



Wake County Public Health

2024 Mental Health Issue Brief: Suicide

OVERVIEW

Suicide remains a challenging issue affecting individuals and communities. Understanding the data behind it can help guide us toward more effective prevention and support efforts. The data included in this issue brief show the many people who face moments of deep pain and struggle, times when hope feels out of reach.

Suicide is death caused by injuring oneself with the intent to die. A **suicide attempt** is when someone harms themselves with any intent to end their life, but they do not die because of their actions.¹

Each year in
Wake County:

An average of

106
people



lose their
lives to
suicide²

Approximately

746



suicide attempts³

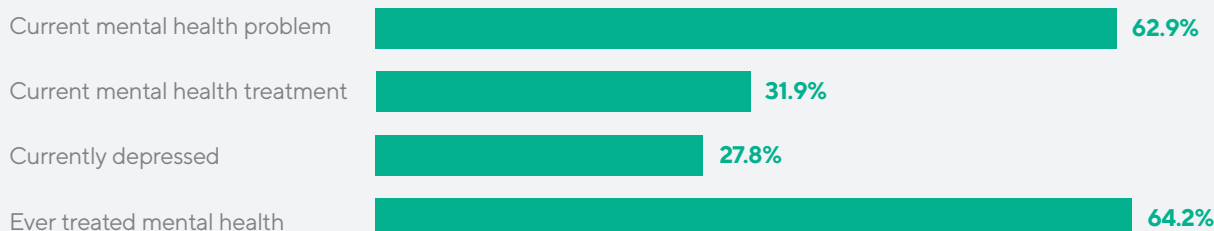
High-Risk Populations:

(From 2018-2022)

- NC veterans were 2.7 times more likely to die by suicide than non-veterans.
- The highest rates of NC veteran suicides were among 18-34-year-olds and **83.8%** were reported among non-Hispanic Whites.
- Firearms were used in three-fourths of NC veteran suicides (**76.3%**) compared to a little over half of non-veteran suicides (**57.4%**).
- According to the 2021 National Vital Statistics System, occupational groups with the highest suicide rates included construction, farming, fishing, forestry, personal care, installation, maintenance and repair, the arts, design, entertainment, sports and media.
- Experiencing a current mental health issue and having a history of treatment for mental illness were common mental health factors among individuals who died by suicide in NC in 2022. See Figure 1.⁶

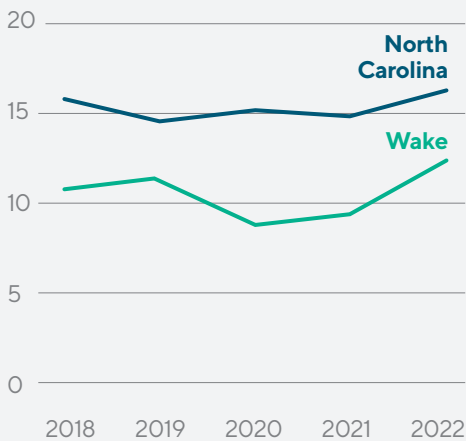
It's important to remember these percentages represent real lives – not just the lives behind the percentages but also their family, friends and other loved ones. As you review this data, please remember to take care of yourself. If you find any part of this information challenging, consider pausing and checking in with your own feelings, and reach out for support if needed.

Figure 1 Mental Health Circumstances for Suicide Victims, North Carolina, 2022



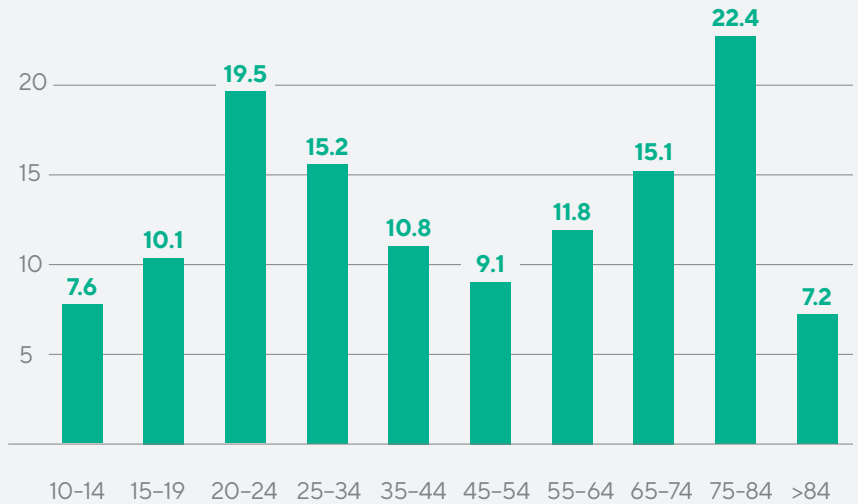
WAKE COUNTY SUICIDE MORTALITY RATES

Figure 2 Suicide Mortality Rate per 100,000 Population, Wake County vs. North Carolina, 2018–2022



Source: North Carolina Violent Death Reporting System (NCVDRS)

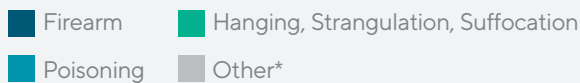
Figure 3 Suicide Mortality Rate per 100,000 Population by Age Group, Wake County, 2022



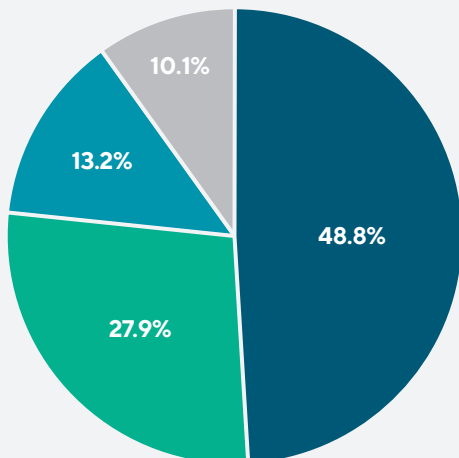
Source: North Carolina Violent Death Reporting System (NCVDRS)

From 2018 to 2022, the suicide mortality rate in Wake County stayed below the state average. In 2020, there was a significant decrease in the mortality rate but it began to rise afterward, increasing by **40%** in 2022 compared to 2020, reaching its highest recorded level (Figure 2). Suicide affects people of all ages. In 2022, the suicide mortality rate was highest among individuals ages 75–84 compared to other age groups (Figure 3).

Figure 4 Suicide Mortality by Method, Wake County, 2022



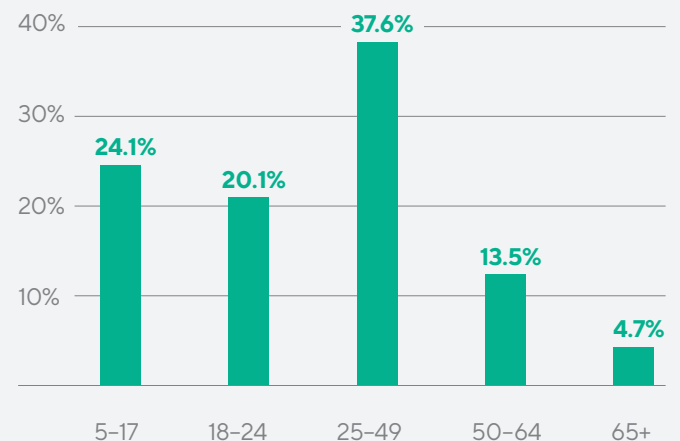
*Other includes drowning, sharp instrument, fall and other.



Source: North Carolina Violent Death Reporting System (NCVDRS)

WAKE COUNTY SUICIDE ATTEMPT RATES

Figure 5 Proportion of Emergency Department Visits for Suicide Attempt by Age Group, Wake County, 2023



25 to 49-year-olds had the highest proportion of Emergency Department (ED) visits for suicide attempt, while the age group of 65 years and older had the lowest proportion of such visits.

PREVENTION

Lethal Means Safety⁷

Lethal means safety involves reducing the availability and lethality of methods (firearms, medications, sharp instruments) used in suicide attempts. The aim is to make suicide means harder to access for individuals at risk.

EFFECTIVE METHODS FOR FIREARM STORAGE⁸



Unloaded

Store firearms unloaded.



Locked

Keep firearms in a gun safe or lock box.



Separate

Store firearms away from ammunition.



Out of Reach

Ensure firearms are out of children's reach.



Keys

Hide keys to the gun safe and trigger locks.



Child Resistant

Equip all guns with effective child-resistant locks.

PREVENTING INTENTIONAL AND UNINTENTIONAL OVERDOSES⁹



Secure

Store medications securely and out of children's sight and reach.



Manage

Get help from a family member or friend to manage medication dosages.



Plan

Fill a medication box and lock away the rest.



Lock

Keep sedatives, stimulants, and opioids in a locked location.



Ask

Ask your doctor or pharmacist to limit refills or quantities.



Dispose

Dispose of expired medications, those unused for over a year, or no longer needed.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS¹⁰

Protective factors are conditions or attributes in an individual, family, or community that increase the health and well-being of children and families. Protective factors can reduce the risk for suicide by helping people cope with negative life events, even when those events continue over a period of time.

Relationship protective factors:



- Support from partners, friends and family.
- Strong family, peer, and community bonds that enhance resilience.
- Feeling connected to others.

Community protective factors:



- Access to effective mental health and substance abuse treatment.
- Support from healthcare providers.
- Feeling connected to school, community, and other social institutions.
- Availability of consistent and high quality physical and behavioral healthcare.

SUICIDE RISK FACTORS¹⁰

- History of depression and other mental illnesses
- Prior suicide attempt
- Current or prior history of adverse childhood experiences
- Substance use
- Feelings of hopelessness, impulsiveness, or aggressiveness

- Social isolation
- Barriers to mental health care or reluctance to seek help
- Loss of significant relationships, employment, or financial support
- Access to lethal means
- Physical illness and chronic pain

KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE:	 Extreme mood swings	 Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain, or being a burden to others	 Increasing use of alcohol or drugs
	 Acting anxious or agitated, behaving recklessly	 Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge	 Talking about wanting to die, kill oneself or feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
			 Looking for a way to kill oneself, such as searching online or obtaining a gun

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

-  Call or text 988 (24/7)
-  988lifeline.org

The Trevor Project

-  24/7 support
-  thetrevorproject.org

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

-  Helpline 800-451-9682; Text 919-999-6527
-  Email helpline@naminc.org
-  (Mon. – Fri., 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.)
-  naminc.org

Alliance Health Behavioral Health Crisis Line

-  877-223-4617 (24/7)

Mobile Crisis Management (MCM) by Therapeutic Alternatives

-  877-626-1772
-  mytahome.com/mobile-crisis

Wakebrook

-  984-974-4800
-  uncmedicalcenter.org/uncmc/care-treatment/mental-health/unc-hospitals-at-wakebrook

Find a mental health provider at:

-  findtreatment.samhsa.gov

REFERENCES

- ¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Facts about Suicide (<https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/index.html>)
- ² North Carolina Violent Death Reporting System, 2018–2022
- ³ North Carolina Disease Event Tracking and Epidemiologic Collection Tool (NCDETECT), Suicide Attempt v2, 2018–2022
- ⁴ Veteran Suicide in North Carolina 2018– 2022, Injury and Violence Prevention Branch, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
- ⁵ Suicide Rates by Industry and Occupation – National Vital Statistics System, United States, 2021 (<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7250a2.htm>)
- ⁶ North Carolina Violent Death Reporting System Dashboard
- ⁷ U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (<https://www.mirecc.va.gov/vsn19/lethalmeanssafety/>)
- ⁸ Suicide Prevention is Everyone’s Business: A Toolkit for Safe Firearm Storage (https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/docs/Toolkit_Safe_Firearm_Storage_CLEARED_508_2-24-20.pdf)
- ⁹ Your Prescription Medicine: Tips for Safe Storage and Disposal (<https://www.cdc.gov/wtc/prescriptionsafety.html>)
- ¹⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Suicide Prevention, Risk and Protective Factors (<https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/risk-factors/index.html>)