

# MESA COUNTY **SUICIDE REPORT**

## **2021**

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**Suicide prevention is a priority in Mesa County.**

It is an area in which public health partners and the community can make impact based on current resources, political will, and community readiness.



**MESA COUNTY  
PUBLIC HEALTH**

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[health.mesacounty.us](https://health.mesacounty.us)

## DEFINITIONS

**Suicide Death** is a death caused by injuring oneself with the intent to die.

**Suicide Attempt** when someone harms themselves with any intent to end their life, but they do not die as a result of their actions.

**Suicidal Ideation**, also known as suicidal thought, is thinking about, considering, or planning suicide. It can range from a passing thought to detailed planning.

## RISK FACTORS

Previous suicide attempts, history of mental disorders (e.g. clinical depression), isolation, easy access to lethal methods, and history of alcohol or substance abuse.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

**FOR EVERY DEATH BY SUICIDE IN 2021, THERE WERE APPROXIMATELY TWELVE SUICIDE-RELATED VISITS TO AN EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT IN MESA COUNTY.**

### CHANGES IN SUICIDE DEATH TRENDS

People who died by suicide in 2021 showed different trends than previous years, including being less likely to have a known previous attempt, and a much higher incidence of intoxication at the time of death.

### MULTIPLE STRESSORS

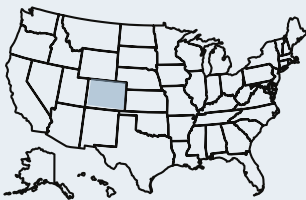
People who died by suicide in 2021 were also more likely to be impacted by multiple types of stressors at the time of their death than people in previous years.

### GENDER

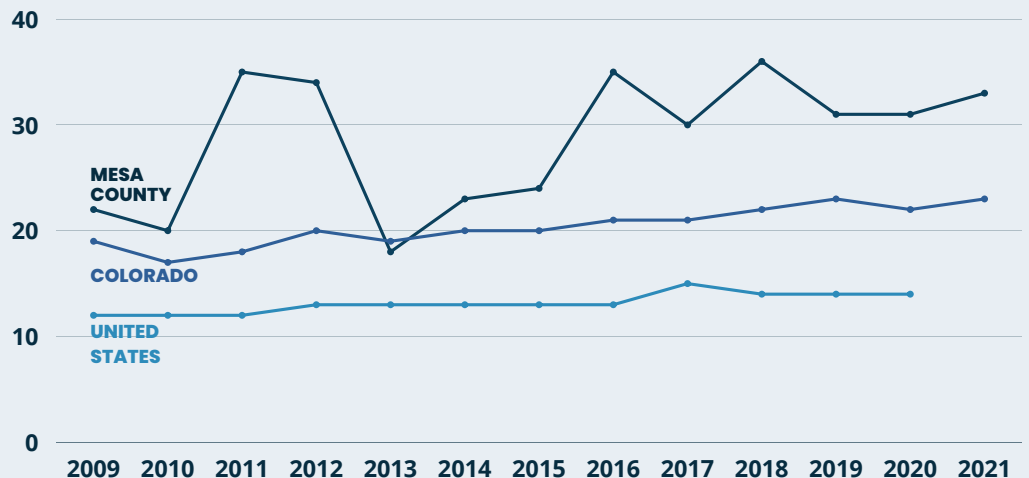
In 2021, the rate of female suicide deaths went up, and the ratio of suicide attempts and suicidal thoughts was evenly split.

### AGE

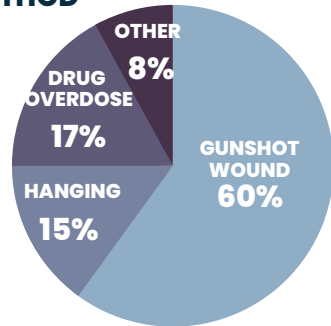
While youth had the highest number of visits for suicidal thoughts and suicide attempt, adult attempts show the largest increase over time.



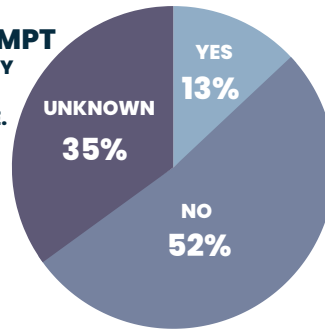
**2009-2021 RATE OF SUICIDE DEATHS IN MESA COUNTY, COLORADO, & THE UNITED STATES PER 100,000**



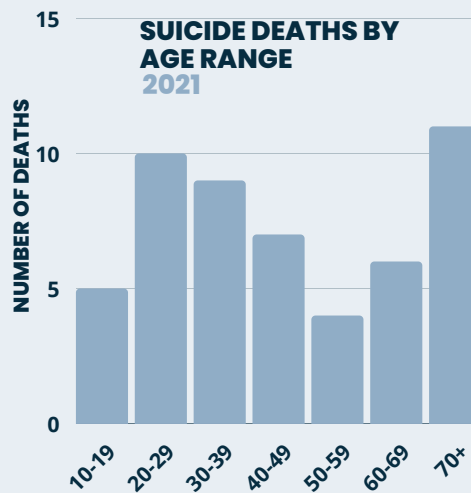
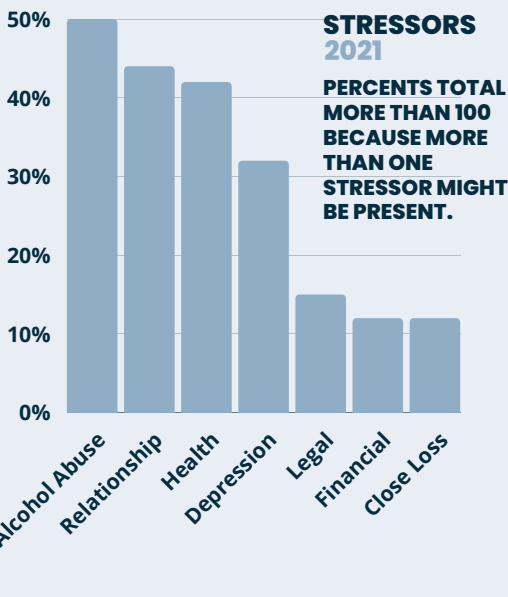
### METHOD



### PREVIOUS SUICIDE ATTEMPT REPORTED BY FAMILY OR FRIEND, MAY BE AN UNDERESTIMATE.



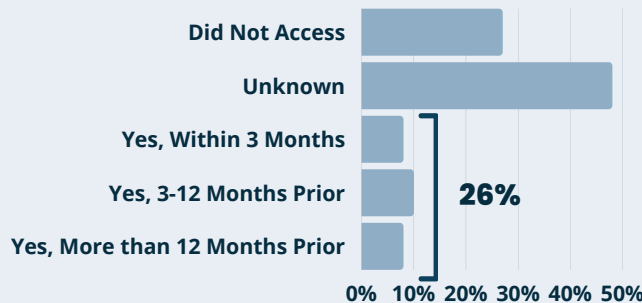
**7 IN 10 WERE MALE**



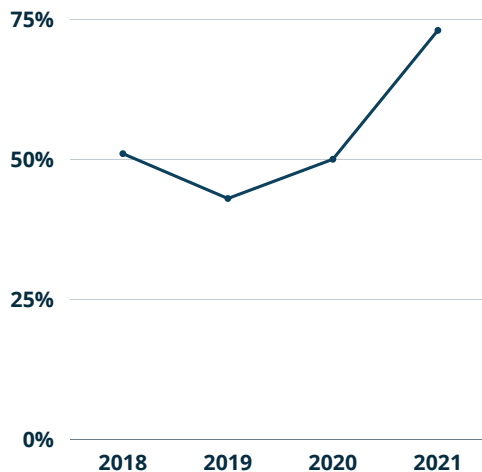
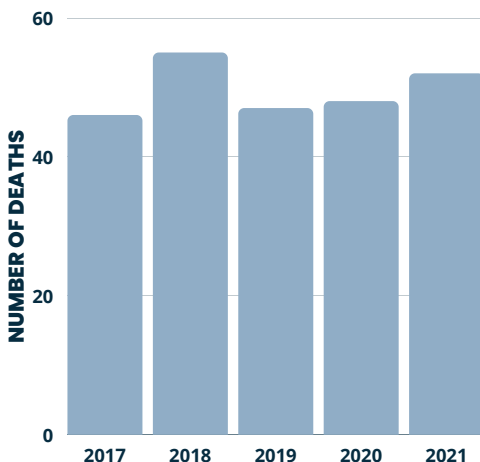
## INSIGHTS

These charts show a shift in the attributes of suicide deaths in Mesa County. In 2021, three in four suicide deaths involved drugs or alcohol, even when the method of death was not overdose. Also, people who died by suicide in 2021 often experienced multiple stressors at the same time.

### ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES 2021



Most people who attempt suicide do not die by suicide. However, those who die by suicide have often made previous attempts (around half since 2018). In 2021, only about 1 in 8 people who died by suicide had a known previous attempt.



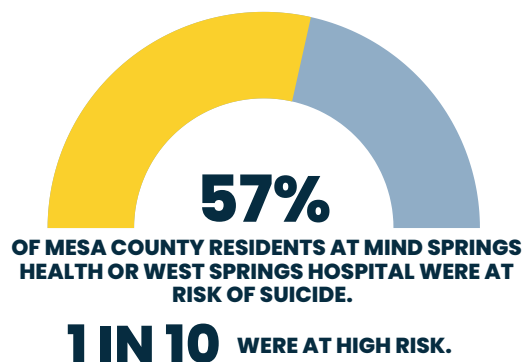
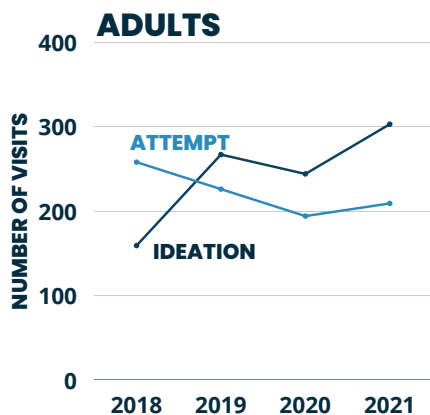
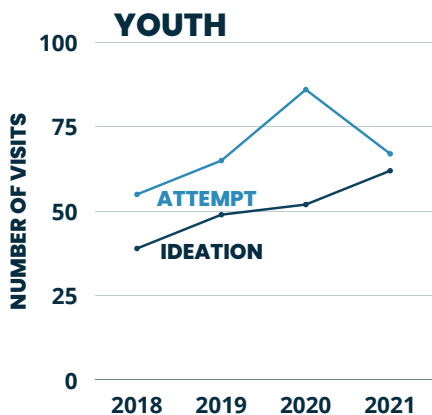
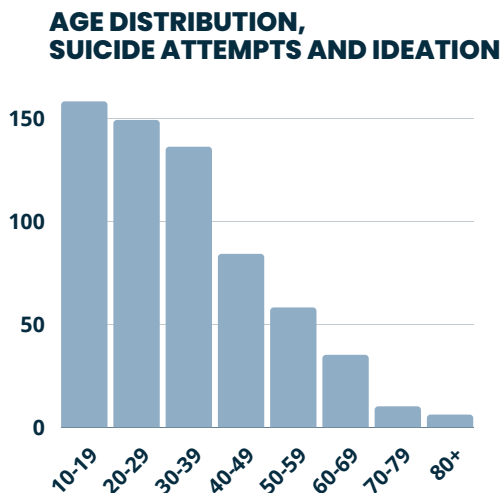
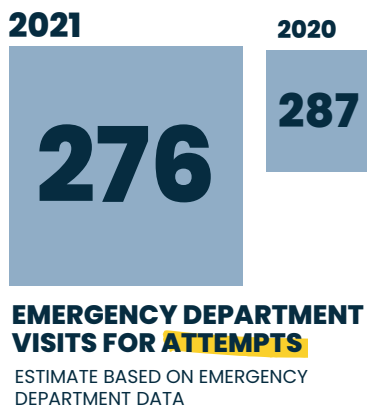
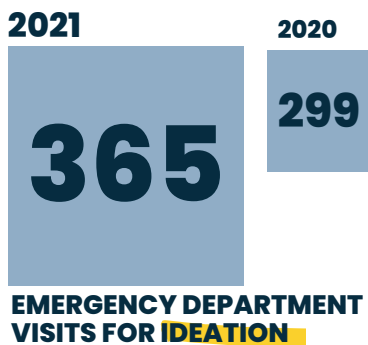
These changes have prompted suicide prevention and behavioral health efforts to focus on coping skills, well-resourced medical professionals, and a strong substance abuse recovery community.

Data was collected on **suicide attempts and incidents of suicidal ideation resulting in an emergency department visit** in Mesa County during 2021. A majority of the data are based on ICD-10 primary diagnosis code.



**5 IN 10 WERE FEMALE**

Data were reported by St. Mary's Medical Center, Community Hospital, VA Western Colorado Health System, and Colorado Canyons Hospital and Medical Center. Suicide risk at Mind Springs and West Springs Hospital is assessed differently.



This high percentage may be attributed to the fact that West Springs is the regional psychiatric hospital, and they are intended to serve patients with high-acuity mental health care needs.

## TOP 3 CAUSES OF OVERDOSE

OVER THE COUNTER PAIN MEDICATIONS

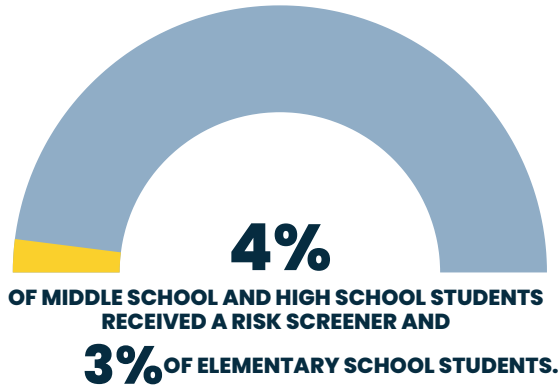
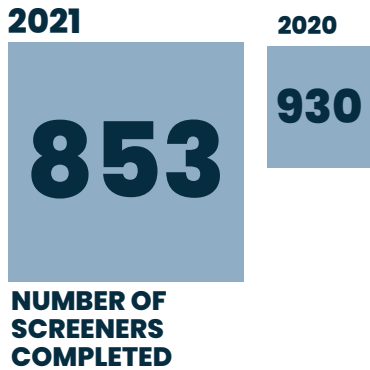
BENZODIAZEPINES (SUCH AS XANAX)

OTHER PRESCRIPTION MEDICATION (SUCH AS INSULIN AND HEART MEDICATION)

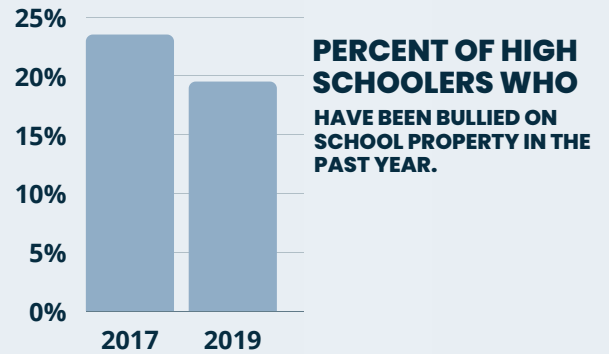
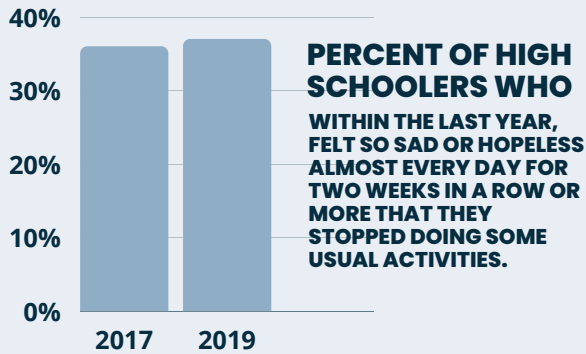
When school personnel are concerned about a student, **they make a referral to trained staff to complete a Suicide Risk Screener (SRS)**. This screener determines the level of intervention required and can initiate immediate safety planning. The number of referrals is related to staff awareness and **concern about behaviors that may be warning signs of suicidal risk.**



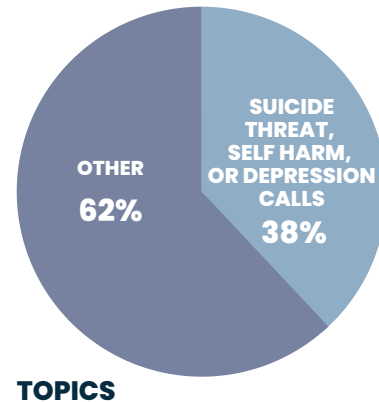
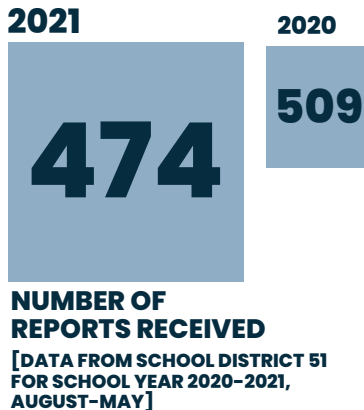
## SCREENERS



THE SURVEY IS ADMINISTERED TO MIDDLE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ACROSS COLORADO EVERY TWO YEARS.



SAFE2TELL IS AN ANONYMOUS WAY FOR STUDENTS, PARENTS, SCHOOL STAFF AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO REPORT CONCERNS REGARDING THEIR SAFETY OR THE SAFETY OF OTHERS.



In Mesa County, we **approach health improvement through our One Community lens**. We address our community challenges through five areas of impact:



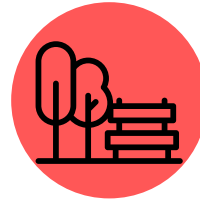
**ECONOMIC STABILITY**



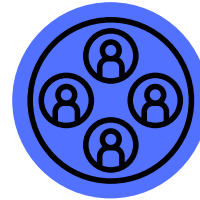
**EDUCATION**



**HEALTH CARE AND ACCESS**



**NEIGHBORHOOD AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT**



**SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT**

To effectively address each of these areas, we look at data and information, work through cross-sector partnerships, promote and **mobilize around topics of shared importance**, and ensure we have the right resources to achieve our collective goals.

**Our suicide prevention work is an example of this approach in action.** Current community efforts are focused in Social and Community Context, Health Care and Access, Education, and Economic Stability. The lead cross-sector partnership working on these important actions is the Mesa County Suicide Prevention Coalition.

HEALTH DOESN'T START IN THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE,



**IT STARTS WHERE WE LIVE, LEARN, WORK, AND PLAY.**

In Mesa County we work hard, we play hard, and we take care of each other. **Yet not everyone has the same opportunities to make choices that allow them to live a long and healthy life.** People in Mesa County lose time, money, and years of their life to preventable and treatable illnesses. Mesa County's foundation is strong in some ways and weak in others. When the foundation is weak, healthy choices feel out of reach as people struggle to meet basic needs.

## SUICIDE PREVENTION IN ACTION



*How Are the Children?* develops action steps around the findings of Mesa County's Child Fatality Review Board, a multi-disciplinary team that evaluates unexpected child deaths to identify prevention opportunities. **The group is currently focused on medication safety and the connection between suicidal thoughts and concussion.**



Mesa County Opioid Response Group partners **provide community trainings and substance abuse recovery support.**



Postvention Alliance **provides resources and information** to those impacted by suicide. Heartbeat Grand Junction, GriefShare, and The Compassionate Friends **offer group support and monthly newsletters focusing on grief.**



Veteran Programs in Mesa County foster **connection and economic stability.**



Mesa County Libraries **host events related to mental health, grief, resilience and more**, with partners such as HopeWest, Hilltop, and others.



Gun shops and pawn shops participate in Colorado's Gun Shop Project, **providing information about suicide risk and distributing gun locks to encourage safe storage** of firearms.



The Mental Health Steering Committee **works to address gaps in our mental health care system.**

**INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?**  
SPMESACOUNTY@GMAIL.COM

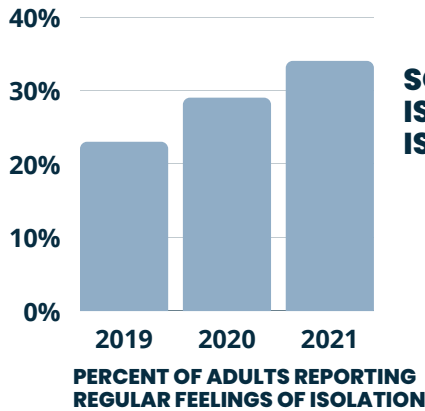


SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT

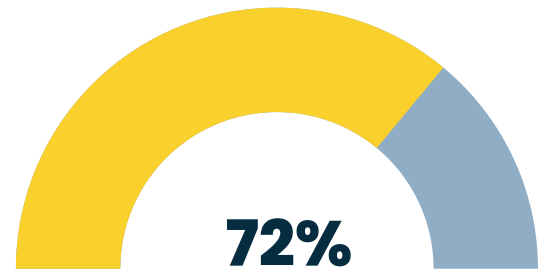
## CONNECTEDNESS

Feeling connected to other people, schools, neighborhoods, workplaces, faith communities, and cultural groups **protects people from suicide risk.**

The Mesa County Suicide Prevention Coalition supports school-based social and emotional learning programs, **advises workplaces about policies that help people feel included and facilitates events and activities across the community.**



**SOCIAL ISOLATION IS INCREASING**



**72%**  
MESA COUNTY STUDENTS REPORT HAVING AN ADULT THEY CAN GO TO FOR HELP WITH A SERIOUS PROBLEM.

[HEALTHY KIDS COLORADO, 2019]



SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT

## POSTVENTION

A loss of a loved one to suicide is a known risk factor for suicide death. **Postvention is the response to and care for individuals and communities affected by a suicide attempt, crisis, or death.** Examples include safe reporting and messaging about suicide by the media and affected organizations. It also includes caring follow up contacts after a suicide attempt or mental health crisis.



In 2021, the Suicide Prevention Coalition, in collaboration with the Mesa County Coroner's Office, **hired a Suicide Loss Coordinator who supports valley residents who have recently lost a loved one to suicide.**

She meets with impacted family members to make sure that their immediate needs are being met and then **works with them as they navigate the logistical and emotional hurdles that come in the months following their loss.**



HEALTH  
CARE AND  
ACCESS

## ACCESS TO SAFER CARE

By implementing best practices for safer care, health care systems and organizations will see improvement in quality of patient care and reduction of suicide risk, attempts, and deaths for those within their system.

The Mesa County Mental Health Steering Committee is a group of mental health care providers and local leaders working to ensure that Mesa County residents have access to quality and reliable mental health care. **This group has initiated a mapping process to better understand the barriers and strengths of our system in delivering mental health care to people who need it.**

Mind Springs Health, St. Mary's Hospital, Community Hospital, and Colorado Canyons Hospital have implemented the Zero Suicide model of care, **which aims to build a culture that provides safer suicide care** through provider training, regular follow up with patients, and effective screening for suicide risk.

### THE TOP BARRIERS IDENTIFIED BY THIS PROCESS INCLUDE:

GAPS IN SERVICES SUCH AS RESPITE CARE AND INTENSIVE OUTPATIENT THERAPY

LONG WAIT TIMES

INSUFFICIENT CARE COORDINATION AND CASE MANAGEMENT



## EDUCATION & AWARENESS

The training and awareness levels of community members and medical providers protects people at risk of suicide by ensuring that when they need help, **they get it from knowledgeable and skillful people.**

**You could be the difference in the life of someone experiencing a suicidal crisis** – your neighbor, your employee, your child, your friend.

**Training is available for free in Mesa County.** Options range from 1-2 hours in person or online or full-day in person training.

SCAN TO SEE  
CURRENT  
TRAININGS:



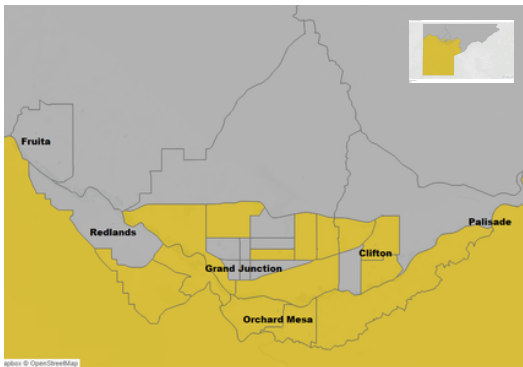




**ECONOMIC STABILITY**

## ECONOMIC STABILITY

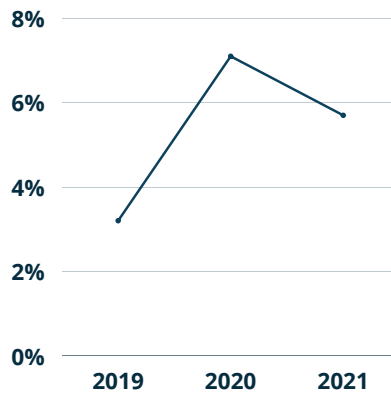
Economic stability increases resilience and reduces financial stress – a risk factor for suicide. **Policies and practices for increased food security, affordable housing, family-friendly employment, and access to affordable, quality child care are suicide prevention efforts.**



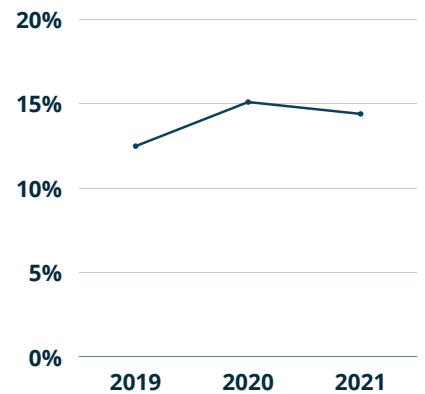
**CHILD CARE DESERT BY CENSUS TRACT**



A CHILD CARE DESERT IS AN AREA WITH MORE THAN THREE CHILDREN AGES 0-5 FOR EACH LICENSED CHILD CARE SPOT.



**UNEMPLOYMENT**  
[BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS]



**PROJECTED FOOD INSECURITY RATE**  
[MESA COUNTY HUNGER ALLIANCE]

## LETHAL MEANS

Access to lethal means describes the ability of a person experiencing a suicidal crisis to access the tools required to end their life. The Mesa County Suicide Prevention Coalition focuses on safe storage of firearms and appropriate storage and disposal of medications to reduce this risk.

**2021**



**2020**



**NUMBER OF GUN LOCKS DISTRIBUTED BY VA WESTERN COLORADO HEALTH SYSTEM IN MESA COUNTY**

**2021**



**2020**



**POUNDS OF MEDICATION DISPOSED OF THROUGH MEDICATION TAKE BACK SITES**

# COLORADO NATIONAL COLLABORATIVE

The Colorado National Collaborative (CNC) is a partnership of professionals, organizations, and community members working on community-based strategies to prevent suicide in Colorado.

Mesa County is a proud participant in the CNC and **is working towards the goal of reducing suicide by 20% by the year 2024.**

## SOURCES

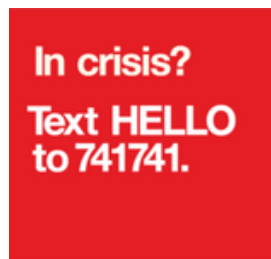
Mesa County Public Health Suicide Attempt Surveillance, 2021

Mesa County Coroner's Office, Suicide Death Data

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

School District 51, 2020-2021

## NEED HELP?



Free, 24/7, confidential crisis support by text.

CRISIS TEXT LINE |

