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Statewide News Release

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Gov. Beshear: Kentucky Awarded Over \$3.6 Million from Garrett Lee Smith Suicide Prevention Grant

Kentucky is among 10 recipients awarded funding from National Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Sept. 29, 2022) – Today, Gov. Andy Beshear announced Kentucky will receive a \$3,675,000 Garrett Lee Smith Suicide Prevention grant, awarded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Kentucky is among just 10 entities to receive the grant, which focuses on reducing suicide among residents of the commonwealth under age 25.

The competitive grant was awarded to the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities and builds upon Kentucky's 20-plus-year history of serving youth ages 10 to 24 at risk of death by suicide and their families. Kentucky was awarded the Garrett Lee Smith Suicide Prevention Grant in 2006, 2011 and 2015.

“My administration has always prioritized quality, accessible mental health care,” **Gov. Beshear** said. “The Garrett Lee Smith Suicide Prevention grant will make it easier for Kentuckians to get the help they need and deserve.”

The funding, \$735,000 per year for five years, will advance the Kentucky Strategic Allies Fostering Empowerment of Today's Youth (KY SAFETY) project. The project will help identify youth at risk for suicide and connect them with care pathways. KY SAFETY will also implement Youth Mental Health First Aid, Question, Persuade, Refer and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training in youth-serving agencies. More than 5,600 staff members of youth-serving agencies are expected to be trained during the initiative.

A key project component will be to provide first responders with internet-equipped tablets for use during behavioral health emergencies, helping ensure near-immediate access to a clinician.



“Kentucky has a long history of working to reduce suicide risk,” said Eric Friedlander, secretary of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services. “Finding new and innovative ways to reach our youth is essential to improving access to behavioral health services. Given that many of our counties are rural, the use of tablets and telehealth services represents a creative way to provide services as quickly as possible.”

The initial implementation will occur in Clinton, Hart, Hickman and Lyon counties. Locations were selected based on suicide attempt rates among middle and high school students. Additional locations will be identified in the coming years.

The five-year grant program, which begins Sept. 30, supports states in building partnerships to implement prevention, early identification and follow-up for youth at risk of suicide. Partner agencies for KY SAFETY include school districts in the four counties and their corresponding Community Mental Health Centers: Four Rivers Behavioral Healthcare, Pennyroyal, LifeSkills and Adanta; the University of Kentucky College of Social Work; the University of Louisville Center for Instructional and Behavioral Research in Schools; the Green River Educational Cooperative and the West Kentucky Education Cooperative.

“Supporting the behavioral health of Kentucky’s youth is vital for the future of the commonwealth,” said Wendy Morris, commissioner of the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. “Ensuring there are sufficient and equitable services available for youth in the state is essential in making this happen.”

“The goal of the grant is to support strategies that focus on the identification of youth at risk of suicide, build capacity of clinical service providers to assess, manage and treat that risk and improve the continuity of care and follow-up of youth receiving care for their suicidality,” said Patti Clark, an agency assistant director and principal investigator for the project.

State suicide prevention coordinator and KY SAFETY project director Beck Whipple said, “By identifying youth early, treating them effectively and following up consistently, we decrease the likelihood that they will die by suicide.”

The Garrett Lee Smith Award is the latest in a series of impactful steps by Gov. Beshear and his administration to help Kentuckians address mental health issues. This includes supporting [House Bill 44](#), permitting Kentucky students to take mental health days; [Senate Bill 178](#), extending Medicaid benefits to pregnant or postpartum women; [House Bill 562](#), which supports mental health for first responders; and [Tim’s Law](#), which expands access to assisted outpatient treatment for people with severe mental illness. The Beshear-Coleman administration supports student mental health through multiple collaborations across agencies and with school and community partners. This results in suicide prevention training for educators and Youth Mental Health First Aid training to help adults identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance abuse.

About the Garrett Lee Smith Suicide Prevention Grant

Garrett Lee Smith was the son of former Oregon Sen. Gordon Smith. Garrett Lee Smith died by suicide in 2004, the day before his 22nd birthday. Sen. Smith proposed the Garrett Lee Smith

Memorial Act, which recognized suicide as the third-leading cause of death among youth ages 10 to 24. Eventually, the act allowed campuses, tribes and states to apply for and receive grants to help prevent stories like Garrett's from devastating other families.

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