

Submitter: Rachel Levy

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care

Measure: SB704

My name is Rachel Levy and I am a social worker, and I work for the state 988 call center. I know that today there was a hearing in favor of both a single-payer health care measure in Oregon and a suicide prevention measure. That is fitting, because the two issues go hand in hand. Universal single-payer health care IS suicide prevention.

The reasons that people consider, attempt or complete suicide are numerous and complicated. However, one risk factor I have heard over and over in my years working in crisis support is lack of access to health care coverage. Losing health care coverage, being unable to afford needed health care, massive medical debt, having to stop seeing a trusted provider or go off needed medication due to insurance issues - all of these are reasons that callers have given for having thoughts of suicide.

It absolutely is important for Oregon to fully fund suicide prevention and postvention services, including the 988 crisis line. However, most people who call us in crisis need additional care and services. There is only so much emotional support we can give to someone who cannot afford needed health care or someone who is losing their home because of massive medical debt. This should never, ever happen to anyone. Crisis services are not enough. We need to provide health care coverage to everyone, and no one should have to worry about losing their health care coverage, or not having needed services covered due to insurance issues.

Many of my colleagues have said that our most difficult and demoralizing calls are those from people who need way more help than we can provide on a crisis line but are unable to access this care and help they need to insurance and health care coverage issues. It is a really helpless and powerless feeling for crisis workers, and it's even worse for the callers who are not getting the care they need. It is no surprise that some people feel so desperate that they consider suicide.

I am all for 988 being fully funded and I am all for care professionals receiving needed training in suicide assessment and prevention. That is only part of the solution, however. Single payer, universal health care coverage is also vital to prevent suicide.

The U.S. has one of the highest rates of suicide in the world. There are many complex reasons for this, but there is clear evidence that our lack of universal health care coverage is a major factor in our high suicide rates. As more and more people are pointing out, health care coverage IS suicide prevention. Thank you.