

Successes from the Suicide and Opioid Overdose Prevention Public Health Initiative

In 2019, CDC and ASTHO collaborated to develop the Suicide and Opioid Overdose Prevention Public Health Initiative (SOPPHI), a pilot project to build capacity for comprehensive state suicide and opioid overdose prevention. Both suicide and overdose share common underlying causes known as risk factors, including but not limited to, mental illness, substance use disorders, suicidal ideation, intimate partner problems, poor social support, childhood trauma, poverty, housing instability, and discrimination. The significant connection between suicide and overdose highlights the importance of creating an initiative with a comprehensive prevention approach, like SOPPHI, to address these public health challenges and to help state and island area health agencies increase their impact in an environment with limited resources and capacity.

In partnership with CDC, ASTHO invited the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) and the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) to participate in the SOPPHI project from September 2019 to July 2022. While the COVID-19 pandemic presented significant obstacles, both states navigated challenges and achieved goals set under the pilot project's four key strategies of partnerships, data and information systems, public health systems infrastructure, and programs and services.

Key Strategies

Partnering to Improve Outcomes

Colorado leveraged the SOPPHI project as an opportunity to expand and refine the [Colorado National Collaborative \(CNC\) for suicide prevention](#), which is a partnership between national, state, and local organizations. CDPHE used the SOPPHI project as seed funding for six local counties to build infrastructure and implement the CNC initiative across six community strategies: improve connectedness, increase economic stability, provide education and awareness, improve access and delivery of safer suicide care, lethal means safety, and postvention. All counties used a comprehensive approach to address both suicide and substance overdose in their communities.

At Maine CDC, SOPPHI supported the organizations' partnership with the Maine Resilience Building Network (MRBN) and Public Health Partners, which helped increase the reach and effectiveness of comprehensive prevention efforts across the state. Maine CDC, MRBN, and Public Health Partners collaborated on the development of Maine Youth Thriving: A Guide for Community Action, a primary prevention-focused guide for improving youth outcomes in Maine communities. Additionally, Maine CDC, in collaboration with Public Health Partners, developed a suite of tools around the [state suicide prevention plan](#), including a Maine Suicide Prevention Toolkit with resources for sectors like healthcare, public health, businesses, and schools and community action planning templates. As a result of these partnerships, there was more access to resources and stronger connections to other agencies.

Leveraging Data and Information Systems to Make an Impact

Colorado's SOPPHI project supported the creation of the comprehensive data and evaluation dashboard to assist CNC local and state partners to evaluate their efforts. This tool facilitated a collaborative, participatory, and empowerment model of evaluation to help ensure input from a diverse group of collaborators. This evaluation dashboard allowed the state of Colorado and local CNC counties to better engage with data, further understand shared risk and protective factors, improve engagement, and share unique and innovative stories at the local level.

Maine used the pilot project as an opportunity to visualize their data and connect with a broader audience on the importance of primary prevention efforts. Maine leveraged the [Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey](#) to understand shared risk and protective factors for youth. They also created an impactful [infographic](#) to improve understanding of protective factors for youth suicide and overdose prevention. On an [episode of ASTHO's Public Health Review](#), Maine representatives shared their work in using data to build resilience and support communities in their suicide and substance prevention efforts.

Collaborating to Improve Public Health Systems Infrastructure

Colorado created state and local infrastructure to implement a comprehensive suicide and overdose prevention approach in harmony with pre-existing activities, community momentum, and separate funding streams. For example, the state supported counties in disseminating lethal means safety informational materials about the safe storage of firearms and medication to reduce suicide and overdose across the state.

Maine made strides in reinforcing the state's public health infrastructure by developing strategic resources to support local and state agencies in their development of comprehensive prevention efforts. Maine also used the SOPPHI project to develop evaluation plans to identify the effectiveness of ongoing efforts at the state and local levels. These evaluations will inform the continued improvement of public health infrastructure in the state.

Bolstering Programs and Services to Better Health

CDPHE recognized the impact of economic stability and community connections as significant factors in suicide and overdose prevalence. SOPPHI provided Colorado's Office of Suicide Prevention and local partners with the opportunity to create action plans and allocate funding to address upstream efforts to reduce suicide and overdose.

Through the SOPPHI project, Maine increased the implementation and reach of the [Everyday Survival Guide](#), a media campaign for Maine's Crisis Line at a pivotal time during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Maine team also developed messages aimed at community and business leaders to improve their understanding of their role in helping youth feel like they matter in their communities. The SOPPHI project also supported Maine CDC, MRBN, and Public Health Partners in funding five community partner organizations that provide services and resources to Maine's most vulnerable youth.

Conclusion

The impact of the SOPPHI project highlights the importance of funding efforts that address the intersection of suicide and overdose. Identifying shared risk and protective factors across public health challenges will help public health practitioners develop partnerships, richer data sharing, and more comprehensive programs and services. Maine and Colorado will continue to leverage the progress made during the SOPPHI project to engage and provide resources to the communities that they serve.