Report: Suicide accounts for 74 percent of Oregon violent deaths

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While the number of violent deaths in Oregon declined slightly in 2005, a new report by the Oregon Department of Human Services finds that suicide remains a public health problem, particularly among veterans of the military. According to the report, "Violent Deaths in Oregon: 2005," 748 Oregonians suffered violent deaths that year, which is down from 771 violent deaths in 2004. Violent death is the second leading cause of death among Oregonians under age 45 and the ninth leading cause among all Oregonians. Suicide remains the leading cause of violent deaths, accounting for 74 percent, or 555 people. Homicide was the second, accounting for 103 or 13.8 percent of violent deaths. Suicide rates were higher among military veterans than the general population. The report found that in 2005, 28 percent of all suicides, or 153 adults, were among veterans, 148 of whom were male. Age-adjusted rates of suicide per 100,000 male veterans were more than twice those of non-veteran males, 46 per 100,000 compared with 22 per 100,000. The report also found that 16 percent of the suicides were among older adults and that Oregon's suicide rate among older adults was 78 percent higher than the national average. Deaths relating to Oregon's Death with Dignity Act are not classified as suicides by Oregon law and are therefore not included in the report. "Suicide remains a serious public health issue in Oregon," said Governor Ted Kulongoski. "We must do more to make sure our returning soldiers get the support they need and that older adults know they are not alone." The complete report can be found at: http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/ipe/nvdrs/index.shtml The Violent Death report makes a series of recommendations to address the suicide issue among veterans, including strategies to train health care providers, increase screening and treatment of depression, implement community-based prevention activities and focus on reducing suicides among veterans and Oregonians aged 25-65. The recommendations build upon the state's work to aid veterans, including an Oregon Military Department reintegration unit that works directly with discharged troops in the transition from service back to the families, communities and careers. Governor Kulongoski also signed legislation this year that increases tax incentives for physicians who accept TRICARE patients, which is the U.S. Department of Defense health care entitlement for active-duty, National Guard, Reserve and retired members of the military, their families and survivors. The bill also establishes a tax credit for physicians who provide medical care to residents of the Oregon Veterans' Home, an assisted living facility for aging veterans. The Governor also signed legislation to expand the amount of federal taxable income military families can deduct on a yearly basis, helping families offset more of the costs associated with a family member serving in the military. Financial concerns are a leading cause of stress for soldiers as they transition back into their communities. Also, the federal Helmets to Hardhats program, administered by the Oregon Bureau of Labor, connects transitioning active-duty personnel and reservists with training and employment opportunities in the construction industry. Other findings in the report include: â€¢ Gunshot wound was the most common cause of death, accounting for nearly 54 percent of total violent deaths. Poisoning (21 percent) and hanging followed. â€¢ The 748 violent deaths occurred in 731 incidents. Of those, 714 incidents involved one death, and 17 incidents involved more than one death. Among the 17 incidents involving multiple deaths, 11 were homicide-suicides. â€¢ Homicide deaths declined from 111 in 2004 to 103 in 2005. Twelve more women died by homicide in 2005 than in 2004. â€¢ Robbery/burglary accounted for 8 percent of homicides. â€¢ Of the 555 suicides, 440 (79 percent) were males and 115 (21 percent) were female. Nearly all, 534 or 96 percent, were white. â€¢ Nearly half of all violent deaths occurred in four counties: Multnomah, Lane, Washington and Clackamas. â€¢ 700 of the violent death victims were white, 47 Hispanic and 21 African American. The remainder were American Indian/Native Alaskan, Asian/pacific Islander or "other race/unspecified." The report was compiled by the Public Health Division's Oregon Violent Death Reporting System (ORVDRS), which since 1993 has been collecting detailed information on all homicides, suicides, deaths of undetermined intent, deaths resulting from legal intervention, and deaths related to unintentional firearm injuries. The data are collected from Oregon medical examiners, local police, death certificates and the Homicide Incident Tracking System.