

Coalition for Suicide Prevention in Clackamas County

Tuesday July 16, 2019 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm

Clackamas County Development Services Building ✦ 150 Beavercreek Road

Room 115 ✦ Oregon City, OR 97045

Meeting Highlights in Blue, Action Items in **Bold**

Goals: Updates/Reports
Work plan Activities Next Steps: Outreach and Services
Roles: Meeting Highlights: **Carlos Benson Martinez** (thank you!)
Greeter: **Scott Thran** (thank you!)
Facilitator: **Michael Ralls** (thank you!)
Agenda Items: **Various Steering Committee & Coalition members** (thank you!)

I. Welcome Michael 4:30 pm

- Scott facilitated introductions and welcomed new members to the group. Moving forward **new members are encouraged to approach designated member before or after the meeting and they will offer a brief introduction and history of the group.**
 - A. **Support and Resources** - Support is available, resource information is available on the resource table
 - B. **Meeting Highlights from June 18, 2019 meeting** – copies are available on the resource table and on the website at <https://www.clackamas.us/behavioralhealth/coalition-for-suicide-prevention>; if you have corrections or changes, please submit to kturner@clackamas.us by July 23, close of business.
 - C. **Meeting Guidelines** on page 4
 - D. **Introductions** - Welcome to first time attendees & introductions from the group – what's your favorite thing about summer?

- E. Agenda Purpose for Tonight—continue building on coalition’s work plan for activities related to the goals of outreach and education and equitable services and supports.

II. Reports and Updates **Scott** 4:40 pm

“Clackamas County Youth and Family Resources Facebook, Carlos Benson Martinez”

A. Tabling and Outreach Opportunities Kathy

1. July 20, Oregon City Community Festival
Two shifts – 8:00 to 11:30 am, 11:30 am to 2 pm
Have one person for each shift; could use one between 10 am to 1 pm for support
 - Held by the Clackamas County Equity, Diversity and Inclusion council, lots of kid’s activities--drop by it’s free!
 - This is a great opportunity to share resources and network with the OC community.
 - Food carts, fresh fruits and vegetables.
 - Kudos to Emily Privatsky and Mindy Rocha-Barella and therapy dog for representing the Coalition
 - Here’s the video from the event: <https://youtu.be/LI-WsJfUeTQ>; check it out and you’ll see our booth and hear about the event!
2. July 27, Estacada Summer Celebration
10 am to 3 pm -- shifts 10 – 12:30; 12:30 to 3 pm;
 - Kudos to Ellen Burns from the Coalition who did a wonderful job conducting outreach at the event, together with Mandy Alvarado and Kevin Shiver who do suicide prevention case management for Clackamas County Health Centers and Behavioral Health Division’s Mental Health Center (MHC) and Naomi Caster, Program Supervisor for Behavioral Health Prevention and Promotion
3. September 14, Downtown Oregon City, [Main Street](#), 9 am to 4 pm
Need 2 people per shift; would like to have men/women teams
 - Research shows that men tend to not ask for help or seek resources and tend to be most at risk because of it. Research shows HOW you talk to them and WHO talks to them matters. Let’s have some teams of guys to increase our chances of reaching this target audience.

- We will have gun locks to give away for safety, coffee, antique hood ornaments, dog biscuits, candy
- Last year we gave away 75 gun locks—this is a great opportunity
- Family friendly but no specific kid activities

4. September 28, Celebrate Molalla, 10 am to 6 pm
Sign up today and via doodle

- Members are welcome to bring resources to share with the group. They are displayed on the resource table in the front of the room.

B. October 5, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Veteran's Coliseum
Presence/Sign Up Mindy

- Tabling 8:30am-10am Walk 10:30am-1pm
- "Out of the Darkness Walk" The CSPCC will be tabling separate from Clackamas County at this event. We are hoping to have a rough draft of the logo to advertise. This will be a great opportunity to promote the coalition. Mindy will be organizing and at the table. Everyone is welcome to come! We will have CSPCC swag to hand out! Contact Kathy or Mindy for more info.

C. Inventory of Strengths and Gaps Update

- Inventory Kathy
 - The environmental scan survey has been closed. The purpose of the survey was to identify strengths and gaps in our services. Nicholas at U of O will analyze and interpret data to be discussed at a later date (possibly September?).
 - We briefly discussed how to identify data about those who refuse services and disagree with/do not believe in being diagnosed with a mental health issue. It was proposed to ask Nicholas at U of O for ideas on how to reach this population when he presents to the CSPCC in September.

III. **Activities & Workgroup Next Steps** 5:00 pm

A. Change the name process Mindy & Carlos

- Last month's workgroup discussed changing the name of the CSPCC and considering becoming a separate entity from the county. Members loved looking at other counties' examples (see page 5).

- We considered a new name for the Coalition that is more inviting and descriptive. People chatted in small groups and came up with examples like “Clackamas Connects,” “Partners for Hope.” “Clackamas Life-force,” “You Matter Clackamas,” “You Are Enough,” “Clackamas Community Suicide Prevention Partnership”
- We discussed adding “Inclusive” to let those know we support those from all walks of life
- *You* (personable) matter vs *Everyone* (inclusive) matters? How about “Every1Matters”
- As we move along, what are our values? Keep the name in back of mind

B. Logo Update

Mindy

- A volunteer graphic designer is working on options for us to consider later; thanks Mindy for obtaining this resource for the Coalition!

C. Veterinarians, Humane Society, etc.

Kathy & Ellen

Suggested approach:

- Meet with Providers
- Identify Champions and Engage
- Offer Training – QPR & Resources

Possible Groups to Meet With/Contact:

- We’ve discussed certain at-risk populations (gun owners, primary care providers, middle-age men) and have decided to approach veterinarians first. Veterinarians often have close contact with those close to suicide. See recent article published.
- Last month’s workgroup drafted a letter to veterinarians. The steering committee discussed next steps. One idea was to identify individual champions within the industry to spread our message.
- Steering committee also discussed approaching big-name organizations like the Oregon - Humane Society, Clackamas County Dog Services, and Veterinarians Associations in and around Clackamas.
- Go to companies like Banfield, DoveLewis, VCA, etc.
- Content
 - Engage them in a discussion regarding Suicide Prevention, offer training (QPR, ASIST, etc.), provide materials

- Discussed incorporating suicide prevention in vet tech training facilities
- We will use networking principles
- **Action Item: Approach Clackamas County Dog Services first, offer training, distribute posters, ask feedback about letter, share resources, network, network, network! *Update: We have a meeting scheduled in September with Dog Services!***
- **Invite them to bring others to training. Get buy-in. Build our confidence and their confidence in us.**

IV. **Closing**

Michael

6:00 pm

- Kathy may reach out to group to ask if members are available to volunteer at tabling event.
- If you see an email from Kathy, please commit to writing back. (If it's too many, let her know!)
- A group member asked how to talk to acquaintances who have experienced a death by suicide. Jennifer suggested checking out AFSP's "Seize the Awkward" Campaign. Mindy offered to bring in a Chaplain who runs a group for families affected by suicide to speak to the group. Michelle shared that NAMI hosts a peer to peer suicide bereavement group.
- Offer resources, offer support, no perfect formula for everyone, timing matters
- It was agreed upon to further discuss the topic during a future meeting.

A. No meeting in August, next meeting September 17, 2019

B. Adjourn – Thanks for coming

Respectfully submitted, Carlos Benson Martinez & Kathy Turner

Third Tuesday
September 17, 2019 ✦ 4:30 to 6:30 pm
Clackamas Development Services Building
150 Beavercreek Road, Room 115
Oregon City OR 97045

WORKING MEETING GUIDELINES (revised)

1. Show each other respect.
2. Start and end on time.
3. Listen to others and be open to hearing others' perspectives.
4. Share the airtime and self-regulate your participation; please don't interrupt others while they are speaking.
5. Please keep to one conversation and avoid sidebar conversations.
6. Create a safe environment.
7. We value stories of lived experience and we want to communicate about the topic safely.
 - a. We recognize the value of stories of lived experience and welcome them as an essential part of our discourse.
 - b. We also recognize that certain words, statistics and details about suicide attempts or deaths can activate emotions and feelings. To communicate safely, we will strive to be mindful about sharing details of a suicide attempt or death, discussion of statistics, discussion about means or other topics that may have potentially dangerous content.
 - c. Please don't share personal stories that are told in the meeting outside the meeting.
 - d. How we say it matters. We suggest using the phrase "died by suicide" instead of "commit," because "commit" is a word associated with a crime or a sin. We also suggest avoiding the use of the terms "successful" or "unsuccessful" when talking about attempts/suicides; as an alternative we suggest saying "attempts" or "died by suicide," so that we avoid attributing positives or negatives.
8. Please place mobile phones on vibrate during the meeting and take important calls outside the room. Thank you for your cooperation.
9. The role of the co-chairs and meeting facilitators is to manage the agenda, the discussions and the time we have together; please cooperate with their requests.
10. Please raise your hand to be recognized by the facilitator if you want to contribute to the full group.
11. There are often many possible solutions to complex issues; when generating ideas about solutions, please strive to speak about interests not positions.
12. Identify next steps that foster commitment to the goals.
13. Resource Table – please share information about other upcoming events, programs, or trainings by providing written materials for the resource table which will be available at all meetings of the Coalition; because of time limitations we request no verbal announcements; thank you for your cooperation.



Oregon tackles the veterinary suicide crisis, starting with the stigma

Updated Jul 10, 2019; Posted Jul 10, 2019



Hazel White, 2, helps her mom Dr. Aletha Carson perform a checkup on Snickett, a 6-month-old guinea pig on April 26, 2012 at Banfield Pet Hospital in Portland. The Vancouver-based pet care company began officially combating the suicide crisis in veterinarians in 2017 through wellness resources and student loan debt programs.

By **McKenna Ross** | [The Oregonian/OregonLive](#)

Not many people can say they've accomplished their life goal of working with animals — one they've had since age 5 — and go on to a dream career. But the stress of Seth Vredenburg's job as a veterinarian was making him a hermit.

Depression from his high-stress position in Portland kept him from simple things like dinner plans. The only social interactions he had, he said, were with other veterinarians, so they could complain. Not a healthy habit, he realizes now. His stress levels led to mounting health problems.

Ultimately, his doctor ordered him to quit his job at the clinic.

Vredenburg is just one of thousands of veterinarians who have suffered from psychological stress on the job. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a study in January that found suicide rates, when compared to the general population, were 2.1 times as high for male veterinarians and 3.5 times as high for female veterinarians.

[The study](#), which analyzed deaths between 1979 and 2015, came as no surprise to many veterinary specialists in Oregon who have seen this trend play out in real life for years. It did, however, validate their concerns.



Suicide rates in the mountain West are sky-high; now researchers are asking why

Ninety-eight percent of veterinarians with psychological stress report depression, 88% report burnout and 83% report anxiety. Each is a much more significant problem for veterinarians under 45.

In the past several years, Oregon educators, business leaders and activists have initiated programs and conversations to address a previously taboo topic in hopes of saving their colleagues' lives.

Factors

Most people don't become veterinarians to get rich.

"Veterinary medicine is a unique industry," Molly McAllister, a veterinarian, said. "It's really a calling as a profession, more so than a logical decision."

It takes a passion for animals and a strong work ethic, she said. That drive helps young vets-to-be to ignore long hours that can affect a healthy work-life balance and student debt that can reach that of a mortgage. The average student loan debt of veterinarians was \$167,000 in 2016, according to the [American Veterinary Medical Association](#). Average starting salaries are between \$70,000 and \$80,000 annually. Some vets can even carry student loans of \$250,000 – debt they'll be paying back well into retirement.

McAllister is the chief medical officer of Banfield Pet Hospital, the Vancouver-headquartered pet care company with 18,000 employees across the country and Puerto Rico, including more than 1,000 in the Portland area. She remembers being questioned about debt when applying to veterinary schools.

"The interview board saying to me, 'You're going to accumulate a lot of debt. Do you realize what that is?'" McAllister said. "As a bright-eyed student, smiling and nodding and saying, 'Yeah, I realize

I'm going to pay off loans for the next 30 years,' I could never have understood how that would actually feel like."

Student loan debt, exacerbated by a high debt-to-income ratio in the profession, is one of several key factors playing into the suicide epidemic, the CDC found.

For a profession filled with high-achievers and perfectionists, it's easy to see how burnout, anxiety and depression can all play out, said Alex Rowell, a psychologist in the Oregon State University Carlson College of Veterinary Medicine.

"They think, 'I have to pass this class so I can graduate and earn some income to pay that debt,'" Rowell said. "'Can I pay my bills? Am I going to find a partner and be able to buy a house?'"

There are factors beyond money. Experts have identified compassion fatigue as another top reason contributing to vets' psychological distress. Treating animals that are often unhealthy can be particularly tough psychologically — or as Rowell put it, "it can drain your tank."

Then, there's the exposure to death. Veterinarians are often tasked with end-of-life care for a family's furry loved one. Vets often become a pet undertaker.

"Sometimes you might have to do five (euthanasia procedures) in a day," McAllister said. "It can be incredibly emotionally draining. It's a very unique aspect to health care, that other health care providers don't necessarily have to deal with death on that level."

The social media age presents a new stressor, too. Grieving clients sometimes take to the internet to blame a clinic or veterinarian for their pet's death. A [New York vet](#) died by suicide in 2014 after harassment over a cat custody battle made her an online target.

Her death was highly discussed in the veterinary community, exemplifying the seriousness of cyberbullying. The American Veterinary Medical Association created a cyberbullying-specific hotline two years after the incident.

Treatments

Suicide in the profession went largely unexplored until U.S. studies began to surface in 2015. But many vets saw the problem for decades.

The data spurred groups to begin health and wellness campaigns. Banfield Pet Hospital took its first major steps toward a wellness plan in 2017 by creating a team dedicated to the problem, McAllister said. The team started with events like open mic sessions with leadership and mental health presentations at national conferences.

The company will launch suicide prevention training through e-learning sessions in September — during [National Suicide Prevention Month](#). The program will be optional and offered annually to start but may be integrated into the hiring process in the future.

Banfield also began addressing a key factor in the epidemic: debt. The company created student loan debt relief programs for its veterinarians in 2017. Plans range from refinancing options to summer jobs and clinical rotations with loan-addressing incentives to return for full-time work.

In its most direct plan, Banfield pays \$150 monthly to every vet's loan organization. The contributions reached \$4 million in one year, according to the company.

But smaller clinics may not have the time or resources for a comprehensive health or debt-fighting plan. At annual conferences, Portland Veterinary Medical Association leaders increasingly heard from their 600 members how much they valued curriculum on health and well-being, president Carla Lerum said. Now, two annual programs center on mental health improvement: from self-care and work-life balance to identifying signs of psychological stress in colleagues.

The association's resources are especially beneficial for smaller clinics, Lerum said. It is working on direct resources as well — things like health care plans and a la carte additions through the association. The goal, she said, is distributing costs and options throughout the community so more is available.

"It takes a village," Lerum said. "A lot of that burden can't just be put on that employer."

Conversations

Ultimately, though, the most important action can be simply [encouraging open dialogue](#), said McAllister. In the past, the field was filled with people who wanted to solve their problems themselves. Health care professionals are fixers — they're trained to not ask for help, McAllister said. Turning the culture around could save lives.

Rowell, the Oregon State psychologist, agreed. In 2016, he became the first counselor embedded in the vet school. Last semester, he launched the first elective focused solely on "self-compassion," leadership and diversity in the profession. He said the class is just one example of how to educate soon-to-be vets on preventing a culture of stress.

Rowell's role puts a face to the solution. He even walks the halls to get students comfortable with therapists. If students see him as an asset early in their education, then maybe they'll be more open to conversations or counseling when they are stressed on the job in 20 years.

Already, Rowell sees an increased caseload. The class of 2023, he said, will be more comfortable with an on-site counselor. His clinical caseload increases each year in part because word-of-mouth recommendations from peers make students and faculty more comfortable.

"I think we've brought it out of the darkness," Rowell said. "We've had conversations about stress, anxiety and suicide. They used to be very taboo. We used to look at it as some moral flaw. But now we say it's OK to talk about it with someone."

"Once they get over that initial potential stigma and process their concerns, it's been a very cathartic experience for them."

For Vredenburg, the Portland veterinarian, opening the dialogue helped. He left clinical work and focused on “self-therapy,” mindfulness and understanding compassion fatigue so he could identify stressors.

He learned to take two minutes after a euthanasia to give himself to feel the pain of the task and the family, then collect himself again, while still practicing. Vredenburg now works at MARS Pet care, where he develops training for other veterinarians.

There’s no one solution, no “simple pill,” to address each person’s mental health, he said. But for now?

“Right now, it’s all about having conversations.”

Portland is home to Lines for Life, a nonprofit devoted to suicide prevention throughout the Pacific Northwest. It operates a suicide prevention line that is answered 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. It can be reached at 800-273-8255 or by texting “273TALK” to 839863.

-- McKenna Ross

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