



National Association of County & City Health Officials

The National Connection for Local Public Health

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Carol Moehrle, RN, BSN, Director of Public Health - Idaho North Central District Will Discuss Rural Suicide at Today's Mental Health Congressional Briefing

— *Idaho is consistently among the states with the highest suicide rates* —

Washington, DC, May 21, 2019 — As part of Mental Health Awareness Month, the Congressional Mental Health Caucus co-chaired by Rep. Grace F. Napolitano (D-CA) and Rep. John Katko (R-NY) have invited mental health experts from around the country to present at the Congressional Briefing: *A Look at Mental Health Access and Protections on the Local Level* on May 21st. [Ms. Carol Moehrle, RN, BSN](#), Director of the North Central District Health Department in Lewiston, ID will discuss rural suicide prevention and local public health prevention strategies. Ms. Moehrle is a member and Past President of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), the voice of the nation's nearly 3,000 local health departments. NACCHO is a sponsor of today's briefing.

Mental health services and regulations can look very different in each state and county, from rural to urban areas. This legislative briefing will examine how states and local governments (e.g., cities and counties) are working to create improved behavioral and mental health services that can serve as a guideline for Congress.

"The 2016 national age-adjusted suicide rate reached the highest level seen in decades, and rural America is sustaining the largest increase, with suicide rates being the highest in the Western US," said Ms. Moehrle, whose health department serves a rural

population of 120,000 residents. “The fact that suicide occurs more frequently in rural areas is not new. However, recent CDC data show that the disparity between rural and urban areas has slowly widened in recent years. Stressors in rural communities are different than in urban areas. Many economically struggling rural areas are experiencing the largest losses to suicide. Rural America also faces isolation issues due to lack of transportation, lack of social support and lack of access to behavioral health services. That along with the ongoing stigma around mental health are stressors more prevalent in Rural America.”

According to the [Idaho Department of Health and Welfare](#), Idaho is consistently among the states with the highest suicide rates. In 2016, Idaho had the eighth highest suicide rate in the U.S. with a rate of 20.8, 50% higher than the national average. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Idahoans ages 15-34 and for males up to age 44.

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) notes that suicide is a large and growing public health problem. Suicide is currently the 10th leading cause of death in the United States, responsible for nearly 45,000 deaths in 2016, with approximately one death every 12 minutes. Many more people think about or attempt suicide and survive. In 2016, 9.8 million American adults seriously thought about suicide, 2.8 million made a plan, and 1.3 million attempted suicide.

NACCHO recognizes the considerable burden and impact of suicide as a national public health problem. Local health departments work with community partners to prevent suicide and address mental health challenges. NACCHO supports policies and practices that support and promote the Surgeon General’s National Strategy for Suicide

Prevention. Among the polices NACCHO encourages local health departments to adopt are:

- Encourage changes in systems, policies, and environments that promote healthy and empowered individuals, families, and communities and support prevention of suicide.
- Provide enhanced clinical and community preventive services, including school-based mental health and substance use services.
- Address risk factors (e.g., barriers to health care, high conflict or violent relationships, family history of suicide, mental illness, substance abuse, aggression), protective factors (e.g., safe and supportive school and community environments,

social connectedness, coping and problem solving skills), and geographic differences in suicidal behaviors.

- Provide better data linkage between systems to prevent suicide and suicide attempts.
- Ensure available, accessible, and timely treatment and support services.

“Suicide is a complex behavior and requires a public health, population based approach to prevention. With more than half of our US counties without a single behavioral health provider, local health departments are more than ever looked upon to assist with our Mental Health and suicide crisis,” concluded Ms. Moehrle.”

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About NACCHO

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) represents the nation's nearly 3,000 local health departments. These city, county, metropolitan, district, and tribal departments work every day to protect and promote health and well-being for all people in their communities. For more information about NACCHO, please visit www.naccho.org