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**2022**

MESA COUNTY  
**SUICIDE REPORT**

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**MESA COUNTY  
PUBLIC HEALTH**

## DEFINITIONS

**Suicide Death** is a death caused by injuring oneself with the intent to die.

**Suicide Attempt** when someone harms themselves with any intent to end their life, but they do not die as a result of their actions.

**Suicidal Ideation**, also known as suicidal thought, is thinking about, considering, or planning suicide. It can range from a passing thought to detailed planning.

## RISK FACTORS

Previous suicide attempts, history of mental disorders (e.g. clinical depression), isolation, easy access to lethal methods, and history of alcohol or substance abuse.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

**THE SUICIDE DEATH RATE IN MESA COUNTY REMAINS HIGHER THAN BOTH THE STATE OF COLORADO AND THE UNITED STATES.**

### LIFE STRESSORS

The top life stressors experienced prior to death were drug/alcohol misuse, relationship, and physical health.

### AGE

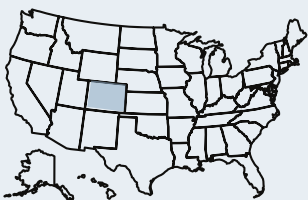
The highest rate of suicide death was observed among working-age adults. Meanwhile, the highest rate of hospital visits for a suicide attempt/ideation was observed among youth and young adults.

### MEANS

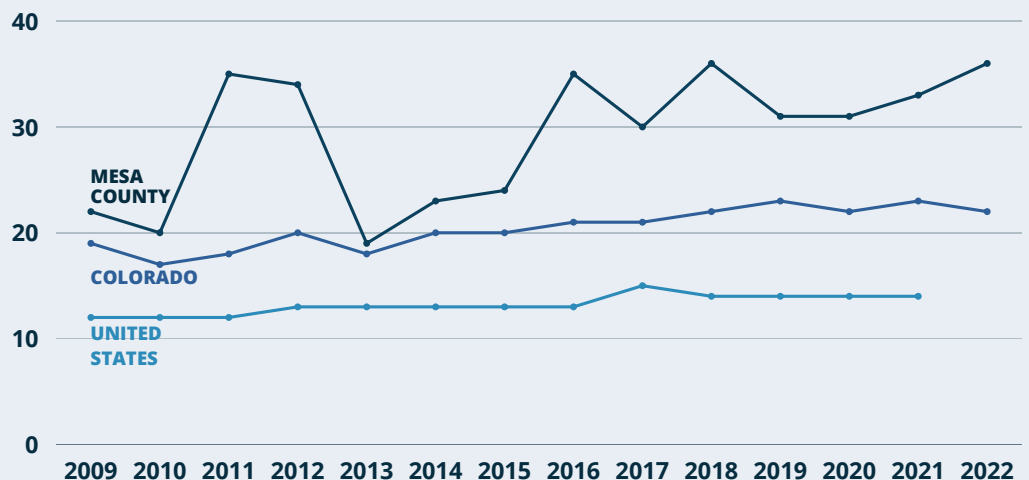
Firearms are responsible for half of suicide deaths in Mesa County.

### SUBSTANCE USE

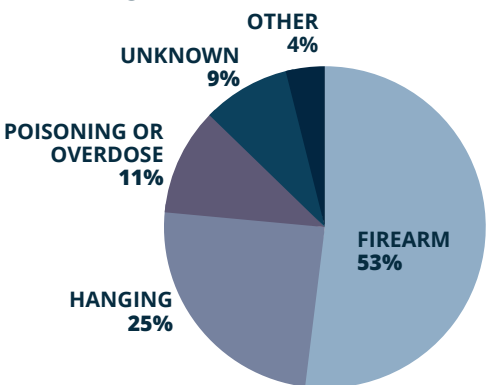
Drugs or alcohol were involved at the time of death in nearly 75% of suicide deaths.



**RATE OF SUICIDE DEATH PER 100,000 IN MESA COUNTY, COLORADO, AND THE UNITED STATES (2009-2022)**

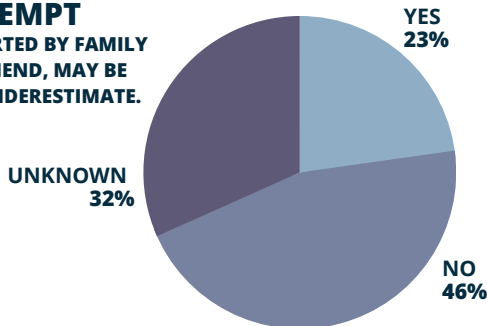


## METHOD

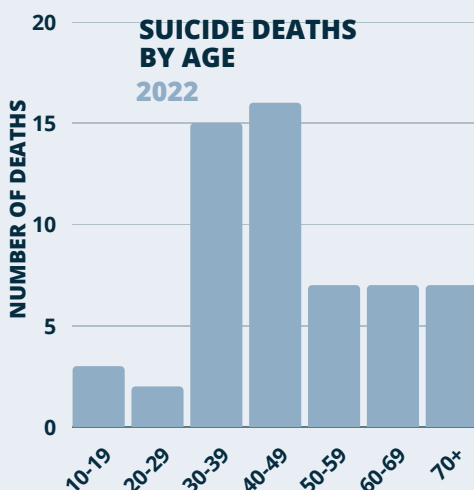
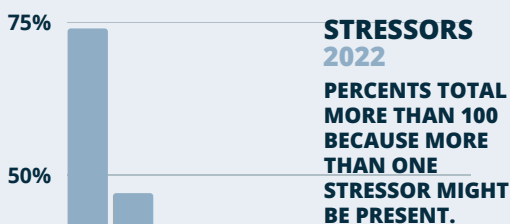


## PREVIOUS SUICIDE ATTEMPT

REPORTED BY FAMILY OR FRIEND, MAY BE AN UNDERESTIMATE.



Those who die by suicide have **often made previous attempts**. In 2022, one in four people who died by suicide had a known previous attempt.



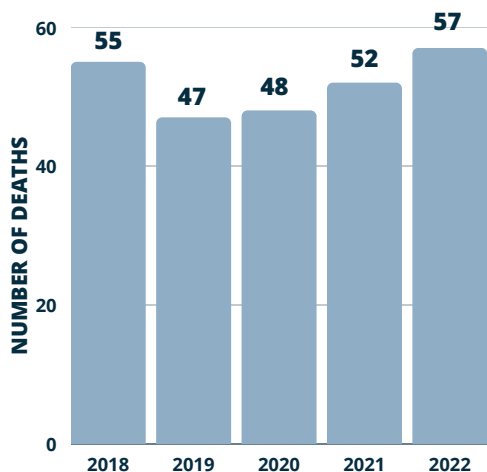
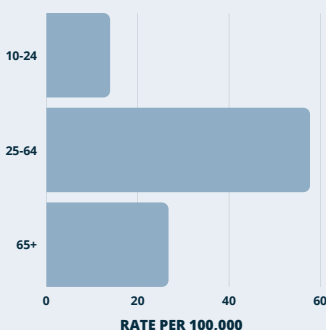
## INSIGHTS

Suicide rates are **highest among working adults** aged 25 to 64. In 2022, the majority of deaths by suicide were among adults aged 30 to 49, compared to only a third in 2021.

65% of people who died by suicide were **experiencing 2 or more non-substance-related life stressors** at the time of their death.

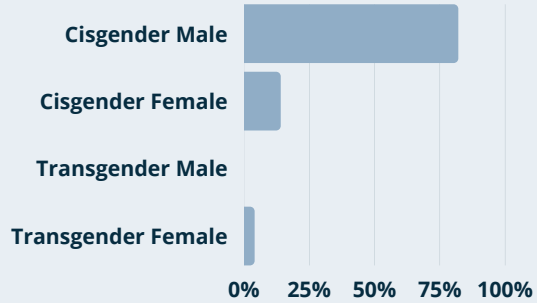
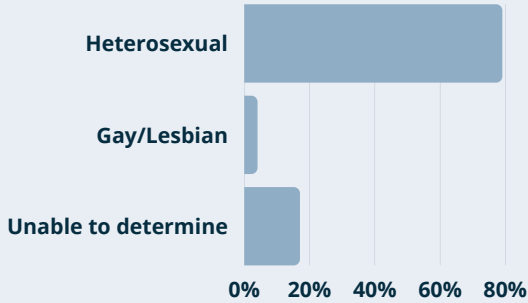
Substance Misuse and Finances as life stressors **increased significantly from 2021 to 2022**. Substance misuse increased by 50%, and Financial stressors more than doubled.

SUICIDE DEATHS BY AGE PER 100,000 IN MESA COUNTY

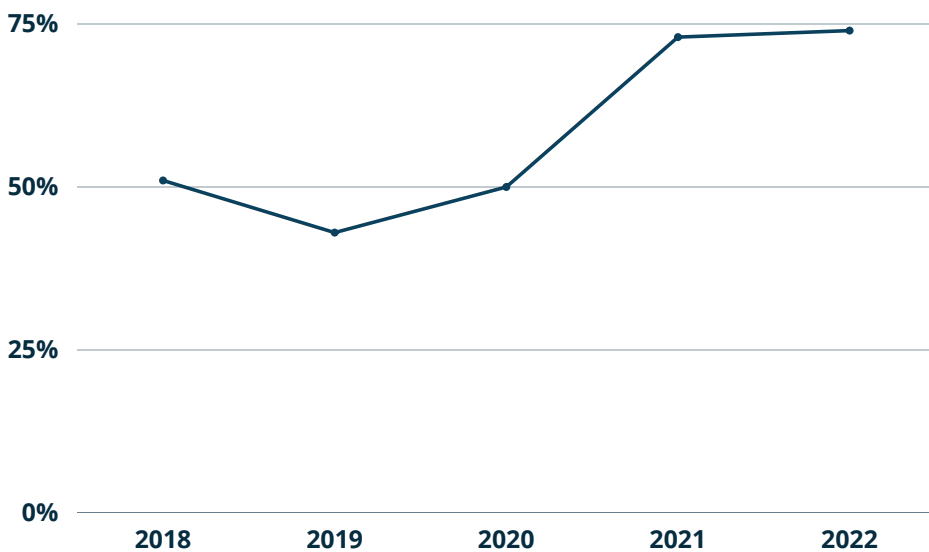
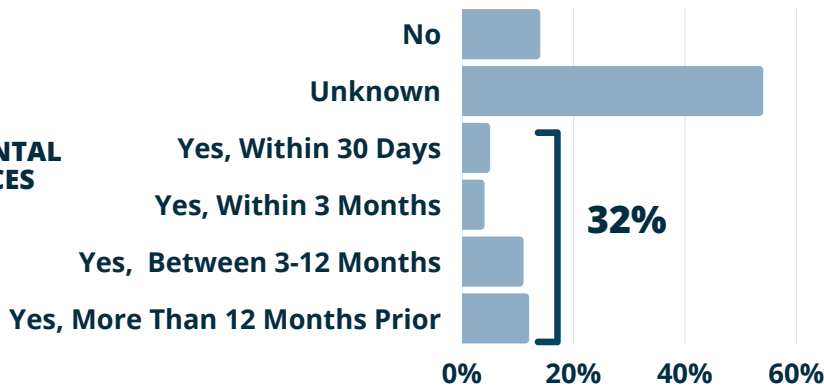


The rate of suicide deaths in Mesa County has **increased over the last two years**, and is notably higher than the statewide rate.

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER



## ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES 2022



## DRUG OR ALCOHOL INVOLVEMENT AT TIME OF DEATH 2018-2022

## INSIGHTS

In Mesa County in 2022, **suicide deaths were nearly 5 times more prevalent by population among men compared to women**, at 69.5 per 100,000 compared to 14.5. Nationally, men die by suicide at four times the rate of women.

Though women are equally likely to attempt suicide in Mesa County, men are more likely to die by suicide. **This may be related to the more common methods used by men compared to women.** Across 2021 and 2022, over half of men (55%) used a firearm, compared to only 1 in 4 (25%) of women.

4% of those who died by suicide were Gay or Lesbian, and 4% were Transgender. **These percentages may be underreported as this is reported by friends and family who may not have known** or been ready to share this sensitive information.

Nationally, most suicide investigations do not collect sexual orientation or gender identity information, so there is little reliable data on how many gay and transgender people die by suicide in the United States. However, recent studies have shown that these communities are at a higher risk of suicide which reinforces the importance of asking about sexual identity. Going forward, **we will be working to improve local data collection to better understand the impact of suicide on this community.**

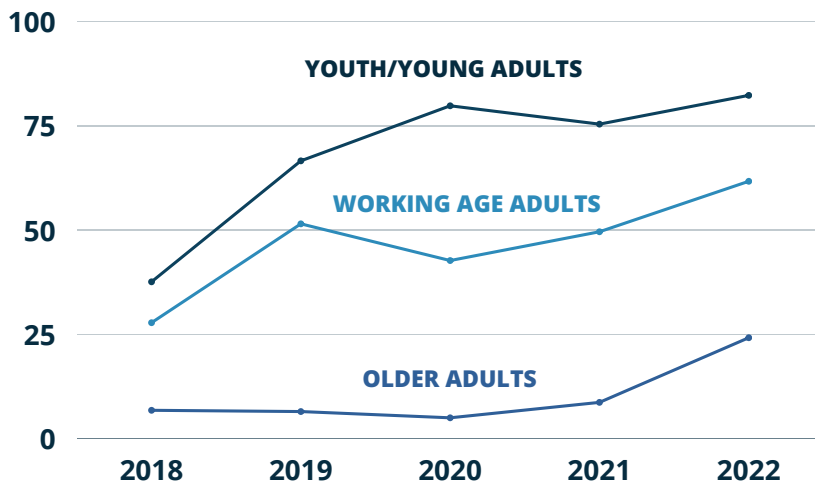
Data was collected on **suicide attempts and incidents of suicidal ideation resulting in an emergency department visit** in Mesa County during 2022. A majority of the data are based on ICD-10 primary diagnosis code.



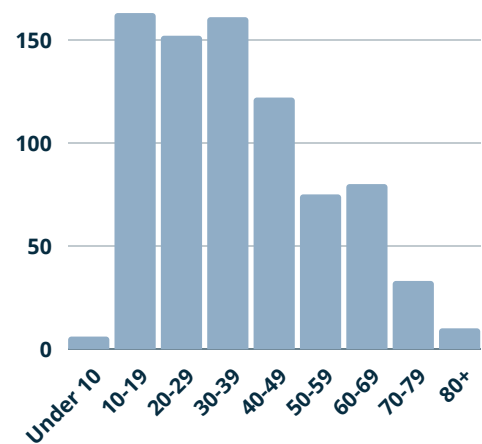
**53% WERE MALE**

St. Mary's Medical Center, Community Hospital, VA Western Colorado Health System, and Family Health West Hospital and Medical Center reported the data. Suicide risk at Mind Springs and West Springs Hospital is assessed differently.

**EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT VISITS BY AGE GROUP**



**AGE DISTRIBUTION, SUICIDE ATTEMPTS AND IDEATION**



## INSIGHTS

Youth/Young Adult hospital visits seem to have **stabilized after an increase in 2019 and 2020**. Working adult visits continue to trend upward, more than doubling in four years. Older adult visits were fairly stable but **began increasing in 2021 and 2022, nearly quadrupling in four years**.

In 2022, a **larger share of these visits were for ideation than in previous years**, suggesting that either people are seeking care earlier in their crisis, or that more people are having ideation crises that rise to the intensity of visiting the hospital.

## TOP 3 CAUSES OF OVERDOSE

OVER THE COUNTER PAIN MEDICATIONS

BENZODIAZEPINES (SUCH AS XANAX)

OTHER PRESCRIPTION MEDICATION (SUCH AS INSULIN AND HEART MEDICATION)



When school personnel are concerned about a student, **they make a referral to trained staff to complete a Suicide Risk Screener (SRS)**. This screener determines the level of intervention required and can initiate immediate safety planning. The number of referrals is related to staff awareness and **concern about behaviors that may be warning signs of suicidal risk**.

## RISK SCREENERS

2022-2023

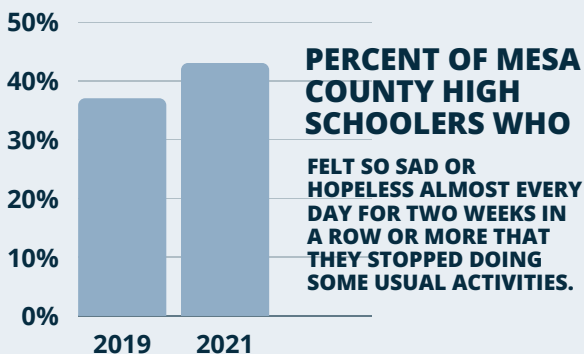
2021-2022

601

853

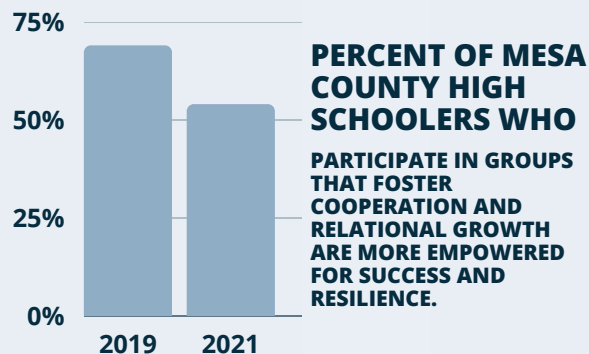
**NUMBER OF SCREENERS COMPLETED BY MESA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT 51.**

This is a decrease from last year, which **may reflect less need for screeners, or the technical difficulty** of moving to a new screener system.



**PERCENT OF MESA COUNTY HIGH SCHOOLERS WHO**

**FELT SO SAD OR HOPELESS ALMOST EVERY DAY FOR TWO WEEKS IN A ROW OR MORE THAT THEY STOPPED DOING SOME USUAL ACTIVITIES.**



**PERCENT OF MESA COUNTY HIGH SCHOOLERS WHO**

**PARTICIPATE IN GROUPS THAT FOSTER COOPERATION AND RELATIONAL GROWTH ARE MORE EMPOWERED FOR SUCCESS AND RESILIENCE.**

THE SURVEY IS ADMINISTERED TO MIDDLE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ACROSS COLORADO EVERY TWO YEARS.



SAFE2TELL IS AN ANONYMOUS WAY FOR STUDENTS, PARENTS, SCHOOL STAFF AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO REPORT CONCERNS REGARDING THEIR SAFETY OR THE SAFETY OF OTHERS.

2022-2023

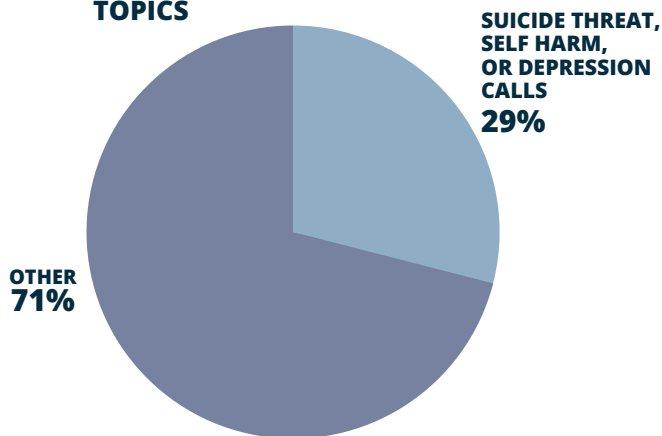
2021-2022

615

547

**NUMBER OF REPORTS RECEIVED**  
[DATA FROM SCHOOL DISTRICT 51 FOR SCHOOL YEAR 2022-2023, AUGUST-MAY]

TOPICS



**SUICIDE THREAT, SELF HARM, OR DEPRESSION CALLS**  
**29%**

**OTHER**  
**71%**

In Mesa County, we **approach health improvement through our One Community lens**. We address our community challenges through five areas of impact:



**ECONOMIC STABILITY**



**EDUCATION**



**HEALTH CARE AND ACCESS**



**NEIGHBORHOOD AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT**



**SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT**

To effectively address each of these areas, we look at data and information, work through cross-sector partnerships, promote and **mobilize around topics of shared importance**, and ensure we have the right resources to achieve our collective goals.

**Our suicide prevention work is an example of this approach in action.** Current community efforts are focused in Social and Community Context, Health Care and Access, Education, and Economic Stability. The lead cross-sector partnership working on these important actions is the Mesa County Suicide Prevention Coalition.

HEALTH DOESN'T START IN THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE,



**IT STARTS WHERE WE LIVE, LEARN, WORK, AND PLAY.**

In Mesa County we work hard, we play hard, and we take care of each other. **Yet not everyone has the same opportunities to make choices that allow them to live a long and healthy life.** People in Mesa County lose time, money, and years of their life to preventable and treatable illnesses. Mesa County's foundation is strong in some ways and weak in others. When the foundation is weak, healthy choices feel out of reach as people struggle to meet basic needs.

## SUICIDE PREVENTION IN ACTION



Grand Valley Connects is an enhanced resource navigation program that **assists community members with more complex needs**.



Mesa County Opioid Response Group partners **provide community trainings and substance abuse recovery support**.



Gun shops and pawn shops participate in Colorado's Gun Shop Project, **providing information about suicide risk and distributing gun locks to encourage safe storage** of firearms.



Veteran Programs in Mesa County foster **connection and economic stability**.



The Behavioral Health Steering Committee **works to address gaps in our mental health care system**.



Mesa County Libraries **host events related to mental health, grief, resilience and more**, with partners such as HopeWest, Hilltop, and others.



**INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?**  
SPMESACOUNTY@GMAIL.COM

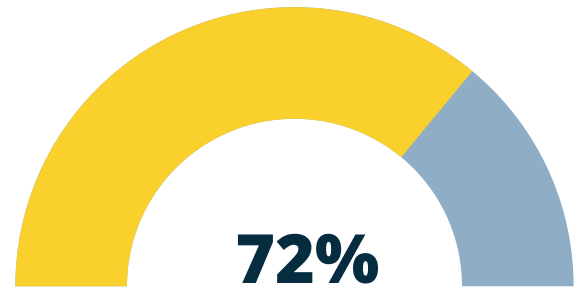
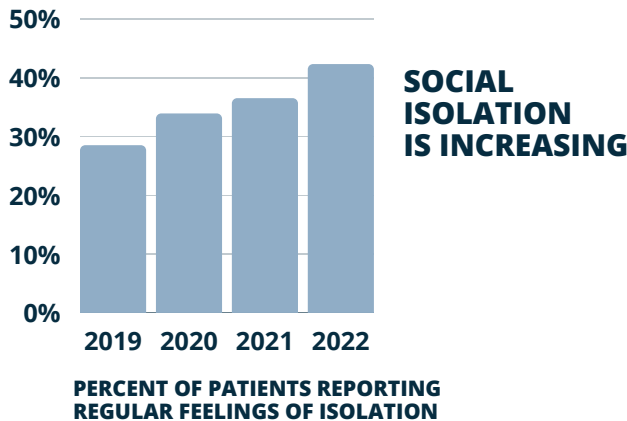


## SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT

### CONNECTEDNESS

Feeling connected to other people, schools, neighborhoods, workplaces, faith communities, and cultural groups **protects** people from suicide risk.

The Mesa County Suicide Prevention Coalition supports school-based social and emotional learning programs, **advises workplaces about policies that help people feel included and facilitates events and activities across the community.**



**MESA COUNTY STUDENTS REPORT HAVING AN ADULT THEY CAN GO TO FOR HELP WITH A SERIOUS PROBLEM. IT IS SIMILAR TO THE STATE, WHICH IS 74%.**

[HEALTHY KIDS COLORADO, 2022]

Historically, little data has been effectively collected about gender identity and sexual orientation in Mesa County, making it difficult to understand the impact of suicide on the LGBT community. **In 2022, reporting standards for suicide death changed to include more accurate information.** One focus of LGBT support groups in Mesa County is education and training around having sensitive conversations to collect this information to ensure everyone in Mesa County receives care that **matches their identity and physical needs.**



## HEALTH CARE AND ACCESS

### ACCESS TO SAFER CARE

By implementing best practices for safer care, health care systems and organizations will see improvement in quality of patient care and **reduction of suicide risk, attempts, and deaths** for those within their system.

All **three non-profit hospitals** in Mesa County, St. Mary's, Community Hospital, and Family Health West, are working to implement the **Zero Suicide Program** to improve outcomes for patients experiencing suicidal crisis.

The hospitals are at different stages of implementation, but in 2022 their work focused on **improving staff training and streamlining systems** for effective screening, suicide care, and follow up.

**VA Western Colorado** is working on similar goals under their own suicide prevention program.





## SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT

### POSTVENTION

A loss of a loved one to suicide is a known risk factor for suicide death. **Postvention is the response to and care for individuals and communities affected by a suicide attempt, crisis, or death.** Examples include safe reporting and messaging about suicide by the media and affected organizations. It also includes caring follow up contacts after a suicide attempt or mental health crisis.

In 2022, the Mesa County Suicide Loss Coordinator supported valley residents who recently lost a loved one. She connected with family members impacted by suicide to make sure that their immediate needs were being met and worked with them as they navigated the logistical and emotional hurdles that came in the months following their loss.

In 2023, similar work is being done by the Family Support Coordinator.

*"She helped me through an unbelievably difficult time, and now I am a better, more supportive person to others with a loss in their lives."*  
-Client

2022

163

INDIVIDUALS SUPPORTED

826

PHONE CALLS, TEXTS, MEETINGS



### EDUCATION & AWARENESS

The training and awareness levels of community members and medical providers protects people at risk of suicide by ensuring that when they need help, **they get it from knowledgeable and skillful people.**



**You could be the difference in the life of someone experiencing a suicidal crisis - your neighbor, your employee, your child, your friend.**

**Training is available for free in Mesa County.** Options range from 1-2 hours in person or online or full-day in person training.

**SCAN TO SEE CURRENT TRAININGS:**

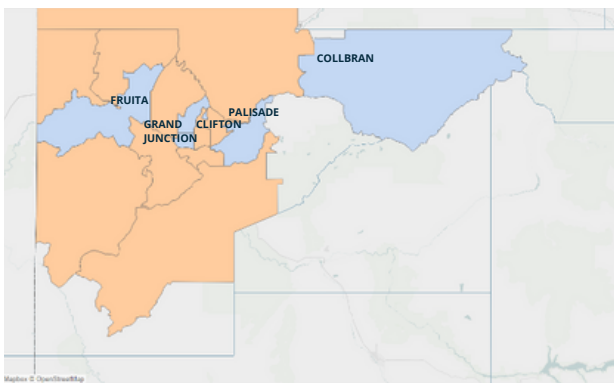




## ECONOMIC STABILITY

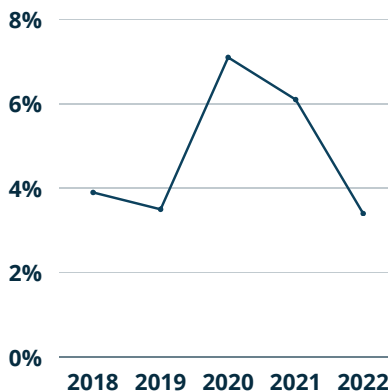
### ECONOMIC STABILITY

Economic stability increases resilience and reduces financial stress - a risk factor for suicide. **Policies and practices for increased food security, affordable housing, family-friendly employment, and access to affordable, quality child care are suicide prevention efforts.**



DESSERT    NON-DESSERT

A child care desert is an area with more than three children ages 0-4 for each licensed child care spot.



**UNEMPLOYMENT RATE**  
[BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS]



**An enhanced resource navigation program** that assists community members with more complex needs.

The program was established by Mesa County Public Health in May 2022 **and has received 600 referrals, with an average of 52 new referrals per month.**

The top needs identified are **counseling, housing, and mental health.**

### LETHAL MEANS

Access to lethal means describes the ability of a person experiencing a suicidal crisis to access the tools required to end their life. The Mesa County Suicide Prevention Coalition focuses on safe storage of firearms and appropriate storage and disposal of medications to reduce this risk.



**NUMBER OF GUN LOCKS DISTRIBUTED**  
BY VA WESTERN COLORADO HEALTH SYSTEM IN MESA COUNTY

2022

962

2021

650

2020

400



**POUNDS OF MEDICATION DISPOSED OF THROUGH**  
MEDICATION TAKE BACK SITES

2022

1,149

2021

753

2020

492

# COLORADO NATIONAL COLLABORATIVE

The Colorado National Collaborative (CNC) is a partnership of professionals, organizations, and community members working on community-based strategies to prevent suicide in Colorado.

Mesa County is a proud participant in the CNC and **is working towards the goal of reducing suicide by 20% by the year 2024.**

## SOURCES

Mesa County Public Health Suicide Attempt Surveillance, 2022

Mesa County Coroner's Office, Suicide Death Data

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

School District 51, 2022-2023

## CRISIS RESOURCES



Free, 24/7, confidential crisis support by text.

CRISIS TEXT LINE |

## PREVIOUS REPORTS

See previous annual suicide reports on the [MCPH Community Reports page](#).



MESA COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH

health.mesacounty.us