

Valley experts talk depression after Robin Williams suicide

THE TRAGIC NUMBERS BEHIND SUICIDES

Robin Williams' apparent suicide is one of thousands nationwide every year. Suicides far outnumber homicides and are more common than vehicular fatalities. Williams' depression was compounded by a history of substance abuse, a major factor in many suicides.

SOURCES: American Association of Suicidology; www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org; Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration Janet Loehrke, Kevin A. Kepple and Denny Gainer, USA TODAY

Victoria Pelham, The Desert Sun 7:35 p.m. PDT August 13, 2014

About 264 Riverside County residents committed suicide in 2012.



(Photo: AP)

Beloved comic and actor [Robin Williams' death this week \(/story/news/health/2014/08/13/robin-williams-addiction-fight/14004837/\)](#), and the outpouring of tributes and heartache that followed, has sparked a conversation around suicide and depression.

Coachella Valley experts are calling for more education to reduce misunderstanding on the topic and for people struggling to know they are not alone.

"His death reminds us that anybody at any walk of life, any age, any socioeconomic status is vulnerable to depression and suicide and that no one's life circumstances in and of themselves can predict it," said Steve Steinberg, deputy director of programs for the Riverside County Department of Mental Health. "We just need to take all the warning signs very seriously and make sure we do everything we can to intervene when we know somebody who may be depressed or suicidal."



Actor and comedian Robin Williams was being treated for depression and substance abuse prior to his apparent suicide. Addiction experts say the two disorders often go hand in hand, and relapses are common. Associated Press

Mental health care is seen by many regional experts as the most needed health service going forward, with a crisis of growing demand and a limited number of providers.

About a quarter of valley residents, almost 90,000 people, experienced a mental health concern of some kind in the last year, according to 2013 numbers from the Health Assessment Resource Center.

Roughly 11.4 percent of valley adults, or 40,458 people, have been diagnosed with depressive disorder, HARC data showed, up from 7.7 percent in 2007.

And almost 9,000 people in that same survey felt so depressed about their future, or "tired of living," they considered suicide in the last year.

Across Riverside County, 264 people committed suicide in 2012, the county said Tuesday.



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[Robin Williams on addiction: 'It lays in wait'](#)

<http://www.desertsun.com/story/news/health/2014/08/13/robin-williams-addiction-fight/14004837/?from=global&sessionKey=&autologin=>

"Suicide is such a difficult and sensitive matter," said Dr. Jill Gover, director of mental health services for the LGBT Community Center of the Desert, in a statement. "The truth is that too many people are affected by suicide, but our society has created both stigma and shame that prevent folks from getting the help and support they deserve.

"It's up to us to help end the silence of suicide, support one another and work together to prevent other suicides."

Steinberg pointed out that warning signs in a person include expressing feelings of hopelessness or desperation, behavioral changes such as acting more recklessly, not sleeping or sudden mood changes, giving away belongings or putting their affairs "in order in a way that's inconsistent with where they're at in their life span."

"The more of those factors one person is displaying, the higher the risk is, but any one of them should be observed and taken seriously," he said.

If you're struggling

Health care professionals point out a range of resources in the Coachella Valley for anyone struggling with mental health issues.

To find a counselor, therapist, psychiatrist or other mental health professional, valley residents can call the County Mental Health clinic in Indio at (760) 863-8455 and be directed to an appropriate place for care. They could also visit www.riverside.networkofcare.org (<http://www.riverside.networkofcare.org/>).

Anyone in Riverside County can also dial 2-1-1 for a list of social service offerings in their region — including mental health care.

If in crisis mode, the county also runs a hotline (951) 686-4357 (HELP), and a national suicide prevention hotline can be reached at (800) 273-8255 (TALK). Both are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The National Association of Mental Illness runs a Coachella Valley chapter that meets the first Monday of each month and can be reached at (888) 881-6264. The local chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention can be reached at (855) 869-2377.

[Up2riverside.org](http://up2riverside.org) (<http://up2riverside.org/>) and [suicideispreventable.org](http://www.suicideispreventable.org) (<http://www.suicideispreventable.org/>) are also resources.

Experts said this should be an opportunity to renew conversation and awareness on the topic and make sure everyone learns the warning signs and gets help for those they're concerned about.

"Depression is an often misunderstood illness that can affect people's lives greatly," said Riverside County Public Health Officer Cameron Kaiser in a statement. "Effective treatment is available, and with help no one with depression has to suffer in silence.

"But the first step is to reach out."

Resources that can help

Help exists throughout Riverside County and the Coachella Valley.

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