



October 17, 2022

**DIRECTIVE:           JOB CORPS INFORMATION NOTICE NO. 22-03**

**TO:**                   ALL JOB CORPS NATIONAL OFFICE STAFF  
                          ALL JOB CORPS REGIONAL OFFICE STAFF  
                          ALL JOB CORPS CENTER DIRECTORS  
                          ALL JOB CORPS CENTER OPERATORS  
                          ALL NATIONAL TRAINING AND SUPPORT CONTRACTORS  
                          ALL OUTREACH, ADMISSIONS, AND CTS CONTRACTORS  
                          ALL CENTER USERS

**FROM:**             RACHEL TORRES  
                          National Director  
                          Office of Job Corps

**SUBJECT:**         Promoting Suicide Awareness and Prevention

1. **Purpose.** To provide centers with tools to develop a comprehensive suicide awareness and prevention program for Job Corps students.
2. **Background.** In 2021, the US Surgeon General called on the nation to respond to the mental health crisis young people currently face. Young people have faced unprecedented mental health needs in recent decades, which accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic. In recent years, national surveys of youth have shown major increases in certain mental health symptoms, including depressive symptoms, suicidal ideations, and creating suicide plans.<sup>1</sup> Suicide is rarely caused by one factor and many people who die by suicide are not known to have a diagnosed mental health condition at the time of death. However, early recognition of mental health symptoms is a protective factor.

Between 2007 and 2018, suicide rates among 10–24-year-olds increased by 57 percent.<sup>2</sup> Suicide is now the third leading cause of death for adolescents and young adults ages 16-24, accounting for 5,729 deaths in 2020. This age group, which includes nearly all Job Corps

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Data Summary & Trends Report: 2009-2019.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Health and Human Services (2021). US Surgeon General Issues Advisory on Youth Mental Health Crisis Further Exposed by COVID-19 Pandemic. Available at: <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2021/12/07/us-surgeon-general-issues-advisory-on-youth-mental-health-crisis-further-exposed-by-covid-19-pandemic.html>

students, has the highest rates of self-harm, suicide attempts, and hospital visits for suicide-related behavior of any age group.<sup>3</sup>

Over the last 14 years, Job Corps' average suicide rate has been less than half of the national average for the same aged population. People are less likely to attempt or die from suicide if protective factors are present. Job Corps provides many of these protective factors, including:

- Limiting access to lethal means (e.g., weapons, drugs)
- Helping students find a social support network and counseling
- Providing mental health and substance use prevention services
- Encouraging healthy eating and exercise
- Promoting thinking about the future as students work towards completing their career technical trade
- Providing policies and tools promoting diversity, wellbeing, and safety. (See Attachment A – *Ways to Prevent Suicide in Job Corps*)

Although Job Corps' suicide rates are lower than the national average, our students are still at risk. Some students are at a higher risk of death by suicide. Risk factors for suicide include, but are not limited to:

- *Gender.* Females are more likely to think and talk about suicide, and males have higher rates of completed suicide.<sup>4</sup>
- *Being part of certain racial minorities.* American Indian/Alaska Native youth have the highest suicide rates. The suicide rate in African American and Hispanic youth, who make up the majority of Job Corps students, has risen in recent years.<sup>5</sup>
- *Being LGBTQ+.* Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ+) youth have among the highest rates of suicide attempts and suicides.<sup>6</sup>
- *Having mental health or substance use issues.* Ninety percent of people who take their own lives suffer from at least one mental health illness. Substance use, especially alcohol misuse, also leads to an increased risk for suicide.<sup>7</sup> According to PY19 data, 19 percent of Job Corps students had mental health disabilities and 31 percent tested positive for drugs on entry.<sup>8</sup>
- *Going through stressful situations.* Sometimes suicides occur without any warning signs in young people. Young people may act impulsively to stressors like a breakup, loss of a friend, or feeling overwhelmed.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) [online]. [Sept 10, 2022]. Available at: [www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars](http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars)

<sup>4</sup> Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) [online]. [Feb 17, 2022]. Available at: [www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars](http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars)

<sup>5</sup> Ramchand R, Gordon JA, Pearson JL. Trends in Suicide Rates by Race and Ethnicity in the United States. *JAMA Netw Open.* 2021 May 3;4(5):e2111563. doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.11563. PMID: 34037735; PMCID: PMC8155821.

<sup>6</sup> Disparities in Suicide. (2022). CDC. Available at: <https://cdc.gov/suicide/facts/disparities-in-suicide.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Covert, D., & Fraire, M. G. (2019). The role of anxiety for youth experiencing suicide-related behaviors. *Children's Health Care.* [Taylor & Francis Online], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar].

<sup>8</sup> Department of Labor (2020). Job Corps Health and Wellness and Disability Indicators Program Year 2019. (Unpublished)

<sup>9</sup> Mayo Clinic. (2022). Suicide and Suicidal Thoughts. Available at: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/suicide/symptoms-causes/syc-20378048>

- *Sleep troubles.* Sleep disturbance is a factor in many suicide attempts and suicides, including in Job Corps students.<sup>10</sup>
- *Negative interactions on social media.* Social media can lead to anxiety, loneliness, and lack of empathy. Online bullying on social media can make young people feel left out.<sup>11</sup>

Every life lost to suicide is one too many. After each suicide in the Job Corps community, health specialists review records to try to determine the cause of suicide and steps to take to prevent future suicides. These reviews informed Attachment A - *Ways to Prevent Suicide in Job Corps*.

3. Action. Distribute this Information Notice to all appropriate staff, particularly Center Mental Health Consultants, Trainee Employment Assistance Specialists, Disability Coordinators, Safety Personnel, Career Counselors, Residential Living Staff, Health and Wellness Directors, and Admission Services staff.
4. Expiration Date. Until superseded.
5. Inquiries. Inquiries should be directed to Lesley Nesmith of the National Office of Job Corps at 202-693-3904 or Nesmith.Lesley@dol.gov.

Attachment A - *Ways to Prevent Suicide in Job Corps*

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<sup>10</sup> Bilsen, J. (2018). Suicide and Youth: Risk Factors Psychiatry, Sec. Public Mental Health. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2018.00540>.

<sup>11</sup> Nesi, J. (2020). The Impact of Social Media on Youth Mental Health: Challenges and Opportunities. North Carolina Medical Journal 2020; 81(2): 116:121.