

Public Testimony: Nevada State Legislature's Interim Finance Committee

Name(s): Alexi Rayo, Gabriela Rios, Christian Suarez,
Maria Jimenez & Melanie Murphy

Thursday, April 30, 2020

Nevada has the highest rate of elderly suicide in the United States and these trends are increasing, creating an issue of the quality of life for Nevadans. Unfortunately, they are considered one of the most vulnerable populations due to the numerous barriers and risk factors that they face as they age. This is why Nevada has passed numerous bills such as S.B. 483 (2019 Session), A.B. 105 (2017 Session) and A.B. 93 (2015 Session) which requires suicide prevention training for health care providers, family members of veterans, members of the military and others who are at risk of suicide. But what are we doing to connect senior citizens to our community? How can we connect senior citizens socially and emotionally? We are proposing that the State of Nevada needs to support programs that assist aged populations in finding volunteer opportunities and allocating additional funds to already established programs, such as the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (R.S.V.P.) and Caring for Reno's Elders (C.A.R.E).

Caring for Reno's Elders (C.A.R.E.) is a program that assists senior citizens to get involved in the community and connect socially. Their overall goal is to connect senior citizens with existing and new social service activities and organizations. They also aim to increase awareness of elder health and well-being. In November of 2019, a grant of \$250,000 was received by Renown Health and the Washoe County Health District for C.A.R.E. (Washoe County, 2019). With just \$250,000, this program has helped our community in many aspects. If programs such as these receive this amount of funding, imagine what we can do as a community with more. In addition, the Sanford Center for Aging employs the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (R.S.V.P.). With this program, seniors are able to stay connected to their community. By utilizing the skills and abilities that Seniors have, they are able to be placed in settings where they can feel the most comfortable. Creating a safe place for these individuals during a time of darkness is vital. One of the leading trends in senior suicide is a loss of connection. By granting additional funding as opposed to cutting these programs, we can ensure that our seniors have plenty of options to choose from and stay connected to our community.

In conclusion, by having the funds necessary we can better develop the programs that are in place and possibly expand the provision of services. The goal is to help reach and change the lives of as many seniors as possible through emotional and social connections from the community. By investing in the programs listed we believe we can assist in integrating seniors back into society and allow them to feel essential as well as help lower the rates of suicide. Investing in C.A.R.E. and R.S.V.P can not only be seen as assistance for decreasing suicide but also an investment, as the goal is to help integrate seniors into society, meaning they'd be giving back to their communities. We believe that by having more funds, we can assist in the provision of awareness in the community to learn and detect the signs of suicide before it is too late. We need to change the negative stigma against aging and to do so we need more programs that allow the community to work with senior citizens, such as C.A.R.E and R.S.V.P, which can create awareness and educate us on how to help meet the needs of our elders and allow them to feel connected.

SENIOR CITIZEN SUICIDE TRENDS

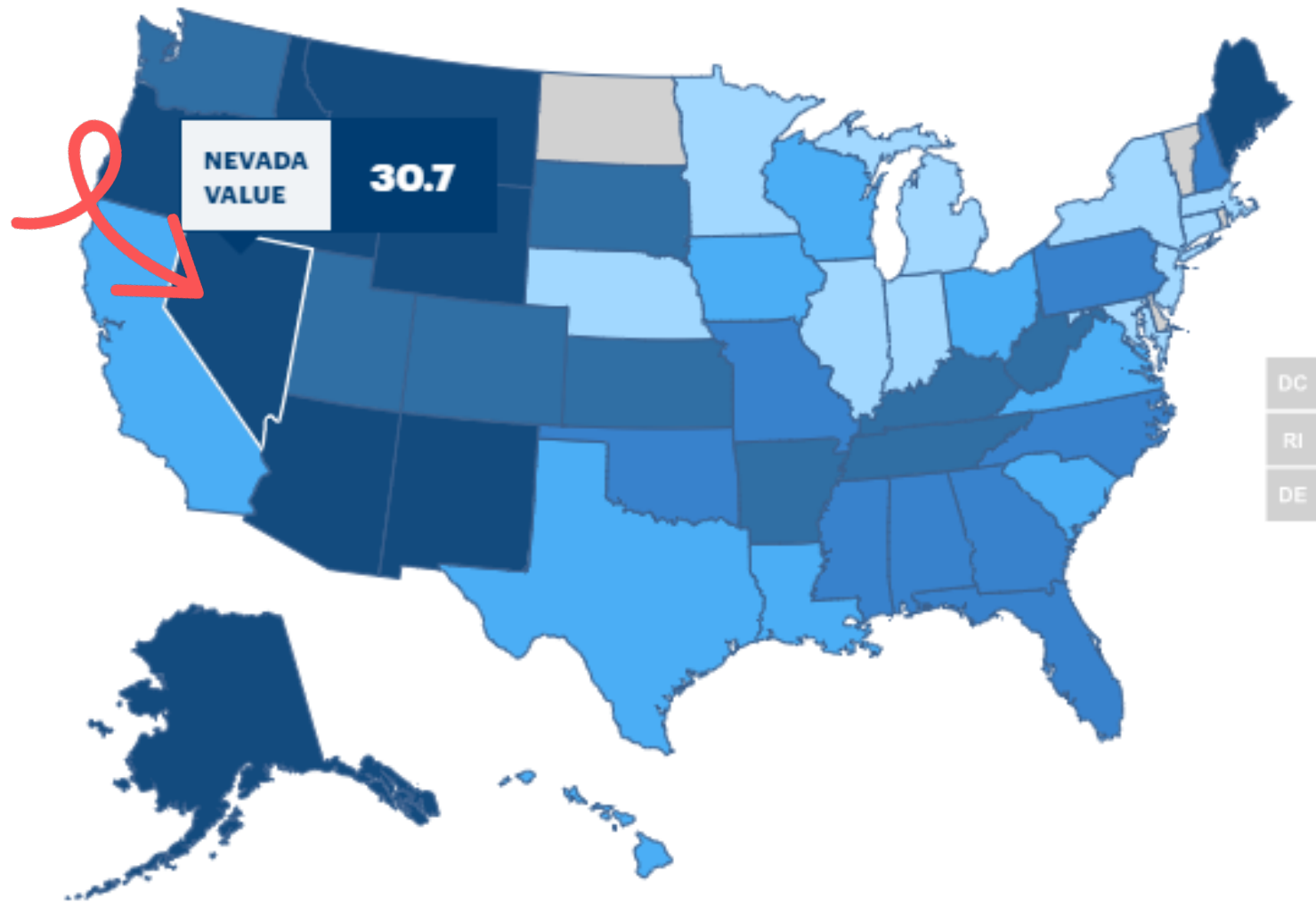
By: Alexi Rayo, Gabriela Rios,
Chirstian Suarez, Maria
Jimenez & Melanie Murphy

IN NEVADA



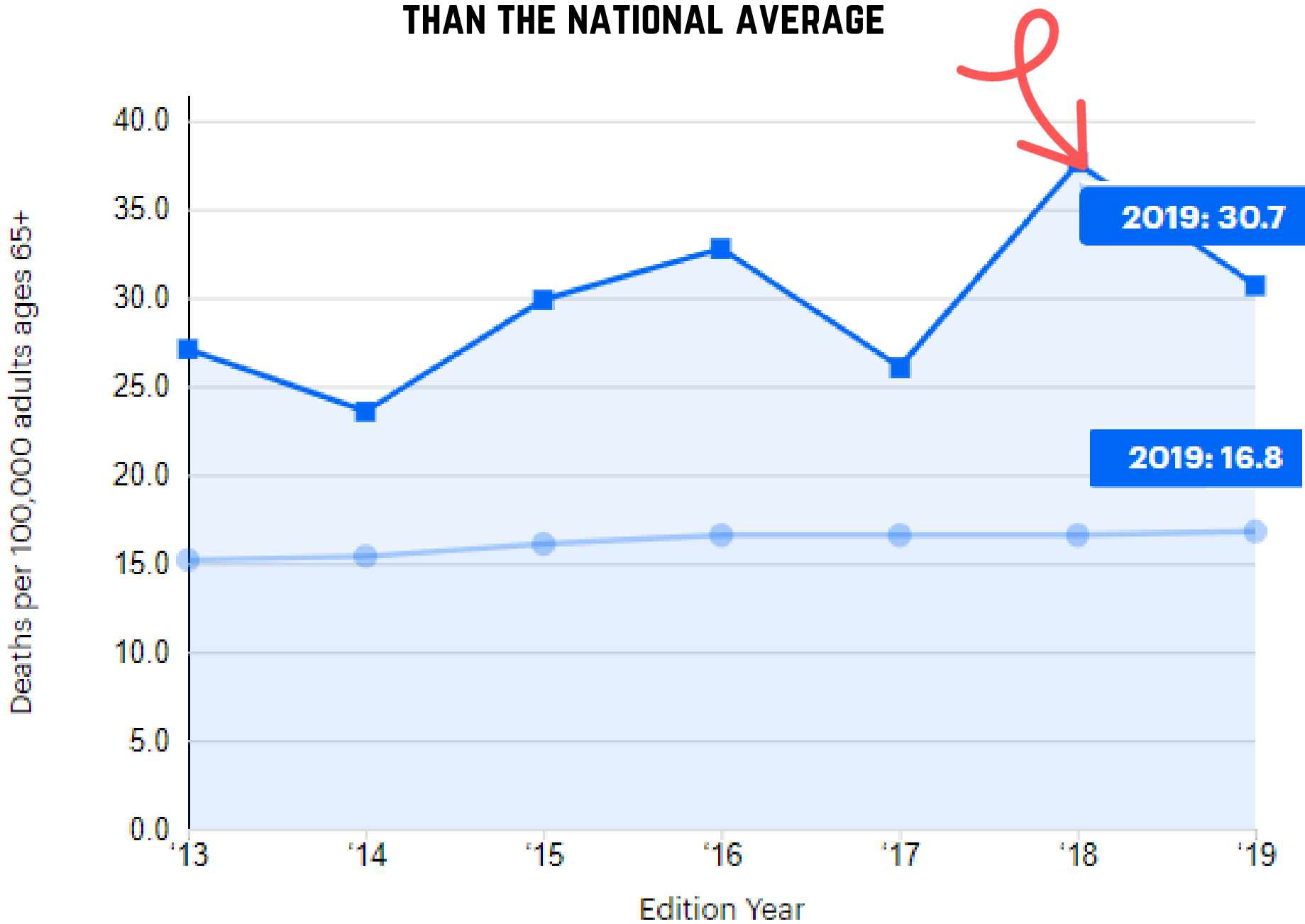
NEVADA HAS THE 2ND HIGHEST ELDER SUICIDE RATE IN THE COUNTRY.

Number of deaths due to intentional self-harm per 100,000 adults ages 65 and older



Source: CDC WONDER Online Database, Underlying Cause of Death, Multiple Cause of Death files

NEVADA'S SUICIDE RATES ARE DRASTICALLY HIGHER THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE



■ Number of deaths due to intentional self-harm per 100,000 adults ages 65 and older

■ Nevada

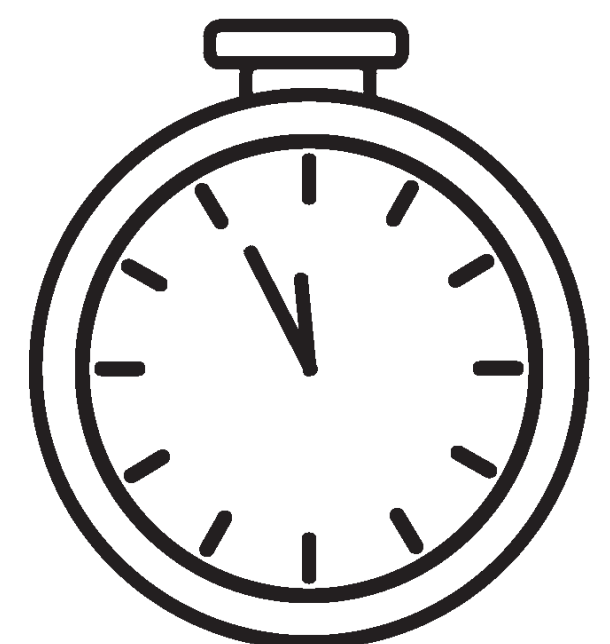
● United States

Source: CDC WONDER Online Database, Underlying Cause of Death, Multiple Cause of Death files

SOME FACTS

- In 2018, there were 657 suicides in Nevada. Of those lost to suicide, 144 were over the age of 65.
- Suicide is the 8th leading cause of death for Nevadans.
- More people die from suicide than homicide and Motor Vehicle Accident Deaths combined in Nevada.
- Veterans comprise an estimated 20% of Nevadan's suicides.
- Suicide attempts are often more lethal in older adults than in younger adults. Older people who attempt suicide are often more frail, more isolated, more likely to have a plan, and are more determined than younger adults. These factors suggest that older adults are less likely to be rescued, and are more likely to die from a suicide attempt than younger adults.
- Nevada seniors over 65 have the 4th highest suicide rate in the nation, almost double the national average for the same age group.

IN THE UNITED STATES A SUICIDE HAPPENS EVERY 11.1 MINUTES WHICH IS THE EQUIVALENT OF 129 PEOPLE WHO DIE EVERY DAY.



SENIOR CITIZEN SUICIDE TRENDS

By: Alexi Rayo, Gabriela Rios,
Chirstian Suarez, Maria
Jimenez & Melanie Murphy

IN NEVADA



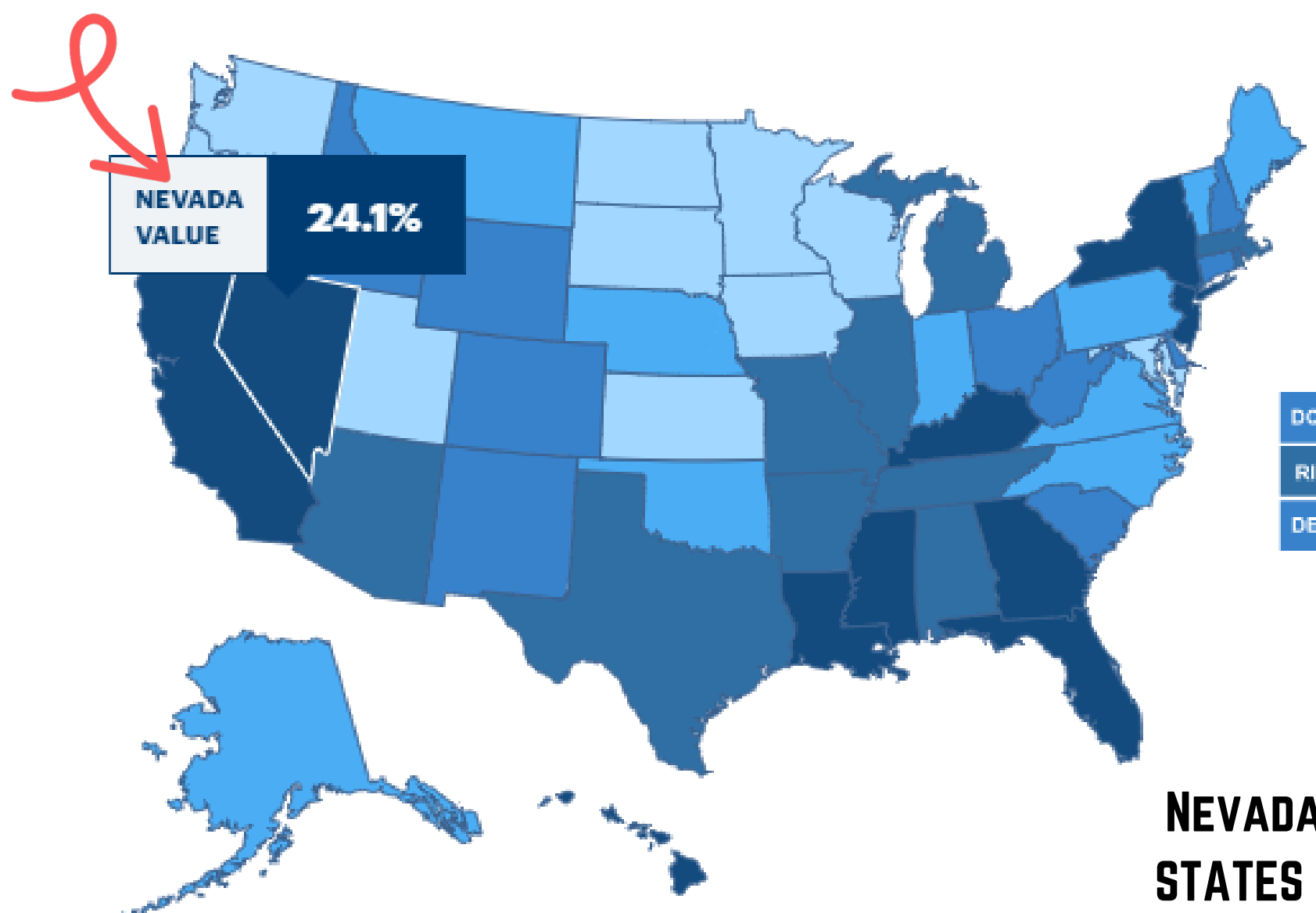
WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

Historically, Nevada's senior suicide rates have been one of the highest rates in the United States. There are several risk factors for suicide in older adults, such as loneliness, feeling like a burden, low sense of belonging, low social support, poverty, mental illness and inactivity. In addition, issues with relationships may affect loneliness, which can lead to seniors to isolate themselves or feel like a burden to others. Some senior citizens believe that their family would be better off without them. These thoughts and feelings can trigger suicidal behaviors to progress over time. Overall, there are several factors as to why senior suicide rates are dangerously high, such as loneliness, however, more programs need to be established and more funds need to be allocated to assist this high-risk population.

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

According to the Office of Suicide Prevention, one of the driving causes of suicide in older populations is a feeling of being alone and not feeling as though they have any sort of connection with others. This is why we are proposing that the State of Nevada needs to support programs that assist aged populations in finding volunteer opportunities and allocating additional funds to already established programs, such as the Sanford Center for Aging. Through continued support of these programs, we hope that there will be a decrease in suicide in aged populations. By creating a sense of community and a feeling of togetherness, we can support our aged population.

Percentage of adults ages 65 and older who reported volunteering in the past 12 months



NEVADA IS ONE OF THE LOWESTS RANKING STATES TO HAVE VOLUNTEERS WHO ARE 65 AND OLDER



BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING



- Studies show older adults who volunteer report lower disability, have better cognitive performance, fewer depressive symptoms, higher activity levels and better mental well-being than seniors who do not volunteer.
- Benefits of volunteering may extend beyond mental health. A review of the literature found that senior volunteering was associated with better self-reported health, fewer functional limitations, and lower mortality.
- The Corporation for National and Community Service also found that volunteers who meet a "volunteering threshold" and commit about one to two hours per week to volunteer activities are more likely to experience positive health outcomes, such as lower rates of heart disease and mortality. This review also found that the positive health benefits of volunteering are greatest for older adults.

QUOTE

Those most vulnerable to depression, and to suicidal thoughts, are "people who lose connection with others, with the community, with their family and friends, and become isolated and lonely," Yeates Conwell, director of the Geriatric Psychiatry Program at the University of Rochester says.