



*“Counselors took me out of my dark place—where feelings of worthlessness, isolation and suicidal thoughts could be addressed and not hidden away. Professionals helped me see that having these thoughts is nothing to be ashamed of. Instead of worrying about burdening others with my problems, I learned to overcome my challenges through open communications and felt connected again with my community.” – Katie Ayotte, suicide attempt survivor, mental health advocate and recipient of behavioral health services in Maricopa County*

Dear Community Members,

Arizona ranks eighth in the nation for suicides—a stunning and completely unnecessary statistic that we are committed to changing.

Over the past year, I’ve written to you about the initiative Magellan, our provider partners, the Arizona Department of Health Services/Division of Behavioral Health Services and numerous community stakeholders have implemented to combat suicide among those most at risk—individuals living with serious mental illness. I’m pleased to tell you that the suicide prevention and intervention initiative (also known as the Programmatic Suicide Deterrent System Project) is 76 percent of the way to meeting its goal of providing ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) to some 2,000 members of the behavioral health workforce in Maricopa County. This training is designed to equip these caregivers with a practical model, as well as skills and increased confidence to intervene with individuals expressing suicidal thoughts and/or actions.

Post-training results have been remarkable. Magellan recently resurveyed the workforce. Those who received the ASIST training showed phenomenal improvement in self-confidence and in the training and support required to intervene with individuals contemplating suicide, with post-training scores improving as much as 187 percent.

Reaching this goal will not be the end for this initiative. It is one important step in a multi-year change process. This process is also addressing the issues of engaging and integrating family support, creating a staff support protocol and developing an objective review process to support learning and reduce blame when adverse events occur. These innovative expansions in service will lead to improved outcomes for those we serve.

Another very important part of this process is to promote the recovery and well being of individuals who have attempted suicide and survived—to help them come out of their “dark place.” Although National Survivors of Suicide Day—happening tomorrow, Saturday, November 20—is focused on friends and family as survivors, I believe it is fitting for us also to consider those who have made an attempt, and survived, and are now trying to put their lives back together.

As part of our initiative, Magellan of Arizona plans to distribute a request for letters of interest next month to agencies who would like to establish a peer-driven support group for individuals with serious

mental illness who are enrolled in the system and have survived a suicide attempt. This will put Arizona on the forefront of a national movement to involve attempt survivors in efforts to combat suicide.

According to Dr. Thomas Joiner, the Robert O. Lawton Distinguished Professor of Psychology at Florida State University, those who want to take their lives “hold two psychological states in their minds...the perception that one is a burden and the sense that one does not belong.” By working together with ADHS/DBHS, our providers, community and government leaders and mental health advocates we are creating a deterrence system that will address both aspects of the suicidal mindset. To learn more about the initiative, I invite you to visit [www.MagellanofAZ.com/suicide](http://www.MagellanofAZ.com/suicide).

In closing, I'd like to thank the many individuals both within and outside Magellan who have been involved in the steering committee, task teams and sub-task teams. Your efforts have made, and continue to make, a real impact in the fight to reduce suicide among those living with serious mental illness.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Clarke".

Richard Clarke, Ph.D.  
Chief Executive Officer  
Magellan Health Services of Arizona