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**Subject:** News from the Wyoming Department of Health: Program to Engage School Leaders in Teen Suicide Prevention  
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## *News from the Wyoming Department of Health*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Program to Engage School Leaders in Teen Suicide Prevention**

With suicide the second-leading cause of death for Wyoming youths ages 15-19, the Wyoming Department of Health is beginning a new program with public and private partners to help address the role of schools in youth suicide prevention.

“Because we are a community here in Wyoming it hurts us all when our youth lose faith in their future and consider suicide as their only option,” says Keith Hotle, suicide prevention team leader with the Wyoming Department of Health’s Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Division. “That’s why it’s important to act aggressively and strategically to counter these tragic and avoidable deaths.”

The initiative known as *Well Aware*<sup>TM</sup>, is designed to inform education leaders and policy influencers about the link between emotional wellbeing and academic achievement. The program includes an online and print quarterly bulletin for school leaders, including school board members, superintendents, principals and central office administration.

Latest mortality data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) spanning the five-year period from 2001-2005 show that suicide rates for Wyoming teens ages 15-19 are more than twice as high as national rates for this same population (WY rate of 17.48 per 100,000 deaths versus U.S. rate of 7.70 per 100,000 deaths). An alarming one in six Wyoming high-school students reported making suicidal plans within the previous year according to the 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, representing a 13 percent increase over 2005 data.

Research from the National Institutes of Health shows that half of all lifetime mental illness cases begin by age 14, and three-quarters of illnesses by age 24 (according to the National Comorbidity Survey Replication).

“This research should be a key consideration for school leaders because mental illness is often an underlying factor for suicide attempts and completions and youth spend the majority of their time in school during these critical years,” Hotle said.

The first issue of the Wyoming Well Aware publication is being distributed this month to more than 5,000 Wyoming education leaders and influences. The newsletter can be viewed online at <http://health.wyo.gov/mhsa/prevention/suicideindex.html>.

The Wyoming Department of Health is bringing the WellAware program to the state with federal funding support. In 2006 the department was awarded a \$1.2 million three-year federal grant to help address Wyoming’s high youth suicide rates. Other projects funded by the grant include an interactive youth-centered website that can be found online at [www.amillionmilesfromanywhere.com](http://www.amillionmilesfromanywhere.com).

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### **About *Well Aware*<sup>TM</sup>**

Well Aware is a multi-faceted strategic communications program to inform and engage education leaders of the link between emotional wellbeing and academic achievement. It includes an online and print quarterly bulletin for school administrators with research-based content, best practices in the national prevention arena, and other information relevant to school leaders. Well Aware is a program from Point de Vue Communications, Inc.