

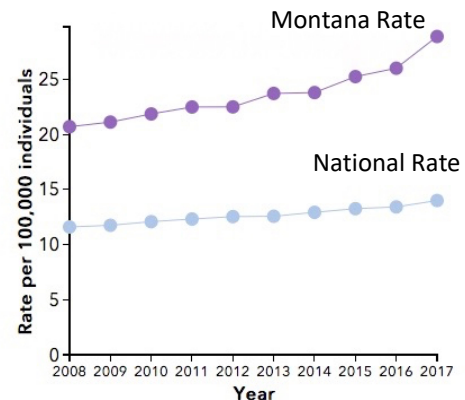
# Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM)

## Montana State University

### A School-Based Program to Support Student Well-Being & Mental Health

In 2017, Montana had the highest rate of death by suicide in the nation at 28.89 suicide deaths per 100,000 (the national rate was 14/100,000). This means that more than five times as many people died by suicide than in alcohol-related motor vehicle accidents. For Montana's youth, the reality is particularly grim as suicide is the leading cause of death for youth ages 15-24. In 2012-16 the Montana youth (ages 11-17) suicide rate was 12.6/100,000; this was almost triple the national rate for the same age group (4.5/100,000). The 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey conducted by the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) found that during the 12 months before the survey:

- 9.5% of grades 9-12 students made a suicide attempt.
- 14.8% of grades 7 & 8 students made a suicide attempt.
- 18.3% American Indian students attempted suicide one or more times.



Death by Suicide in Montana and the Nation (from <https://afsp.org/about-suicide/suicide-statistics/>)

**To address critical Montana youth mental health challenges, Montana State University brought the Youth Aware of Mental Health program to Montana schools**

#### What is Youth Aware of Mental Health?

Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM) is a classroom mental health promotion program that aims to raise mental health awareness about risk and protective factors associated with suicide, including knowledge about depression and anxiety, and enhance the skills and emotional resiliency needed to deal with stress and crisis. The adolescents learn from both a professional and from each other through a mix of cognitive, emotional, and experiential learning.

The program is taught by a YAM certified instructor and assistant in five one-hour highly interactive sessions to middle school and high school students. YAM provides an opportunity for students to delve into relative topics through active discussion and role-play. These activities allow students to find solutions to difficult situations and common stressors in a fun and nonthreatening environment.

#### YAM Program Goals

- Breaking down the stigma -- awareness and information about mental health
- Establishing self-help and coping strategies
- Recognizing stress and crisis
- Understanding depression and suicidal thoughts
- Helping a troubled friend
- Seeking help -- who to contact and resources available

#### How will my students benefit from the YAM Program? What are the risks?

The YAM program stands out among youth suicide prevention programs based on its strong foundation of research evidence.<sup>1</sup> The Saving and Empowering Young Lives in Europe (SEYLE) study was a multicenter, cluster-randomized controlled trial that studied YAM and two other interventions. The SEYLE sample consisted of 11,110 adolescent pupils, median age 15 years (IQR 14-15), recruited from 168 schools in ten European Union countries.<sup>2</sup> At the 12-month follow-up, YAM was associated with a significant reduction of incidents suicide attempts and severe suicidal ideation compared with the control group. Dr. John Mann, a leading suicide

<sup>1</sup> Brent, David A., and C. Hendricks Brown. "Effectiveness of school-based suicide prevention programmes." *The Lancet* 385.9977 (2015): 1489-1491.

<sup>2</sup> Wasserman, Danuta, et al. "School-based suicide prevention programmes: the SEYLE cluster-randomised, controlled trial." *The Lancet* 385.9977 (2015): 1536-1544.

<sup>3</sup> Mann, J John, Michel, Christina A., and Auerbach, Randy P. "Improving Suicide Prevention Through Evidence-Based Strategies: A Systematic Review." *The American Journal of Psychiatry* (2021): Appiajp202020060864. Web.

prevention specialist from Columbia University, highlighted YAM as an evidence-based program that should be implemented in schools in his latest systemic review on suicide prevention.<sup>3</sup> Even if a student is not a risk for suicide, the YAM program aids youth in learning to help friends and peers who may be struggling with suicidal thoughts and depression.

In previous studies of YAM, no major risks were posed to the youth participants. If a student were to have a problem while participating in YAM, our certified instructors and assistants are trained to respond appropriately. Instructors will work with school counseling personnel or administration to ensure the students' needs are met when participating in the program.

### How do I get more information about bringing YAM to our school?

Please contact:

Kelley Edwards  
YAM Program Manager  
406-994-1606  
[Kelley.edwards@montana.edu](mailto:Kelley.edwards@montana.edu)

Or visit:

<http://www.y-a-m.org>

### YAM by the Numbers in Montana

**Over 9,000 students**  
have participated since  
2016

**88% of youth surveyed**  
said their schools  
should teach mental  
health

**Grown from 3 to 30**  
schools in 4 years

**4 YAM-certified Trainers**  
and **44 YAM-certified**  
Facilitators

