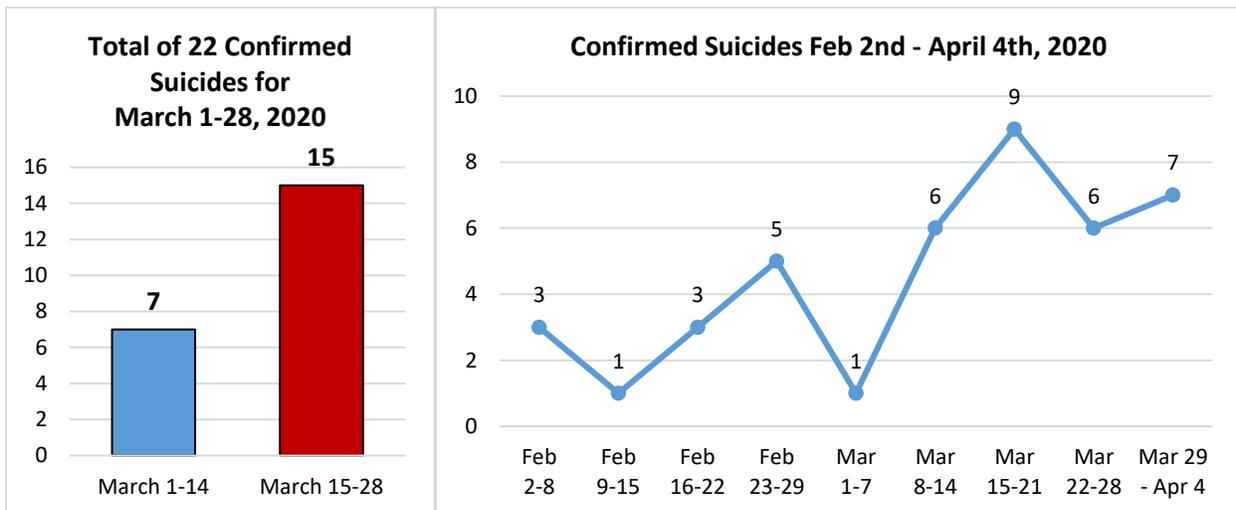


April 14, 2020

**RE: Recent spike in number of confirmed suicides in Pima County for the month of March 2020.**

Dear Community Providers,

Recent suicide data has displayed a spike in the number of deaths recorded in Pima County for the first 28 days of March 2020. **The sharpest increases were observed over the second half of March when 15 suicides were recorded in a 14-day timeframe for an average slightly above one per day.** This spike was more than double the amount from the previous 14 days (see table below).



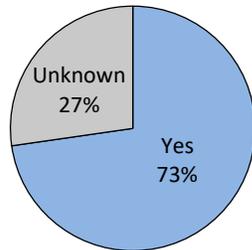
**Breaking down the data: There were a total of 22 suicides during the March 1<sup>st</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> time frame, one of which was a murder-suicide which resulted in 23 deaths in total. Three of the deaths were minors and the remaining 20 were adults ranging from age 20 to 70. The line graph to the right provides additional historical perspective in the weeks leading up to the highlighted spike.**

Although we cannot accurately estimate how much of this increase is being influenced by the current environment, we have been able to verify through record review that several of these deaths were influenced by isolation and the constant stream of negative media which exaggerates the sense of risk and fear associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

For these reasons, this alert also comes with a reminder of the psychological trauma that occurs as a result of exaggerated reporting and misused statistics presented out of context. This paired with uncertainty, financial stress, isolation, and reduced access to resources has placed all of our most vulnerable populations at a much higher risk than usual. The current statewide response to the pandemic is rightfully aimed at protecting individuals most susceptible to the virus. However, given what we know about isolation, poverty, and the profound influence of social media, it's of equal importance

to focus on our most vulnerable populations who are absorbing a disproportionate amount of the consequences stemming from social distancing and financial decline.

Confirmed Mental Illness and/or Co-occurring  
Medical Condition in  
March 1-28, 2020 Confirmed Suicides



**Lastly, people with a mental illness and co-occurring medical conditions such as heart disease, asthma, and diabetes, should be considered for more frequent check-ins to mitigate the sense of fear and danger. The constant emphasis on “death tolls” and poorly understood data is exaggerating the risks, resulting in a constant state of duress. This type of exposure can be a tipping point for many who are already at risk of suicide and drug overdose.**

Please note that all of the above data is based on point in time surveillance of fluid data sets. Public facing reports regarding fatalities would typically not be distributed in such close proximity to the actual date of death. However, given the current isolation measures and widespread use of anxiety provoking media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical that we provide information to health providers to support treatment and crisis intervention services in response to the rapid changes in our community.

As a direct service provider there is no doubt you have saved countless lives. In moments like these, this fact must be acknowledged in order to emphasize the remarkable work done each day in behavioral health. Without the ability to quantify the number of lives you’ve changed, there’s no denying that the data presented in this alert would be much worse in your absence.

The Health Department will continue to conduct surveillance to closely monitor these trends and will produce an updated report to keep you informed. We hope this information will support treatment strategies, healthy messaging, and targeted resources for vulnerable populations at risk of suicide and for those most impacted by social distancing and isolation. If you have questions, please contact our Community Mental Health and Addiction team at [CMHA@Pima.Gov](mailto:CMHA@Pima.Gov) or contact me directly at [Mark.Person@Pima.Gov](mailto:Mark.Person@Pima.Gov) or 520-724-7518. Thank you for all that you do.

Sincerely,



Mark Person, MSP  
Program Manager  
Community Mental Health and Addiction