TO: Local Media

From: Nicole Anjeski, Public Health Director, Cortland County Health Department, Sharon MacDougall, Director of Community Services, Cortland County Mental Health Department, and SPEAK UP Cortland (Suicide Prevention Coalition)

RE: 2023 Cortland County Suicide Prevention Needs Assessment Released

DATE: 7/5/2023

The Cortland County Health Department, Cortland County Mental Health Department, and SPEAK UP Cortland Suicide Prevention Coalition are announcing the release of the 2023 Cortland County Suicide Prevention Needs Assessment. Suicide is a complex, multifaceted public health issue, so accurate and thorough data assessment is essential in monitoring progress and making changes to community plans on an as needed basis. It is essential to periodically re-assess the state of suicide prevention within a community to best support and address the needs of community members.

Populations identified at risk of suicide in Cortland County include but are not limited to:

- Middle Age Male Population
- Youth Population
- LGBTQ+ Population

While middle age men are most likely to die by suicide in Cortland County, data collected for this assessment has affirmed the need for suicide prevention efforts in youth locally. Individuals living in Cortland County zip codes that are under the age of 19 accounted for the highest number of Emergency Department visits related to suicide ideation/attempts at Guthrie Cortland Medical Center from October 2020 to December 2022. In addition to this data, Cortland County Youth Survey data suggests there has been no notable progress in the percentage of youth reporting suicide ideation since 2018, though there has been a slight decline in reported attempts.

The local data included in this assessment also identified that marginalized groups, in particular, our LGBTQ+ community members are at particular risk for suicide ideation and attempts. Research shows that LGBQT+ individuals are not inherently prone to suicide risk, but are placed at higher risk because of how they are treated and stigmatized by society. The 2022 Community Health Assessment Survey in Cortland County (n=2,266) found that survey respondents that self-identified as LGBQ+ were 4 times more likely to report they have attempted suicide in their lifetime than respondents that self-identified as straight. Cortland County Youth Survey Data shows similar trends.
Risk factors likely to be associated with suicide in Cortland County include but are not limited to:

- Mental Health Disorders
- Depression
- Substance Use
- Chronic Illness/Disability
- Financial Problems
- Bullying
- Hopelessness
- Social Isolation

Suicide is almost never caused by a single circumstance or event, but rather a range of individual, relationship, community, and societal factors such as those noted here. Local surveys suggest mental health disorders, depression, and substance use are prominent risk factors for suicide ideation and attempts in Cortland County adult and youth populations. There is also support showing that chronic illness/disability, and financial problems may contribute to suicide ideation/attempts in adults and that bullying, aggressive tendencies, hopelessness, social isolation, and high conflict relationships may contribute to suicide ideation in youth.

View the full 2023 Suicide Prevention Needs Assessment here.

Next steps for suicide prevention in Cortland County:

- Implement suicide prevention strategies that address the risk factors identified in this assessment through pooling of resources via the SPEAK UP Cortland coalition.
- Advocate for funding for more sustained suicide prevention efforts and to fill in the resource gaps identified in this assessment.
- Build systems to better track suicide prevention efforts and measure changes overtime.

Director of Community Services, Sharon MacDougall States:

“Suicide prevention efforts in our community will need to increase after the layers of need intensify in communities from the pandemic. This suicide prevention assessment will help us to use data informed decisions connected with our community feedback.”

Public Health Director, Nicole Anjeski States:

“The topic of suicide is often stigmatized and can be one of the most uncomfortable discussions to have, but what is not always understood is that suicide is a serious public health problem. Both economic and human costs of suicidal behavior does not only affect individuals, but also families, communities and society. It is important for public health to emphasize efforts to prevent suicide before it occurs. This requires not only reducing risk factors that may put people at risk but also increasing the factors that protect people from engaging in suicidal behavior”

Resources for Community Members:

- Call or text 988 if you are experiencing emotional distress
- Call 2-1-1 to be connected to local mental health and suicide prevention resources
- Know the warning signs of suicide which can be found here.
Media entities should reference the following document for recommendations on safe reporting on suicide: https://afsp.org/safereporting