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## Suicide rates on the rise

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Rock County had 22 suicides during 2009 — 17 men and five women.

Nine of those people were 24 years of age or younger, with the youngest being 13. In the United States there is a suicide every 17 seconds, and 60 percent of suicides occur on the first attempt.

Suicide is the third leading cause of death for people ages 15-24. Over the past 14 years Rock County has averaged more than 18 suicides per year.

In 2007, Wisconsin had a total of 724 suicides in contrast to 199 homicides. Wisconsin had 737 suicides in 2008, which is the highest suicide rate in 20 years.

On March 29 in Janesville, experts have planned a symposium called "Making Parity a Reality" to discuss Wisconsin's mental health treatment.

Many suicide attempts are tied to mental illness, which is something that will be discussed and reviewed the symposium.

Brad Munger, crisis intervention supervisor for Rock County Human Services, said mental illnesses can be life threatening, and that many who have them end up in the criminal justice system. Munger said people who are incarcerated are nine times more likely to attempt suicide.

The symposium will call together a panel of leading mental health and addiction treatment experts from Rock County and South Central Wisconsin to discuss statewide policy changes to improve health treatment. The public is encouraged to attend the symposium and share their views on how to improve mental health and addiction treatment coverage.

The symposium will take place at 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. at the UAW Local 95 Union Hall, 1795 Lafayette St., Janesville. The event is free and open to the public but registration is required by Friday, March 26.

Speaker Mike Sheridan (D-Janesville) will co-host the symposium with Rep. Kim Hixson (D-Whitewater), Rep. Sandy Pasch (D-Whitefish Bay) and David Riemer, Director of Community Advocates Public Policy Institute.

According to a report by the Wisconsin Center of Investigative Journalism this year, Rock County experienced a nearly 20 percent increase of suicide crisis contacts. Munger arranged figures that indicate Rock County Crisis Intervention units received a total of 23,645 calls, which is up from 20,222 in 2008. In 2003, only 12,797 crisis contacts were recorded, the number has grown each year after.

Those affected by suicide can contact Survivors of Suicide in Rock Co., which runs a support group for those who have lost someone to suicide. Meetings are held every fourth Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. at the Rock County Job Center.

Another resource available is the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC), which can be contacted at 877-438-7772 or [www.sprc.org](http://www.sprc.org).

Resources are also available for those with mental health issues.

National Alliance of Mental Illness meets every fourth Monday at 7 p.m. at River of Life Methodist Church in Beloit.

For more information or to register for the symposium visit [www.makingparityreal.org](http://www.makingparityreal.org)

Discussion at the symposium will examine options for mental health and substance use disorder treatment. The discussion will detail the adequacy for public and private funding sources for prevention as well as strategies to reduce the stigma towards those with mental illness. Munger hopes the symposium will encourage good discussion about mental health options.

"There are a lot of people who do not have access to good treatment," Munger said.

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