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Upstream Strategies to Support Mental Health Wellness in Vermont Youth

Here are the facts.

1. Suicide is the **second leading cause of death** for Vermonters aged 15 through 34 (CDC WISQARS and VDH, 2017).
2. Twenty five percent (25%) of high school students (1:4 students), and 19% of middle school students, report **feeling sad or depressed** for over two weeks in the past 12 months, the definition of clinical depression (YRBS, 2017).
3. Eleven percent (11%) of high school students, and 12% of middle school students, report **making a plan** on how they would attempt suicide (YRBS, 2017).
4. Youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ) are **4.5 times more likely** to have made a suicide attempt (CDC WISQARS and YRBS, 2017).
 - Trans youth **who have supportive families** are 5 times more likely to report high self esteem, over 14 times *less* likely to attempt suicide (TSER, 2012)
5. **Substance use** is often a part of suicide:
 - Acute alcohol intoxication is present in 30-40% of suicide attempts (SAMHSA, 2009)
 - The rate of planning and attempting suicide rises in tandem with marijuana use (VDH, Marijuana use in VT, 2015)
 - Youth who report abusing prescription medication (including opioids) have a higher rate of suicidal thinking (CDC YRBS 2018)
6. Vermont youth report their **biggest concerns** at school and in the community are drug and alcohol use, sexism, personal and emotional safety, and bullying (Vermont Network, 2018).
 - Youth report what helps the most are having **“askable” or supportive adults**, support for youth initiatives and **leadership**, training of school staff and adults, counseling and support groups, and school policy change (Vermont Network, 2018).

Umatter Trainings for Schools and Youth

Umatter for Schools is designed to create prevention prepare communities. As a national best practice program created by Center for Health and Learning, *Umatter for Schools* trains school teams:

1) as Gatekeepers, which means adults who know the risk factors and warning signs associated with suicide risk, know what to say and do and how to get help; 2) to develop or update prevention and postvention policies and protocols with mental health agencies and providers; 3) to provide awareness training for school staff and parents; 4) to deliver Lifelines curriculum to students in the classroom.

Center for Health and Learning has trained 130 schools grades 7-12 across Vermont over the past 9 years. Schools need continual support, retraining, and tooling up to keep skills and protocols up to date and address crisis as they occur.

Umatter Youth and Young Adults – This program is designed to move upstream off crisis and suicide, to build resiliency skills in youth. It uses a peer youth leadership model and trains youth in the core concepts of health and wellness, self care, communication and coping skills. School groups then design Community Action Projects to promote mental health and wellness in their school communities.

Students often go to trusted adults asking how they can help their peers and this program provides needed training and focus for these student groups to make a difference in their school community.

For more information

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