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Rising Suicide Rates Worry U.S. Health And Military Officials

Rates High Across The Country, Including Missouri

by Jonah Kaplan, KSPR News

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An alarming rise in suicides across America has the federal government racing to help before more lives are lost.

The National Alliance On Mental Illness says there are about 100 suicides a day in the USA - and it's just as serious an issue here in missouri.

According to the Suicide Prevention Resource Center, about 700 Missourians commit suicide every year, making it the 10th leading cause of death in the state.

Suicide is even more common in young people - it's the 3rd leading cause of death for ages 15 to 24.

The alliance says of the one million Americans who attempt suicide each year, about 34,000 succeed.

"In the past year, more than eight million Americans 18 years and older thought seriously about committing suicide," notes Kathleen Sebelius, US Secretary of Health and Human Services. "More than two million had a suicide plan and more than one million attempted to take their own lives. And those numbers are quite troubling."

To help, the White House has created a new group - the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention.

Sebelius says the group allows suicide prevention advocates to reach those at risk more effectively. The alliance says high risk groups include - members of the military, Native Americans and Alaskans, young latinos, gay and lesbian youth and middle aged men.

Experts are especially concerned about the increasing number of American service members committing suicide.

More than 1,100 members of the armed forces killed themselves between 2005 and 2009.

"This June, the army saw the most deaths from suicide it's ever recorded in a one month period," says Sebelius.

"It is always a horrible tragedy to see a service member safely off the battlefield only to lose them to this scourge," adds Robert Gates, US Secretary of Defense. "We can, we must, and we will do better."

Researchers are in the process of surveying soldiers at several bases, including Fort Leonard Wood here in Missouri.

It's the largest study to date of suicide and mental health among military personnel. The Pentagon says participation is voluntary and confidential

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