



Laurie Emerson, Executive Director
NAMI Vermont
April 8, 2016
Committee: Senate Committee on Appropriations
Re: Reinstate Funding Request by Suicide Prevention Center

The Honorable Senator Jane Kitchel, Chair,

My name is Laurie Emerson. I am the Executive Director of the National Alliance of Mental Illness of Vermont (NAMI Vermont). I am also an advisory member of the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Vermont (VT SPC).

NAMI Vermont is asking the Senate Appropriations committee to reinstate the new request of \$72,000 for the Suicide Prevention Center of Vermont. Their current budget of only \$100,000 is unsustainable. This funding is essential to keep the momentum going in suicide prevention. We ask for legislative support and expansion for the state allocation to continue their work.

The VT SPC is a statewide resource fostering a sustainable approach to suicide prevention in Vermont. Their mission is to create health-promoting communities in which schools, Institutions of Higher Education, public and private agencies and people of all ages have the knowledge, attitudes, skills and resources to reduce the risk of suicide. Their research on data-driven evidence-based practices will help Vermont reduce the very high suicide rate that we have in the state.

As a nation, we lose one life to suicide every 15.8 minutes. The vast majority of those who die by suicide live with mental illness - often undiagnosed or untreated (McIntosh, J.L., Suicide: 2006 Official Final Data, American Association of Suicidology, 2009). In Vermont, 1 in 5 people are affected by mental illness - approximately 23,000 adults and 6,000 youth and teenagers.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Vermonters aged 15 through 34, and the third leading cause of death for Vermonters aged 35-44 (CDC WISQARS and VDH). Returning combat veterans are experiencing very high rates of serious mental illness, suicide, addiction, homelessness and incarceration related to posttraumatic stress disorder. Protecting and strengthening state and local mental health organizations and services will save lives. Suicide is diagnosable, it is treatable and can largely be prevented. The VT SPC promotes effective evidence- and results-based approaches to suicide prevention to ensure that crises can be averted.

The VT SPC has advanced research and innovations to help the community better understand strategies to prevent suicide. We need more investment in these effective services that meet Vermonters' needs. These services help individuals and families move from crisis to treatment and prevention.

NAMI Vermont encourages the pursuit of strategies to promote treatment, recovery and prevention for individuals who live with mental health conditions. Your leadership to appropriate funds for this organization can help continue the work of VT SPC so that current trends can be reversed to help prevent suicide for individuals affected by mental illness.

Thank you for your attention and listening to our comments.

NAMI Vermont is the independent Vermont chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, a statewide non-profit, grassroots, volunteer organization comprised of family members, friends, and individuals affected by mental illness. As our mission, NAMI Vermont supports, educates and advocates so that all communities, families, and individuals affected by mental illness can build better lives.