



Suicide Health Alert for January 2022

February 23, 2022

Dear Community Providers,

The Health Department's Community Mental Health and Addiction unit conducts routine surveillance of local suicide trends. Surveillance looks at specific data sets to monitor and record trends in critical public health indicators commonly associated with suicide and self-harm. **This notification serves as an advisory as suicides have surpassed the alert threshold for the month of January 2022.**

Methods

The CMHA team uses a six-month moving average to set thresholds for issuing health alerts. The alert indicator is set at 10% greater than the moving average. This alert indicator allows for standardized methodology for the team to issue alerts when local suicide trends reach higher than expected totals.

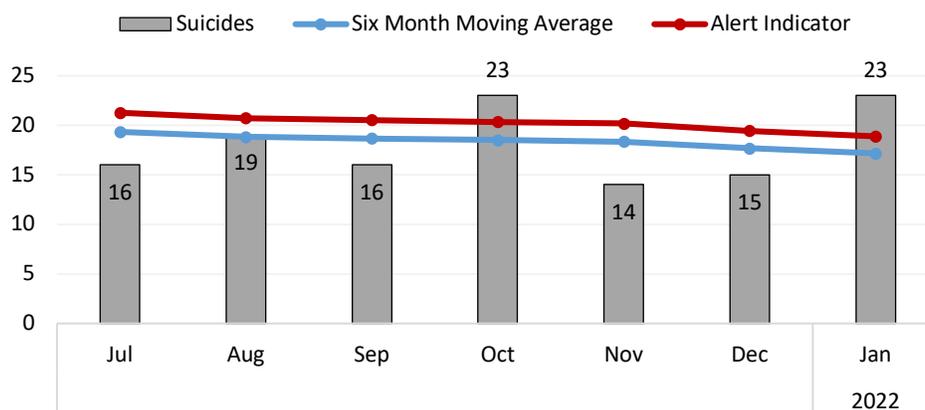
Mortality Data

Data from Arizona Department of Health Services' Vital Records and Pima County's Office of the Medical Examiner were used in this alert. There is an inherent data lag in the death certification process and the required time to complete the medical examination. Given these two factors, this report is limited to information available at the time the report was completed.

Alert

A point in time count on February 17, 2022 confirmed 23 suicides for January 2022, exceeding the alert threshold (*Figure 1*). Note, January counts are preliminary, as some cases may still be pending.

Figure 1. Count of Suicides by Month with Six Month Moving Average



Characteristics of the Increase in Suicides:

Figure 2: Firearms remain the leading cause of suicides for this time period, as 52% of all suicides in January were by firearm. Intentional overdoses, however, made up 26% of all suicides in the month of January, which is well beyond the 2021 average of 7%.

Figure 3: The percentage of females dying by suicide for this time period is also higher than historical averages. In January 2022, 35% of suicides were completed by a female, which is higher than the 2021 average of 22%.

Figure 4: Ten older adults (over the age of 60) died by suicide in January 2022. On average in 2021, there were six suicides in older adults each month, making the count in January 2022, an increase of 67%.

Figure 2. Percent Intentional Overdoses by Month

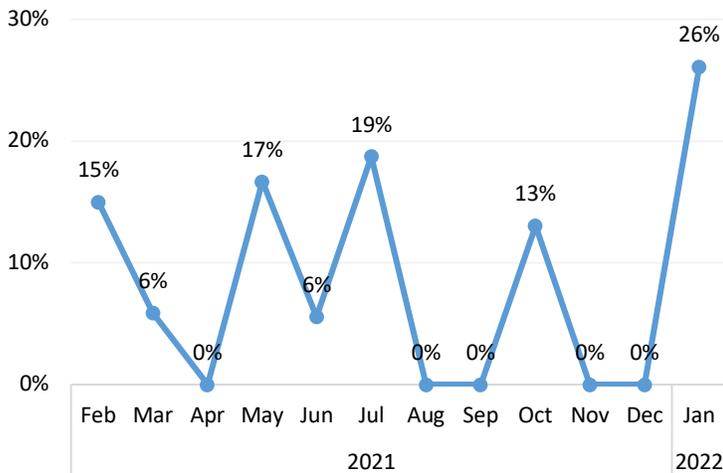


Figure 3. Percent Female Suicides by Month

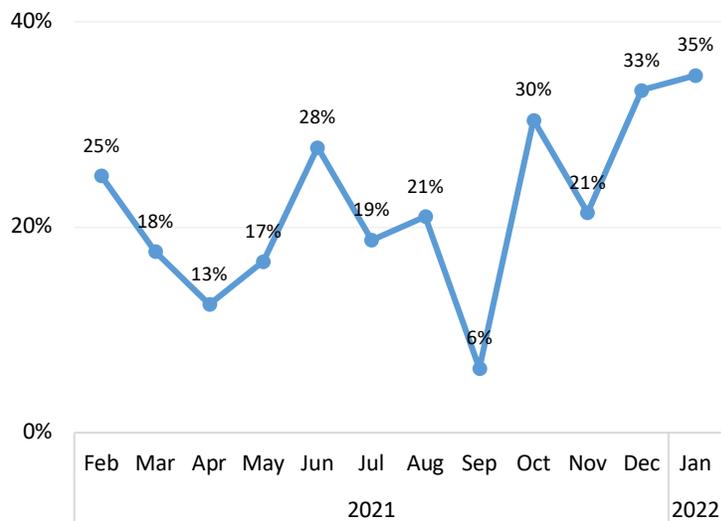
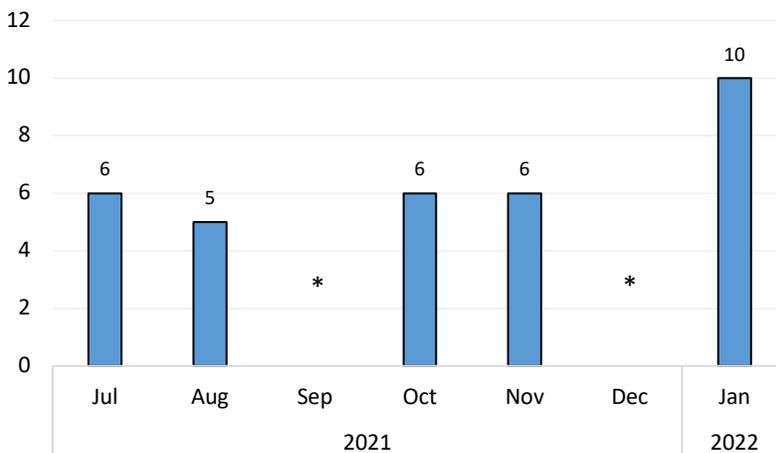


Figure 4. Suicide Decedents Over 60 Years

*Number suppressed as total is less than 5



Provider Recommendations and Risk Factors

Risk Factors for Suicide

- Access to lethal means, particularly firearms
- Prior suicide attempts
- Mental health disorders, particularly depression and other mood disorders
- Use of alcohol or other drugs
- Family history of suicide
- Suicide death within social network, especially a family member
- Social isolation
- Having debilitating chronic disease and/or disability
- Lack of access to behavioral health and substance use care
- Untreated mental health and/or substance use conditions

Protective Factors Against Suicide

- Engaging in behavioral health care and substance use treatment
- Connectedness to individuals, family, community, and social institutions
- Engaging in meaningful and/or social activities
- Life skills (such as problem solving, resiliency)
- Self-esteem and a sense of purpose or meaning in life

Provider Recommendations

- Utilize a suicide risk assessment tool, such as the Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS), to assess individuals who present with risk factors
- Refer individuals in crisis to the 2-1-1 crisis counseling program: Resilient Arizona Crisis Counseling: <https://resilientarizona.org/>
- Promote safe storage of firearms and medications, such as locks and safes
- Share resources and 24-hour crisis lines, such as:
 - Local Community Wide Crisis Line: 1-866-495-6735 or 520-622-6000
 - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
 - Teen Lifeline, call or text: 602-248-TEEN (8336)
 - Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255 (press 1)
 - Substance Use Referral and Treatment Hotline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357)
 - Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990

Organization Recommendations

- Have all staff certified in QPR Gatekeeper Training and/or Mental Health First Aid
- Make an organizational commitment at About Zero Suicide: https://www.azahcccs.gov/AHCCCS/Downloads/SuicidePrevention/Zero_Suicide_One_Pager.pdf
- Create internal protocols and policies to help others surrounding a suicide: Suicide Postvention: <https://www.azahcccs.gov/AHCCCS/Downloads/PostventionInformationSheet.pdf>
- Print and distribute attached crisis line information to clients



Our Commitment

The Health Department continues to conduct surveillance to closely monitor changes in trends and will keep you informed through these types of updates. For more information or to schedule trainings, including Mental Health First Aid and QPR Gatekeeper Training offered by certified public health instructors, visit www.pima.gov/mentalhealth or contact our team at CMHA@pima.gov.