



# OFFICE OF THE STATE AUDITOR



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## State's Suicide Prevention Efforts Stretch Limited Funding

DENVER—A new report released by the Office of the State Auditor (OSA) provides detailed information about 11 suicide prevention activities funded by the Office Suicide Prevention (Office), located in the Department of Public Health and Environment. Measuring the impact of suicide prevention strategies on Colorado's suicide rate can be challenging because suicide risk is influenced by many factors. Colorado's suicide rate is the 10th highest in the nation and, between 2015 and 2019, it increased from 19.5 to 21.6 suicide deaths per 100,000 people. The State's goal is to reduce the suicide rate by 20 percent by 2024.

The Office is tasked with coordinating the State's suicide prevention strategies and relies on funding from a variety of sources for these efforts. Office spending increased from about \$600,000 in Fiscal Year 2017 to \$2.9 million in Fiscal Year 2020 due largely to the availability of additional federal funds and new state funding for school-based suicide awareness programs. The OSA's report pulls together information about various suicide prevention activities in a single place and connects these activities to the dollars being spent. "For a relatively little amount of money, the State is trying to accomplish a lot. This report helps policy makers and taxpayers understand what those efforts look like," said Heidi Wagner, Legislative Audit Supervisor.

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Examples of funded suicide prevention activities include programs to follow up with people recently discharged from the hospital who are at risk of suicide, to promote behavioral health resources for working-age men, and to provide training at schools on suicide awareness and the importance of a positive school climate. For each of the 11 suicide prevention activities funded by the Office, the report outlines key factors and which counties were served by the activity.

Auditors found that the State has sound processes for identifying priority areas for targeting its suicide prevention efforts. However, there are also opportunities for the Office to ensure that it receives full value and benefit from its investment in suicide prevention efforts. Of \$3.7 million spent on suicide prevention activities, auditors estimate that about \$301,000 was spent to reimburse grantee costs even though grantees did not complete all of the essential activities included in their grant agreements.

The audit makes one recommendation.

The full report is available online at [www.colorado.gov/auditor](http://www.colorado.gov/auditor).

#### **About the Office of the State Auditor (OSA)**

Under the direction of the State Auditor, the OSA is the State's nonpartisan, independent external auditor with broad authority to audit state agencies, departments, institutions of higher education, and the Judicial and Legislative Branches. The OSA also conducts evaluations of the State's tax expenditures (e.g., credits, exemptions, deductions) established in statute, administers a fraud reporting hotline, and tracks about 4,000 Colorado local governments for compliance with the Local Government Audit Law. The OSA's professional staff serve the people of Colorado by addressing relevant public issues through high-quality, objective audits, evaluations, and other work products that promote accountability and positive change in government.

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