

# Report Highlights

## Why DLA Performed This Audit

The audit was performed to determine if there is a continued need for the council and if its termination date should be extended. The council is set to sunset on June 30, 2027, and will have one year from that date to conclude its administrative operations.

## What the Legislative Auditor Recommends

1. The council's chair should work with the Division of Behavioral Health's (DBH) director to address difficulties with recording meeting minutes or amend the existing transcription contract to properly include the council within the scope of work.
2. The council's chair should ensure annual reports are completed and properly maintained.
3. The council's chair should work with DBH's director to develop and implement effective procedures for updating the council's webpage.

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# A Sunset Review of the Department of Health, Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (council)

May 8, 2026

Audit Control Number 16-20153-26

## REPORT CONCLUSIONS

The council served the public's interest by broadening the public's awareness of suicide prevention and coordinating efforts among agencies, regional groups, coalitions, and local communities. Additionally, the council issued the 2023–2027 Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan and collaborated with stakeholders to develop and refine the plan's strategies, resources, and indicators. The audit also concluded that council operations were hampered by travel restrictions, executive director turnover, and other administrative deficiencies.

In accordance with AS 44.66.010(a)(7), the council is scheduled to terminate on June 30, 2027. We recommend that the legislature extend the council's termination date six years to June 30, 2033, which is two years less than the maximum allowed by statute. The reduced extension reflects the need for more routine oversight of the council in light of the audit findings.

# Report Highlights (Continued)

4. The council's chair should coordinate with the chairs of the Alaska Mental Health Board and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse to ensure performance evaluations of the executive director are completed.

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

## LEGISLATIVE BUDGET AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

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May 27, 2026

Members of the Legislative Budget  
and Audit Committee:

In accordance with the provisions of Title 24 and Title 44 of the Alaska Statutes (sunset legislation), we have reviewed the activities of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council and the attached report is submitted for your review.

#### DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH STATEWIDE SUICIDE PREVENTION COUNCIL SUNSET REVIEW

May 8, 2026

Audit Control Number  
16-20153-26

The audit was conducted as required by AS 44.66.050(a). Per AS 44.66.010(a)(7), the council is scheduled to terminate on June 30, 2027. We recommend the legislature extend the council's termination date to June 30, 2033.

We conducted this audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. Fieldwork procedures utilized in the course of developing the findings and recommendations presented in this report are discussed in the Objectives, Scope, and Methodology section.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kris Curtis".

Kris Curtis, CPA, CISA  
Legislative Auditor

## ABBREVIATIONS

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|         |                                                |
|---------|------------------------------------------------|
| ABADA   | Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse    |
| ACN     | Audit Control Number                           |
| AMHB    | Alaska Mental Health Board                     |
| AMHTA   | Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority           |
| AS      | Alaska Statute                                 |
| CISA    | Certified Information Systems Auditor          |
| council | Statewide Suicide Prevention Council           |
| CPA     | Certified Public Accountant                    |
| DBH     | Division of Behavioral Health                  |
| DEED    | Department of Education and Early Development  |
| DOH     | Department of Health                           |
| FY      | Fiscal Year                                    |
| NAMI    | National Alliance on Mental Illness            |
| SAPP    | suicide awareness, prevention, and postvention |

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# ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTION

## Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (council)

The council is authorized under AS 44.29.350 to serve in an advisory capacity to the legislature and the governor on matters related to suicide prevention.

The council's governing statutes identify its purpose and scope of work as actions intended to:

1. Improve health and wellness throughout the state by reducing suicide and its effect on individuals, families, and communities;
2. Broaden the public's awareness of suicide and the risk factors related to suicide;
3. Enhance suicide prevention services and programs throughout the state;
4. Develop healthy communities through comprehensive, collaborative, community-based, and faith-based approaches;
5. Develop and implement a statewide suicide prevention plan; and
6. Strengthen existing and build new partnerships between public and private entities that will advance suicide prevention efforts in the state.

## Exhibit 1

### Statewide Suicide Prevention Council Members as of February 28, 2026

Monique Andrews, Chair  
*Military*

Peter Angasan  
*Alaska Federation of Natives*

Jen Carson  
*Department of Health*

Sharon Fishel  
*Department of Education and  
Early Development*

Roberta Moto  
*Rural*

Tonie Protzman  
*Alaska Mental Health Board*

Cynthia Erickson  
*Public*

Dakoma Epperly-May  
*Youth*

Jason Simmons  
*Suicide Loss Survivor*

Marcus Sanders  
*Clergy*

Terese Kashi  
*Secondary Schools*

Anthony Cravalho  
*Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug  
Abuse*

Vacant  
*Statewide Youth Organization*

Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson  
*Senate Majority*

Representative Sara Hannan  
*House Majority*

Representative Elexie Moore  
*House Minority*

Vacant  
*Senate Minority*

Source: Office of the Governor, Boards and Commissions.

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Under AS 44.29.360, the council is required to report its findings and recommendations in a report annually to the governor, the president of the senate, and the speaker of the house.

The council is administratively located within the Department of Health (DOH) and consists of 13 voting members appointed by the governor and four nonvoting legislative representatives from the Alaska House of Representatives and the Alaska Senate (see Exhibit 1).

Alaska Statute 44.29.300(a)(3) specifies that the governor-appointed seats must be filled by:

1. One DOH employee;
2. One Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) employee;
3. One member of the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse;
4. One member of the Alaska Mental Health Board;
5. One person recommended by the Alaska Federation of Natives;
6. One person who is an employee of a secondary school;
7. One person who is active in a youth organization;
8. One person who has experienced the death by suicide of a member of the person's family;
9. One person who resides in a rural community in the State that is not connected by road or the Alaska Marine Highway to the main road system of the state;
10. One person who is a member of the clergy;

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11. One person who is at least 16 years of age but not more than 24 years of age;
  12. One person who is discharged from, retired from, or engaged in active-duty military service in the armed forces of the United States, or who is a mental health provider, social worker, or other person actively providing a health care service to discharged, retired, or active military personnel; and
  13. One public member.

The council's operational costs for July 2022 through February 2026 are shown in Exhibit 2 on the following page. Operational costs included a reimbursable service agreement with DEED for a suicide awareness, prevention, and postvention program. Personal services expenditures represent the salary and benefits of council staff.

DOH staff provide the council with administrative support, including contract assistance, financial and budgetary reporting, and information technology services. Council funding sources for FY 23 through FY 26 are shown in Exhibit 3 on the following page.

## Exhibit 2

| Statewide Suicide Prevention Council<br>Schedule of Expenditures<br>FY 23 through February 2026<br>(Unaudited) |                  |                  |                  |                                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                | FY 23            | FY 24            | FY 25            | July 1, 2025 –<br>February 28, 2026 |
| Expenditures:                                                                                                  |                  |                  |                  |                                     |
| Personal Services                                                                                              | \$123,102        | \$128,000        | \$140,169        | \$ 94,602                           |
| Travel                                                                                                         | 24,406           | 12,240           | 3,500            | 826                                 |
| Services                                                                                                       | 165,795          | 76,078           | 27,671           | 55,359                              |
| Commodities                                                                                                    | 1,544            | 282              | 0                | 37                                  |
| DEED*                                                                                                          | 368,616          | 392,252          | 258,976          | 108,453                             |
| Total                                                                                                          | <u>\$683,463</u> | <u>\$608,852</u> | <u>\$430,316</u> | <u>\$259,277</u>                    |

Source: Division of Behavioral Health management.

\* Reimbursable service agreement for the suicide awareness, prevention, and postvention program.

## Exhibit 3

| Statewide Suicide Prevention Council<br>Funding Sources<br>FY 23 through FY 26 |                  |                  |                  |                  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
|                                                                                | FY 23            | FY 24            | FY 25            | FY 26            |
| Interagency Receipts                                                           | \$ 30,000        | \$ 30,000        | \$ 30,000        | \$ 30,000        |
| General Fund Appropriations                                                    | 598,600          | 601,500          | 608,700          | 619,800          |
| Mental Health Trust Authority<br>Receipts                                      | 50,000           | 0                | 0                | 0                |
| Total                                                                          | <u>\$678,600</u> | <u>\$631,500</u> | <u>\$638,700</u> | <u>\$649,800</u> |

Source: Compiled from Office of Management and Budget operating budget documents.

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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### **The council shared administrative support with the Alaska Mental Health Board and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse.**

Per an FY 13 memorandum of agreement between the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (council), the Alaska Mental Health Board, and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, administrative operations were to be shared among the three entities. In accordance with the agreement, offices were co-located and the entities' staff worked collaboratively on common goals and efforts related to suicide prevention, mental health, substance abuse prevention and treatment, and wellness. The agreement states that performance evaluations of the executive director are to be conducted jointly by the chairs of the council and the two boards.

Six staff positions report to the executive director with five of the positions shared between the Alaska Mental Health Board and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, and one position dedicated to the council. The executive director position is expected to apply around 20 percent of time to the council.

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# REPORT CONCLUSIONS

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In developing our conclusion regarding whether the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council's (council) termination date should be extended, its operations were evaluated using the 11 factors set out in AS 44.66.050(c), which are included as Appendix A. Under the State's "sunset" law, these factors are to be considered in assessing whether an entity has demonstrated a public policy need for continuing operations.

The audit concluded that the council served the public's interest by actively broadening the public's awareness of suicide prevention and coordinating efforts among agencies, regional groups, coalitions, and local communities. Additionally, the council issued the 2023–2027 Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan and collaborated with stakeholders to develop and refine the plan's strategies, resources, and indicators. The audit also concluded that council operations were hampered by travel restrictions, executive director turnover, and other administrative deficiencies.

In accordance with AS 44.66.010(a)(7), the council is scheduled to terminate on June 30, 2027. We recommend that the legislature extend the council's termination date six years to June 30, 2033, which is two years less than the maximum allowed by statute. The reduced extension reflects the need for more routine oversight of the council in light of the audit findings.

Detailed report conclusions are as follows.

## **Most council meetings were held virtually, which negatively impacted community engagement.**

The audit reviewed the 12 council meetings held from July 2022 through February 2026 and found meetings were properly noticed to the public and quorum was consistently met. Ten of the 12 meetings were held virtually, with two conducted in-person. According to council staff, in-person meetings have been limited for many years due to budget restrictions. Further, the governor's Administrative Order No. 358 (issued May 9, 2025) prohibited travel unless considered essential State business. Council members routinely noted that travel restrictions hindered community engagement.

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Council staff could not provide meeting minutes for four of the 12 meetings. The lack of minutes prevented auditors from concluding whether meetings were conducted effectively. According to council staff, minutes were not maintained due to technical difficulties. The council began utilizing a transcription provider in January 2025 that also provided transcription services for the Alaska Mental Health Board and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse. While this arrangement improved the consistency of meeting minutes, the related contract was never amended to formally include the council within the scope of work. (Recommendation 1) A total of \$1,151 was paid for transcription services during the audit period.

**There was excessive turnover in the council's executive director position.**

As noted in the background information section of this report, the council shares an executive director with the Alaska Mental Health Board and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse. From July 2022 through April 2026, four individuals served as executive director. The executive director resigned in March 2026 and stated that an inability to fill staff vacancies due to the governor's hiring freeze contributed to his resignation. Exhibit 4 on the following page summarizes vacancies for the positions that reported to the executive director. Of the six support positions, only the project assistant was dedicated to the council. That position was filled the entire audit period.

#### Exhibit 4

| Executive Director and Support Positions<br>Turnover and Vacancies<br>July 1, 2022, through April 2026 |                               |                  |                 |                                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| Position                                                                                               | Times Position<br>Turned Over | Months<br>Vacant | Vacancy Percent | Status as of<br>April 20, 2026 |
| Executive Director                                                                                     | 3                             | 6                | 13%             | Vacant                         |
| Administrative Assistant I*                                                                            | 1                             | 33               | 72%             | Vacant                         |
| Administrative Assistant II                                                                            | 2                             | 12               | 26%             | Vacant                         |
| Program Coordinator II                                                                                 | 2                             | 33               | 72%             | Vacant                         |
| Health and Social Services<br>Planner II                                                               | 1                             | 21               | 46%             | Vacant                         |
| Health and Social Services<br>Planner II                                                               | 1                             | 19               | 41%             | Vacant                         |
| Project Assistant                                                                                      | 0                             | 0                | 0%              | Filled                         |

*Source:* Compiled from Office of Management and Budget operating budget documents and the State accounting system.

\*Position title changed in FY 26. Previously, the position was a Statistical Technician I.

### Administrative deficiencies were noted.

The audit noted deficiencies related to evaluations, annual reporting, and website maintenance. Per the 2013 memorandum of agreement, evaluations of the executive director are to be conducted jointly by the chairs of the council, Alaska Mental Health Board, and Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse. Three evaluations were due during the audit period; however, only two were completed. (Recommendation 4)

The audit also noted noncompliance with the council's annual reporting requirement. Alaska Statute 44.29.360 requires the council to submit an annual report by March 1 of each year that includes findings and recommendations related to suicide in Alaska. Council staff were unable to provide auditors copies of the 2022 or 2023 annual reports. One report was not completed because the executive director considered the release of the 2023–2027 Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan as sufficient for meeting the annual report

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requirement. According to staff, the other report was completed but not maintained. (Recommendation 2)

Additionally, the audit found that the council's website was not properly maintained. It lacked key information including meeting schedules and minutes, links to annual reports, and a link to the comprehensive 2023–2027 Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan. (Recommendation 3)

### **Suicide continues to be a serious issue for the State.**

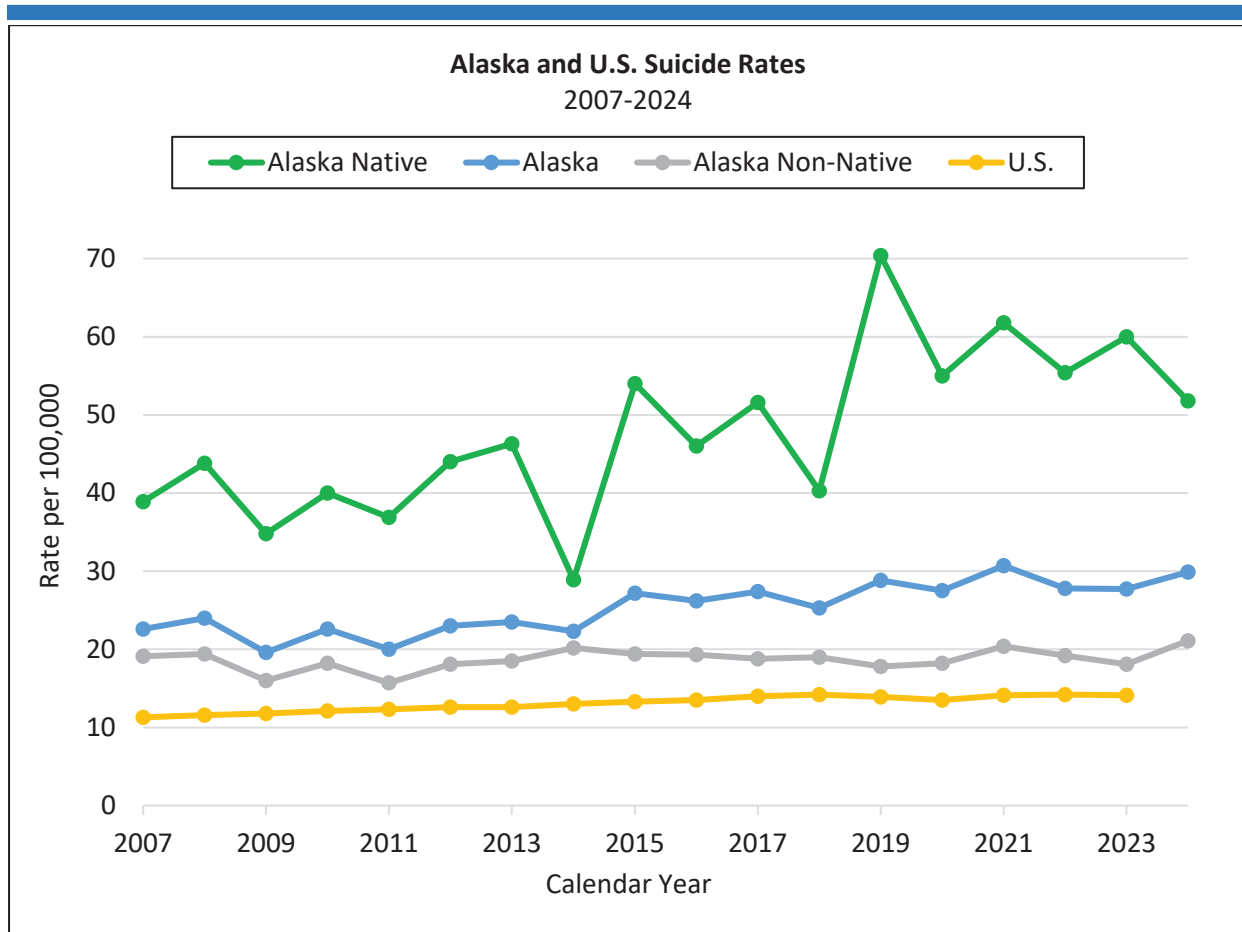
Alaska continues to experience one of the highest suicide rates in the nation, reflecting a significant public health challenge. Exhibit 5 reports suicide rates for Alaska as compared to national averages. Over the 18-year period, the State's suicide rate remained nearly twice the national average. The disparity was even more pronounced among Alaska Natives, with suicide rates consistently three to five times higher than the national average.

### **The council actively worked to meet its mission.**

The council served as the State's primary body responsible for advising the legislature and the governor on actions that should be taken to reduce suicide and its impacts on individuals, families, and communities. Throughout the audit period, the council was active in coordinating suicide prevention efforts across agencies, regional groups, coalitions, and local communities. Its activities included facilitating collaboration among stakeholders, supporting outreach and educational programs, advocating for funding to sustain prevention initiatives, and providing technical assistance when needed. While numerous governmental and private organizations shared the broader goal of preventing suicide, the council was the only entity that performed this statewide coordination function.

As required by statute, the council completed the 2023–2027 Suicide Prevention Plan, titled "Messages of Hope." The plan established six statewide suicide prevention goals (see Exhibit 6), each supported by specific strategies designed to guide coordinated prevention efforts across Alaska. In addition to outlining these strategies, the plan

Exhibit 5



Source: Alaska Native, Alaska Non-Native, and Alaska data provided by council staff. US data was acquired from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website and only available through calendar year 2023.

provided resources that individuals, communities, and agencies could use to reduce suicide and mitigate its impacts.

A summary of significant council activities from July 2022 through February 2026 was compiled by council staff and is presented in Exhibit 7 on pages 13 and 14. During this period, the council actively engaged in a variety of support and prevention efforts, including providing direct support services, conducting outreach activities, fostering collaboration among partner organizations, and delivering training to stakeholders. Each of these activities was intended to advance one or more of the goals outlined in the statewide suicide prevention plan.

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## Exhibit 6

### Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan Prevention Goals 2023-2027

**Goal 1:** Address upstream factors that impact suicide.

**Goal 2:** Implement a broad-based public health response to suicide.

**Goal 3:** Reduce access to lethal means.

**Goal 4:** Enhance Alaska’s crisis continuum of care.

**Goal 5:** Address special considerations for Alaskan youth, seniors and elders, veterans and military families.

**Goal 6:** Improve the quality of data and research for suicide prevention efforts.

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*Source:* 2023–2027 Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan.

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## Exhibit 7

### Statewide Suicide Prevention Council Activities July 2022 through February 2026

#### Support Services:

- Supported and advocated for funding coalitions across the state in urban and rural communities. Participated in meetings with numerous coalitions to collaborate on suicide prevention efforts.
- Created and/or supported numerous public service campaigns, including a lethal means safety radio campaign, the distribution of gun locks with lethal means safety documents in partnership with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHTA), a 988 television campaign in partnership with the Division of Behavioral Health (DBH), and a multi-platform Public Service Announcement campaign aimed at Alaska Native youth and elders, which included radio, television, and social media materials.
- Supported the work of the five-year grant from the National Institute of Mental Health through its completion in 2024. The grant created the Alaska Native Collaborative Hub for Resilience Research, which helped Alaska Native communities share knowledge, guide research, and identify culturally relevant suicide prevention strategies in rural Alaska.
- Provided funding to DEED to continue the suicide awareness, prevention, and postvention (SAPP) program, a grant program for school-based suicide prevention, which provided direct services for at-risk youth in numerous communities across the state.

#### Outreach and Collaboration:

- Created and/or supported numerous public service campaigns, as listed above.
- Released its statutorily required 2023-2027 Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan on March 1, 2023.
- Partnered with the Alaska Mental Health Board (AMHB), Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (ABADA), DBH, and AMHTA to host a two-day, hybrid, in-person/virtual suicide prevention conference for all Alaskans in 2023 and 2024.
- Partnered with AMHB, ABADA, DBH, and AMHTA to host a one-day, in-person Youth Suicide Prevention Summit in 2023, and a two-day, hybrid, in-person/virtual Youth Suicide Prevention Conference for all Alaskans in 2025.
- Helped develop 988 magnets, stickers, brochures, and other materials to distribute to Alaskans at various conferences, summits, and community gatherings across Alaska.
- Made educational presentations at the School Counselors Association Conference, School Health and Wellness Initiative Conference, Garrett Lee Smith Grantee Conference, and the American Association of Suicidology national conference.
- Partnered each year with the Alaska Community Foundation and the Alaska Children's Trust to continue the GCI Suicide Prevention Grant Program, which provides \$100,000 annually in grants to increase suicide prevention services across the state.
- Partnered with the Office of Substance Misuse and Addiction Prevention, ABADA, AMHB, and the nonprofit "My House" in 2024 to build 500 Narcan kits to be distributed in Wasilla.
- Supported and worked with the Careline to promote 988, which included helping secure funding to bolster staff due to increased public demand by Alaskans. Careline calls increased from 16,734 in fiscal year 2022 to 43,769 calls in fiscal year 2025.

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**Statewide Suicide Prevention Council Activities  
July 2022 through February 2026  
(Continued)**

- Partnered with the Alaska chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention to host and promote suicide prevention awareness walks/runs across the state each year in several communities.

**Trainings:**

- Partnered with DBH to provide trainings each year for Connect Training suicide prevention as well as postvention classes in communities throughout the state, designed by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) – New Hampshire, which hundreds of Alaskans received.
- Partnered with the Alaska Training Cooperative at the University of Alaska Anchorage and DBH to provide various trainings throughout the state, some of which included Mental Health First Aid, Youth Mental Health First Aid, Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training, SafeTALK, and others.
- SAPP grantees received training in Connect Training, designed by NAMI – New Hampshire at its 2024 annual grantee meeting, and PC CARES lethal means safety training at the 2025 meeting.
- Partnered with DEED to create, revise, and update the five suicide prevention eLearning modules developed for educators. The council purchased 500 public seats each year through the SAPP grant program to provide all Alaskans with access to the eLearning system.
- Provided reporting on suicide training to Alaska Public Media producers and reporters in 2024 to promote safe messaging in covering deaths by suicide.
- Partnered with the Alaska Commission on Aging and the Alaska Training Cooperative to provide older Alaskans and their providers with trainings in Mental Health First Aid for Older Adults.

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*Source:* Compiled by council staff. Formatted by Division of Legislative Audit staff.

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## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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The prior 2018 sunset audit made two recommendations:

- The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council's (council) executive director should develop and implement procedures to ensure public notices for meetings are published timely and accurately.
- The council chair should develop and implement written procedures to ensure performance evaluations are completed annually for the council's executive director.

The prior audit recommendation to develop and implement procedures to ensure public notices for meetings are published timely and accurately was resolved. All 12 of the council meetings reviewed as part of this audit were properly noticed to the public.

The prior audit recommendation to develop and implement written procedures to ensure performance evaluations are completed annually was partially resolved. The council established written procedures concerning the evaluation of the executive director, but one out of three evaluations due during the audit period was not completed. The unresolved portion of the prior recommendation is reiterated as Recommendation 4.

This sunset audit makes three new recommendations.

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## **Recommendation 1:**

**The council's chair should work with the Division of Behavioral Health's (DBH) director to address difficulties with recording meeting minutes or amend the existing transcription contract to properly include the council within the scope of work.**

Council meeting minutes were not prepared for four out of 12 meetings held during the audit period. According to council staff, minutes for the four meetings were not available due to technical difficulties recording the meetings. The lack of meeting minutes prevented auditors from concluding whether council meetings were conducted effectively.

Council Bylaws Article V, Section 2 identifies that the duties of council staff include the recording, or arranging for the recording, of the minutes of all council and committee meetings, and preparing and distributing meeting minutes. Rather than utilize council staff to ensure meeting minutes were prepared, in January 2025 the council began utilizing a transcription service contractor that also prepared meeting minutes for the Alaska Mental Health Board and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse. While this arrangement improved the consistency of minutes, the contract with the provider was not amended to formally include the council within the scope of work.

We recommend the council's chair work with DBH's director to address difficulties with recording meeting minutes or amend the existing transcription contract to properly include the council within the scope of work.

## **Recommendation 2:**

**The council's chair should ensure annual reports are completed and properly maintained.**

Two of the four annual reports due during the audit period could not be provided to auditors. According to council staff, turnover in the executive director position resulted in one of the annual reports not being maintained. Further, one annual report was not completed because the executive director considered the release of the 2023–2027 Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan as sufficient for meeting the annual report requirement.

The audit found that the prevention plan did not satisfy the annual reporting requirements. The prevention plan is forward-looking, as defined in AS 44.29.350(5), whereas the annual report is required to include the prior year findings and recommendations.

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Per AS 44.29.360, the council must annually report its findings and recommendations to the governor, the president of the senate, and the speaker of the house by March 1. Failure to prepare or maintain required annual reports reduces transparency, and limits the ability to monitor the council's effectiveness.

We recommend the council's chair ensure annual reports are completed and properly maintained.

### **Recommendation 3:**

**The council's chair should work with DBH's director to develop and implement effective procedures for updating the council's webpage.**

The council webpage did not provide key council information including council meeting minutes, upcoming meeting dates, annual reports, and the 2023–2027 Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan. According to council personnel, website maintenance changed after the Department of Health and Social Services reorganized<sup>1</sup>. Following the transition, uploading council-related information became significantly more difficult. Staff reported that the new process was slow, unclear, and frequently failed, resulting in key information not being posted or maintained on the website.

Alaska Statute 44.29.350 states that the council shall serve in an advisory capacity to the legislature and the governor regarding actions that can and should be taken to broaden public awareness of suicide and its associated risk factors, and to develop and implement a statewide suicide prevention plan. Failing to maintain information on the council's webpage reduces transparency, impairs outreach, and limits the public's ability to learn about, or participate in, council activities.

The council's chair should work with DBH's director to develop and implement effective procedures for updating the council webpage.

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<sup>1</sup> The Department of Health and Social Services was split into two separate departments, the Department of Health and the Department of Family and Community Services, in 2023.

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#### **Recommendation 4:**

**The council's chair should coordinate with the chairs of the Alaska Mental Health Board and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse to ensure performance evaluations of the executive director are completed.**

One of three executive director evaluations that was required during the audit period was not completed. The executive director should have been evaluated in October of 2022, 2024, and 2025; however, the 2022 evaluation was not performed. Due to turnover in the position, no evaluation was required in 2023.

Alaska Statute 44.29.330(b), requires the council to annually review the performance of the executive director. A memorandum of agreement from 2013 established that the executive director would be shared among the council, the Alaska Mental Health Board, and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, and the respective chairs would jointly conduct the executive director's annual performance evaluation. The council bylaws state that the chairs will evaluate the performance of the executive director after the first six months of employment and annually on the hire date.

According to DBH management, the evaluation did not occur because the council chair could not secure full participation from the chairs of the Alaska Mental Health Board and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse. Evaluations provide important feedback. The lack of feedback may limit the executive director's ability to meet performance expectations and may impair the council's effectiveness.

We recommend the council's chair coordinate with the chairs of the Alaska Mental Health Board and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse to ensure performance evaluations of the executive director are completed.

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# OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

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In accordance with Title 24 and Title 44 of the Alaska Statutes, we have reviewed the activities of the Department of Health, Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (council) to determine if there is a demonstrated public need for its continued existence.

As required by AS 44.66.050(a), this report shall be considered by the committee of reference during the legislative oversight process in determining whether the council should be reestablished. Currently, under AS 44.66.010(a)(7), the council will terminate on June 30, 2027, and will have one year from that date to conclude its administrative operations.

## Objectives

The three central, interrelated objectives of our report are to determine:

1. If the termination date of the council should be extended.
2. If the council is operating in the public's interest.
3. The status of recommendations made in the prior sunset audit.

## Scope

The assessment of council operations and performance was based on criteria set out in AS 44.66.050(c). Criteria set out in this statute relates to the determination of a demonstrated public need for the council. We reviewed the council's activities from July 1, 2022, through February 28, 2026. Financial data is presented, unaudited, for the same period.

## Methodology

During the course of our audit, we reviewed and evaluated the following:

- The prior sunset audit report (ACN 06-20115-18) to identify issues affecting the council and to identify prior sunset audit recommendations.

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- Applicable statutes and regulations to identify council functions and responsibilities, determine whether statutory or regulatory changes enhanced or impeded council activities, and help ascertain if the council operated in the public interest.
  - Council meeting minutes to gain an understanding of council proceedings and activities, the nature and extent of public input, whether a quorum was maintained, whether council vacancies impeded operations, and compliance with statutes.
  - Council annual reports to gain an understanding of council activities and verify compliance with statutes.
  - The State's Online Public Notices System to verify council meetings were adequately noticed to the public in compliance with State law.
  - Expenditures and revenues of the council to identify costs of operations and reimbursable service agreements.
  - Budget documents for FY 23 through FY 26 published by the governor's Office of Management and Budget to identify council funding sources.
  - Various Alaska news-related websites to identify complaints against the council or other council related concerns.
  - Various websites containing information for potential duplication of council activities.
  - Council bylaws to gain an understanding of council functions and responsibilities.
  - The 2023–2027 Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan to determine compliance with statutes and to evaluate council operations.
  - The memorandum of agreement between the council, the Alaska Mental Health Board, and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, to determine the status of a prior recommendation and organization of support staff.

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- Annual performance evaluation reports to determine compliance with statutes.
  - Documents including reimbursable service agreements, website content, and activity reports related to the suicide awareness, prevention, and postvention program administered by the Department of Education and Early Development to understand objectives, intended outcomes, and expenditures.
  - The contract between the meeting-minutes provider and the Alaska Mental Health Board, and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse utilized by the council to gain an understanding of the scope of work.
  - Suicide rates for Alaska natives, non-native Alaskans, the State of Alaska, and the United States to help evaluate suicide rates in Alaska.
  - A list of council activities from July 2022 through February 2026 to evaluate operations and help ascertain if the council operated in the public interest.

To identify and evaluate council activities, we conducted interviews and/or inquired through writing with Department of Health Division of Behavioral Health staff, council staff, council members, and the council executive director. Specific topics of inquiry included council operations, suicide prevention efforts, duplication of efforts, complaints against the council, and results of grant activity under the purview of the council. Inquiries were made with the Office of the Governor, Boards and Commissions to understand council member recruitment activities and determine significant vacancies.

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## APPENDIX SUMMARY

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Appendix A provides the sunset criteria used in developing the conclusions regarding whether the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council's termination date should be extended.

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## APPENDIX A

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### **Analysis of Public Need Criteria AS 44.66.050(c)**

A determination as to whether a board or commission has demonstrated a public need for its continued existence must take into consideration the following factors:

1. the extent to which the board or commission has operated in the public interest;
2. the extent to which the operation of the board or commission has been impeded or enhanced by existing statutes, procedures, and practices that it has adopted, and any other matter, including budgetary, resource, and personnel matters;
3. the extent to which the board or commission has recommended statutory changes that are generally of benefit to the public interest;
4. the extent to which the board or commission has encouraged interested persons to report to it concerning the effect of its regulations and decisions on the effectiveness of service, economy of service, and availability of service that it has provided;
5. the extent to which the board or commission has encouraged public participation in the making of its regulations and decisions;
6. the efficiency with which public inquiries or complaints regarding the activities of the board or commission filed with it, with the department to which a board or commission is administratively assigned, or with the office of victims' rights or the office of the ombudsman have been processed and resolved;
7. the extent to which a board or commission that regulates entry into an occupation or profession has presented qualified applicants to serve the public;

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## APPENDIX A

### (Continued)

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8. the extent to which state personnel practices, including affirmative action requirements, have been complied with by the board or commission in its own activities and in the area of activity or interest;
9. the extent to which statutory, regulatory, budgetary, or other changes are necessary to enable the board or commission to better serve the interests of the public and to comply with the factors enumerated in this subsection;
10. the extent to which the board or commission has effectively attained its objectives and purposes and the efficiency with which the board or commission has operated; and
11. the extent to which the board or commission duplicates the activities of another governmental agency or the private sector.

# Agency Response from the Department of Health



THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

## Department of Health

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

**Anchorage**  
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**Juneau**  
P.O. Box 110601  
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RECEIVED

AUG 06 2026

LEGISLATIVE AUDIT

August 6, 2026

Ms. Kris Curtis, CPA, CISA  
Legislative Auditor  
Division of Legislative Audit  
P.O. Box 113300  
Juneau, AK 99811-3300

RE: Confidential Preliminary Audit Report, Department of Health (DOH), Statewide Suicide Prevention Council

Dear Ms. Curtis,

The Department of Health (department) appreciates the opportunity to evaluate and provide responses to the preliminary audit report dated July 16, 2026.

### Conclusions

Most council meetings were held virtually, which negatively impacted community engagement.

Travel guidance resulted in the council limiting in-person meetings as a cost control measure. Virtual meetings were conducted to maintain continuity of regularly scheduled council meetings and provided statewide community access to these meetings.

There was excessive turnover in the council's executive director position.

The department agrees with this conclusion. The department will assess the current organizational and supervisory structure of the Executive Director to determine whether changes could improve retention and turnover.

### Recommendation No. 1

The council chair should work with the DBH director to obtain assistance to address difficulties with recording meeting minutes or pursue amending the existing transcription contract to properly include the council within the scope of work.

The department agrees with this recommendation. The Division of Behavioral Health (DBH) director will assure the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC) is added to the existing Alaska Mental Health Board/Advisory Board on Alcohol and Drug Abuse meeting transcription contract scope of work.

### Recommendation No. 2

The council chair should ensure annual reports are completed and properly maintained.

The department agrees with this recommendation. The chair, with support from council staff, will ensure an annual report is completed by March 1 each year. Progress toward report completion will be reviewed during

Ms. Kris Curtis, CPA, CISA  
August 6, 2026  
Page 2 of 2

the council's winter quarterly meeting to ensure statutory reporting requirements are met.

Recommendation No. 3

The council chair should work with DBH's director to develop and implement effective procedures for updating the council's webpage.

The department partially agrees with this recommendation. The department acknowledges the need for additional training and communication regarding the new procedures to ensure information can be consistently maintained and updated. The department will work with the council chair to ensure key information is available to council members and the public. The information and materials provided by the council, including council roster, council meeting minutes, upcoming meeting dates, annual reports, and the five-year SSPC Plan, will be submitted using the department's standardized process for requests for website updates, ensuring they meet current standards for quality and accessibility.

Recommendation No. 4

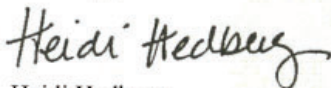
The council chair should coordinate with the chairs of the Alaska Mental Health Board and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse to ensure performance evaluations of the executive director are completed.

The department partially agrees with this recommendation. The department agrees Executive Director evaluations should be completed but recommends amending the organizational structure of the Executive Director position. The current statutory requirement that the Executive Director report to all three boards has contributed to high turnover and a missed evaluation as noted in the audit. Because these reporting relationships are established in statute, changing the organizational structure requires a statutory amendment.

Board chairs do not have access to the State's evaluation system, are not subject to State personnel rules, and do not oversee the Executive Director's financial management of the council. Volunteer board members are not state employees and therefore cannot carry out supervisory duties under state personnel rules. For these reasons, a statutory amendment to have the Executive Director formally report to the department, with each board providing meaningful input into the evaluation process, should be considered. This structure would ensure appropriate supervisory authority, timely and comprehensive evaluations, and greater stability in the role while maintaining the board's important advisory functions.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to address these issues and to provide additional insight into them. Please contact Terra Serpette at 907-465-6333 if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Heidi Hedberg  
Commissioner

cc: Pam Halloran, Assistant Commissioner  
Leah Van Kirk, Deputy Director, Commissioner's Office  
Jenn Carson, Division Director, Division of Behavioral Health  
Monique Andrews, Chair, Statewide Suicide Prevention Council  
Terra Serpette, Division Operations Manager, Finance and Management Services

# Agency Response from the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council



THE STATE  
of ALASKA  
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

## Department of Health

STATEWIDE SUICIDE PREVENTION COUNCIL

431 North Franklin Street, Suite 200  
Juneau, Alaska 99801  
Main: 907-465-8920  
Fax: 907-465-4410

August 4, 2026

Ms. Kris Curtis, CPA, CISA  
Legislative Auditor  
Division of Legislative Audit  
P.O. Box 113300  
Juneau, Alaska 99811-3300

Please accept the following as the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council's response to the confidential preliminary audit report issued May 8, 2026.

### In response to the Report Conclusions:

We appreciate the comprehensive audit completed of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (Council) and for recognizing that suicide continues to be a serious public health issue that affects all Alaskans and must continue to be addressed by the State of Alaska. The Council also appreciates the recommendation to extend the termination date to June 30, 2033.

### **Most council meetings were held virtually, which negatively impacted community engagement.**

The Council agrees with this conclusion. The Council has more community engagement with the public during in-person meetings, as evidenced by lack of public comment and community participation in virtual meetings. In addition, the in-person meetings were primarily focused on specific communities, including site visits to different mental health facilities, as well as presentations and engagement with local providers, organizations, and the community at large. Often in those communities we would hear about gaps in services and it was easier to identify and address those issues when all together in person to discuss solutions.

### **There was excessive turnover in the Council's Executive Director position.**

The Council agrees with this conclusion. There has been far too much turnover in the Executive Director position that leads to inconsistent organizational structure and direction.

### In response to Recommendation No. 1:

**The Council chair should work with the DBH director to obtain assistance to address difficulties with recording meeting minutes or pursue amending the existing transcription contract to properly include the council within the scope of work.**

The Council agrees with this recommendation. The Council Chair will work with the DBH Director and Council staff to ensure that Statewide Suicide Prevention Council will be added with the AMHB/ABADA's existing transcription contract scope of work.

In response to Recommendation No. 2:

**The Council Chair should ensure annual reports are completed and properly maintained.**

The Council agrees with this recommendation. The chair will work with council staff to ensure there is an annual report completed by March 1 of each calendar year. The chair will work with council staff to put an agenda item regarding the annual report at each winter quarterly meeting historically held in January.

In response to Recommendation No. 3:

**The Council Chair should work with DBH's director to develop and implement effective procedures for updating the council's webpage.**

The Council agrees with this conclusion and has found that the updated Department of Health website and the Council page is ineffective and does not serve Council members or the public. The Council Chair will work with DOH leadership to explore options to improve the website to have better communication with the public.

In response to Recommendation No. 4:

**The council chair should coordinate with the chairs of the Alaska Mental Health Board and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse to ensure performance evaluations of the Executive Director are completed.**

The Council recognizes the importance of this recommendation but is limited in its scope and practice in ensuring performance evaluations are completed. Council members are volunteers and don't have access to state evaluation systems. Therefore, the Council will work with AMHB/ABADA to provide DOH with their recommendations to be included in the Executive Director's evaluation. The Council agrees with this recommendation, but that it must be in coordination with DOH.

Thank you to the Legislative Audit team for the time and careful consideration in the audit of our Council. The process will help bolster the work of the Council and help it continue to address the serious public health issue in Alaska.

Sincerely,

*Monique Andrews, LPC, PsyD*

Monique Andrews  
Chairperson  
Statewide Suicide Prevention Council