

Understanding Oklahoma suicide deaths through psychological autopsies

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HEALTHY MINDS
POLICY INITIATIVE

For nearly two decades, Oklahoma has had a higher suicide rate than the national average — among the top ten highest in the country. HB 3901 would establish a five-year pilot project to develop psychological autopsy services within the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH). These comprehensive reviews of suicide deaths **can improve suicide prevention strategies by offering deeper insight** into risk factors and challenges around access to care.



Psychological autopsies are structured investigations that look back on a person's mental state, life events, and other social and environmental factors, often used to understand the circumstances that preceded a person's suicide death.

What a psychological autopsy entails

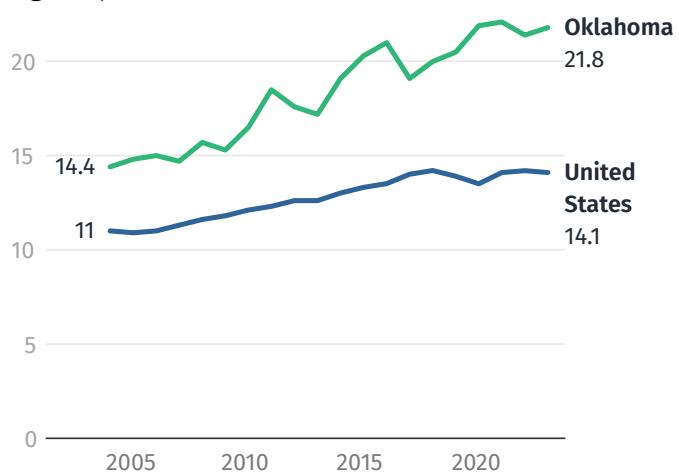
- Interviews with family members, friends, or acquaintances of the person who died
- A review of the person's medical, mental health, and other relevant records
- An examination of stressors, behavioral changes and other social factors that can inform **as complete an understanding of a person's death as possible**

A strategy to inform future suicide prevention efforts

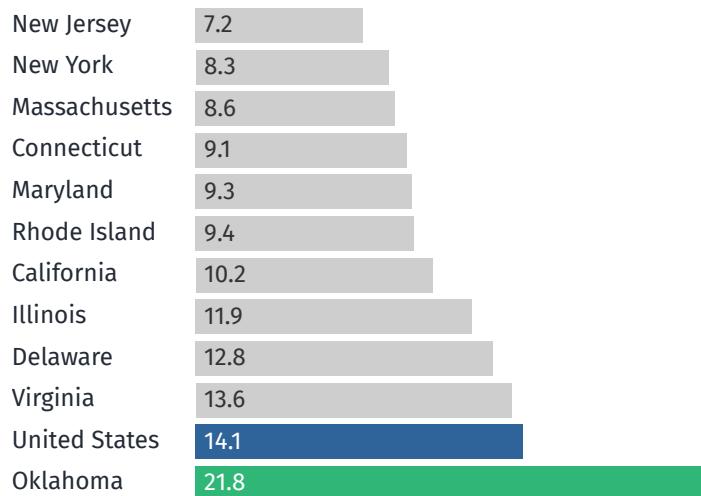
- HB 3901 would charge OSDH with appointing a full-time psychological autopsy examiner to launch the pilot program and create an annual report on the findings
- Psychological autopsies can reveal systemic gaps in access to mental health services and point to periods or circumstances of a person's life where they may be at higher risk for suicide
- By guiding future research, training, and prevention programs, findings from psychological autopsies benefit many disciplines, including first responders and medical, behavioral health, and public health professionals

Oklahoma's suicide rate has been higher the U.S. average over nearly two decades

Age-adjusted suicide rates, 2004–2023



How Oklahoma's age-adjusted suicide rate compares to the 10 states with the lowest rates



Source for both charts: CDC WONDER