Suicide Prevention: A Statement from NACCHO

In light of the high-profile suicides this week – Kate (Spade) Valentine on Tuesday and well-traveled storyteller and friend of food and cultures Anthony Bourdain this morning – we are reminded of the devastating and irrevocable act that takes the lives of thousands of people every year. More than half of the people who die by suicide had no known mental health condition at the time of death. There were nearly 45,000 suicides in the U.S. in 2016, more than double the number of homicides, and the ages of 45-64 are an especially vulnerable time in terms of mental health, when suicide rates are the highest. Suicide was the second-leading cause of death among people ages 15 to 34. The number of suicides by both military veterans and youth has also alarmingly spiked: suicide among veterans is 22% higher than for civilians of the same age, and for 15-24-year-olds, suicide is the third-leading cause of death. Clearly, more funding for mental health services and working to build awareness of risk factors and removing the overwhelming stigma of mental illness is key.

NACCHO wants to remind its local health departments and partners that for those who are struggling, there is help: The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number is 1.800.273.8255, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness offers resources at https://www.nami.org/Find-Support. For people in crisis for whom speaking on the phone is difficult, there are texting services: text NAMI to 741741, and https://chat.itskoko.com/. SAMHSA also has a national helpline: 1.800.662.HELP (4357), in both English and Spanish. Health departments can work with communities to put in place a comprehensive suicide prevention program using CDC's *Preventing Suicide: A Technical Package of Policy, Programs, and Practices*. All of these resources are vital lifelines to which we add, please watch out for your friends, families, colleagues, and acquaintances, and do not be afraid to speak up to offer help. NACCHO also has a post on the Preparedness Brief blog, "Why Including a Behavioral Health Component to an Emergency Preparedness Plan is Critical," which contains useful links for trainings, planning resources, federal resources, and technical assistance: https://bit.ly/2IZT30r.