



9th Annual

With Help There is Hope Conference

“Hidden in Plain Sight”

September 30, 2026

Bismarck, ND and Virtually



Welcome and Thank you

Our warmest welcome to you at the ninth annual "With Help There Is Hope" conference.

Our theme this year, "Hidden in Plain Sight," calls our attention to the quiet struggles, the overlooked signs, and the critical opportunities for connection that exist all around us every day.

In the field of suicide prevention, we know that pain is not always loud. Often it quietly churns in the routine moments of our daily lives while we work at our jobs, learn at our schools, and live at our homes. This conference is dedicated to pulling those hidden realities into the light. Over the course of today, we will come together as advocates, clinicians, educators, loss survivors, and community members to share insights, break down stigmas, and equip one another with the tools to see what is easily missed.

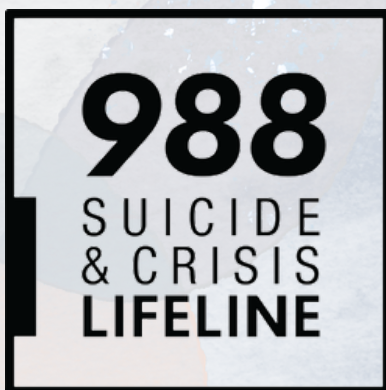
Thank you for bringing your expertise, your passion, and your lived experiences to this vital space. Your presence here ensures that those who feel invisible are seen, and those who are struggling in silence are heard. Together, we can transform awareness into action and save lives.

Welcome, and thank you for your unwavering commitment to this mission.

Sincerely,

Kora Dockter and the NDSPC Conference Planning Committee

Special Thank You To Our Sponsors:



You are Not Alone:

988 is available to you today (and every day) if you need to speak with someone



Bismarck Eagles Club #2237

Agenda

8:00 Registration

8:30 Opening Prayer - Pastor Martha Harrison
Welcome and Thank You - Kjersti Armstrong, First Lady of North Dakota and Kora Dockter, NDSPC Founder

8:45 Finding Hope Through Data (.25)
Kodi Pinks, ND DHHS Epidemiologist

9:00 Hidden in Plain Sight: How Addressing Isolation and Loneliness Through Social Health Can Build Stronger Communities and Reduce Death by Suicide (1.25)
Crystal Bettenhausen-Bubulka, LCSW, MSG

10:15 Break

10:30 Wanna Bet? (.5)
Katie Cashman Fitzsimmons, Director of Student Affairs, ND University System

11:00 Fatherhood: Challenging Stereotypes (1)
Dan Cramer, PhD, LP, Chief Clinical Officer, Behavioral Health Clinics

12:00 Lunch and Vendor Visiting

12:45 From Pain to Possibility (.5)
Tara Feil, PhD, Psychologist

1:15 Mental Health Across Professions: An Expert Panel (1.5)
Tara Feil, PhD, Clinical Psychologist; Dave Erickson, Hettinger High School Principal; Scott Van Dyke, Occupational Therapist; Katie Houle, Clinical Administrator ND System of Care. Moderated by Sarah Kemp Tabbut

2:45 Break

3:00 Beyond Stabilization: Social Supports, Care Continuity, and Follow-Up (.5)
Jeremy Brown, Director of Operations, FirstLink

3:30 Social Health & Community Wellness Workshop (1)
Crystal Bettenhausen-Bubulka, LCSW, MSG

4:30 Closing/Evaluations

Sessions

Finding Hope Through Data

Kodi Pinks

Description:

This presentation uses North Dakota Violent Death Reporting System (NDVDRS) data to examine the frequency and rate of suicide deaths across the state. This brief presentation highlights demographic patterns by age, sex, and race to identify populations experiencing a disproportionate burden. It also connects statistical trends to underlying factors - including mental health conditions, life stressors, and common risks or triggers - to deepen understanding and inform prevention. By translating data into actionable insight, the presentation emphasizes opportunities for targeted support, stronger prevention strategies, and hope for North Dakota communities.

After completion of this session, participants will be able to:

- Quantify the frequency and rate of ND suicide deaths using NDVDRS data.
- Examine demographic breakdowns—including age, sex, and race—to see which populations experience.
- Connect statistical trends to underlying drivers like mental health conditions, life stressors, and common risks/triggers.

Hidden in Plain Sight: How Addressing Isolation and Loneliness Through Social Health Can Build Stronger Communities and Reduce Death by Suicide

Crystal Bettenhausen-Bubulka, LCSW, MSG

Description:

Social isolation and loneliness now stand as an urgent public health crisis. The World Health Organization recognizes them as a global health threat, and the former Surgeon General of the United States, Dr. Vivek Murthy, declared an epidemic of loneliness and isolation. Crystal Bettenhausen-Bubulka, LCSW, MSG, draws on her clinical practice, her role as a clinical supervisor, and her doctoral research to share how integrating social health awareness and psychoeducation can support suicide prevention, and postvention. Bettenhausen-Bubulka serves as a Social Health Ambassador with the Foundation for Social Connection and contributed to the WHO Commission on Social Connection sharing lived-experience, which will be shared as a tool for understanding the global impact. She will also explain how evidence-based measurement scales have improved individual therapy outcomes in clinical practice and strengthened community initiatives. This session spans every generation, with a focus on communities at the heart of North Dakota: rural and agricultural families, active duty service members, National Guard and Reserve members, veterans, first responders, and veterinarians, where a culture of self-reliance can mask withdrawal. Participants learn to recognize the warning signs and leave with the Crisis Response Plan and community strategies that reduce isolation.

After completion of this session, participants will be able to:

- Explain how social health functions as a determinant of mental health, physical health, and suicide risk, and connect evidence-based suicide prevention practices and postvention practices to social health across every generation to social health across every generation.
- Recognize social withdrawal as a key indicator of suicide risk within North Dakota's rural, agricultural, military, veteran, first responder, and veterinary communities, and describe how the Crisis Response Plan supports a person at risk.
- Identify how evidence-based measurement scales support individual treatment and community initiatives, and name at least two ways organizations and communities can shift the conditions that drive isolation.

Wanna Bet?

Katie Cashman Fitzsimmons

Description:

Many addictions are visible to others, but online gambling is hidden in plain sight. E-tabs and other forms of in-person gambling are proliferating around North Dakota even when the cost of groceries and gasoline have risen to new heights. Online sports betting, prediction markets, crypto trading, and other app-based gambling activities are quickly expanding and in doing so, leaving many bettors drained financially and emotionally. This presentation aims to educate about the consequences of online gambling, beyond its financial impacts, and how it connects to elevated suicide risks.

Sessions

Wanna Bet? continued

After completion of this session, participants will be able to:

- Explain how online gambling attracts new bettors and the overall odds of such activities.
- Identify how to tell if someone you know is struggling with an addiction to online gambling and what you can do to help them.
- Describe how suicide prevention is a crucial concern for those who participate in risky behaviors with online gambling.

Fatherhood: Challenging Stereotypes

Dr. Daniel Cramer

Description:

What does it mean to be a strong father? Too often, men receive messages that strength means being stoic, self-reliant, in control, and able to handle problems on their own. While often well-intended, these expectations can create barriers to connection, help-seeking, and healthy coping—and may contribute to the significant disparities we see in suicide among men.

Fathers have an opportunity to change that narrative, both for themselves and for the next generation. This presentation explores men's mental health through the lens of fatherhood, beginning with the importance of fathers modeling the behaviors we hope to see in our children: talking openly about difficult emotions, asking for help, developing healthy coping strategies, building meaningful relationships, and creating supportive communities with other men.

The presentation also explores practical principles for raising resilient children, fostering connection and emotional safety, talking with children about difficult topics, and helping them develop the skills to navigate adversity. Being a strong father isn't about having all the answers—it's about showing our children what healthy strength looks like.

Identify cultural expectations and stereotypes about masculinity that can create barriers to emotional expression, social connection, help-seeking, and positive mental health among men.

After completion of this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify cultural expectations and stereotypes about masculinity that can create barriers to emotional expression, social connection, help-seeking, and positive mental health among men.
- Describe key factors associated with the disproportionate impact of suicide on men and the protective role of connection, supportive relationships, healthy coping, and help-seeking.
- Explain how fathers and other positive male role models can influence children's attitudes toward emotions, mental health, coping, relationships, and asking for help through their own behavior.
- Apply practical strategies for fostering resilience in children, including strengthening connection, creating emotional safety, discussing difficult topics, modeling healthy coping, and helping children navigate adversity.

From Pain to Possibility

Dr. Tara Feil

Description:

Suicide prevention requires more than helping people get through moments of crisis. It also means helping people build the psychological resources to face pain, respond to difficult emotions skillfully, and remain connected to what is good in their lives. Drawing from suicide prevention research, resilience science, and positive psychology, this talk explores the importance of approaching rather than avoiding emotional pain, building effective coping skills, and intentionally cultivating positive experiences that strengthen resilience over time.

After completion of this session, participants will be able to:

- Explain how avoidance of painful thoughts and emotions can limit adaptive coping and resilience.
- Identify skills that help people approach, tolerate, and respond more effectively to emotional distress.
- Describe how intentionally noticing and cultivating positive experiences can build psychological resources and support resilience.

Sessions

Mental Health Across Professions: An Expert Panel (1.5)

Dr. Tara Feil; Dave Erickson; Scott Van Dyke, OT; and Katie Houle, LMSW

Description:

Mental Health Across Professions: An Expert Panel brings together diverse leaders in behavioral health to explore this year's conference theme, "Hidden in Plain Sight." Panelists will discuss social connection and belonging, stress and resilience in youth, and strategies for personal and community recovery, among others. An interactive Q&A session will follow the moderated discussion.

After completion of this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify three stressors facing North Dakota's population including overlapping risk factors for suicide.
- Recognize commonly missed signs of emotional distress and how to start the important conversation.
- Implement strategies for personal and community resilience.

Beyond Stabilization: Social Supports, Care Continuity, and Follow-Up

Jeremy Brown

Description:

The days and weeks following discharge from inpatient psychiatric or crisis stabilization care are among the highest-risk periods for suicide, yet standard discharge protocols often stop at symptom stabilization. This session focuses on three actionable, evidence-informed practices clinicians can build directly into discharge planning: identifying and mobilizing a patient's meaningful social supports, ensuring a connection to ongoing outpatient or community-based care, and initiating immediate follow-up contact within the few days after discharge. Attendees will leave with a practical framework for strengthening the discharge-to-community bridge for patients recovering from a suicide crisis or from inpatient treatment for suicidal ideation.

After completion of this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify at least three evidence-based strategies for assessing and strengthening a patient's meaningful connection to care and support prior to discharge from inpatient or crisis stabilization care.
- Describe the components of a documents, confirmed connection to ongoing care, as distinguished from a passive referral, consistent with the Joint Commission NPSG 15.01.01 and the Zero Suicide Care Transitions standard.
- Apply a structured framework for initiating immediate post-discharge follow-up contact (e.g., caring contacts offered by FirstLink) to reduce suicide risk during the highest-risk post-discharge window.

Social Health & Community Wellness Workshop

Crystal Bettenhausen-Bubulka, LCSW, MSG

Description:

Social Health & Community Wellness Workshop will introduce participants to the concept of social health and practical strategies for building connection across everyday settings: at home, in schools, at work, and in rural communities. Participants will explore the SOCIAL Framework and the SILC construct (Social Isolation, Loneliness, and Connection), which separates three related but distinct experiences: how much contact a person has, how alone a person feels, and the quality of the relationships that protect health. Participants will then apply these tools to North Dakota culture, complete a brief self-assessment, and leave with a personal Social Health Action Plan.

After completion of this session, participants will be able to:

- Describe the core components of the SOCIAL Framework and the SILC (Social Isolation, Loneliness, and Connection) construct.
- Identify at least two ways connection and disconnection show up in North Dakota communities, and apply that knowledge to their own settings.
- Complete a brief self-assessment and reflection activity and create a personal Social Health Action Plan.

Presenters/Panelists

Kodi Pinks is an Epidemiologist and Unit Director of Surveillance and Data Management in the Health Statistics and Performance Section, Division of Public Health, at the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services (NDDHHS). She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in biology, and a Master of Public Health degree in Health Promotion and Policy from the University of Missouri, Columbia. Kodi has been employed with the NDDHHS since 2014 and supervises non-infectious disease department epidemiologists. Her unit provides epidemiological support to the chronic disease, cancer, MCH, special health services, and injury programs as well as to other sections in the division. She administers and manages the North Dakota Violent Death Reporting System.

Crystal Bettenhausen-Bubulka is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, military spouse, and advocate at the intersection of mental health, social connection, and military family advocacy. Her path into this work began at 17; not in a classroom, but in the field of gerontology, where a high school experience grew into a lifelong calling into post-secondary education which spans 30 years of direct care, clinical practice, supervisory leadership, and now doctoral studies.

Crystal is the Founder and Executive Director of Strength in Service, a nonprofit providing mental health therapy, career mentorship, and social health advocacy for military spouses and military-connected families. Strength in Service is built on one core belief: community is not just a resource, it is essential to our health. Rooted in community, driven by connection. She also founded Through the Kaleidoscope Lens Therapy & Consulting, a mental health practice specializing in grief. Beyond her clinical and organizational work, Crystal has served as Region E Associate Director for NASW-CA, she is a clinical supervisor and field practicum supervisor for master level social work students. She also serves as a Social Health Ambassador with the Foundation for Social Connection. She has represented lived military experience on a World Health Organization Commission on Social Connection bringing the voices of military families into one of the most critical global conversations on public health.

Currently pursuing her Doctorate in Social Work at USC's Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work, Crystal's research focuses on licensure barriers for military spouse social workers, career mentorship for future social workers who are challenged with professional isolation, and the role of social health in reducing mental health disparities in military communities. She is a proud 2024 Pat Tillman Scholar.

Crystal is married to a Navy officer with 32 years of active-duty service. Together they have three daughters and lived across global relocations from Japan and Bahrain to Hawaii and California, navigating deployments and geographical separations along the way. She knows what it means to need community and not have it and she has been blessed with countless communities along the way. Her honors include the 2022 and 2025 Naval Base San Diego Military Spouse of the Year, the 2023 Red Cross Real Heroes Good Samaritan Award, and the 2025 Camp Pendleton/San Diego Mighty MilSpouse Award.

Crystal shares her clinical expertise, lived experience, humor, and the unshakable belief that no military family should have to do this alone and is usually accompanied by her Maltese, Commodore Hei Hei.

Katie Cashman Fitzsimmons serves as the Director of Student Affairs and Educational Pathways for the North Dakota University System in Bismarck. She works directly with the 11 state colleges and universities to further their student success and retention goals that relate to life outside of the classroom: substance misuse prevention, student mental health, sexual assault prevention, health and wellness promotion, student health insurance, accessibility services, and campus safety. Additionally, she serves on the System Office's legislative team and fulfills other community outreach initiatives. She has previously worked with a statewide advocacy group and in nonprofit development but has been tied professionally to higher education for fifteen years. In addition to her day job, Katie serves as a charity and benefit auctioneer with one of her sisters and together they have raised over \$22 million dollars for local organizations. Katie lives in Bismarck with her firefighting husband Owen and their three children.

Dr. Dan Cramer is a North Dakota licensed psychologist and Chief Clinical Officer for North Dakota's Behavioral Health Clinics. He has worked with North Dakota Health and Human Services for more than 20 years, serving in clinical and operational leadership roles at both the regional and statewide levels. In his current role, Dan provides clinical leadership for the state's eight Behavioral Health Clinics and works to strengthen access, quality, and coordination of behavioral health services across North Dakota. He also serves as a member of North Dakota's Suicide Fatality Review Commission.

Presenters/Panelists

Dr. Dan Cramer continued

Professionally, Dan is passionate about improving behavioral health systems, suicide prevention, and challenging the assumptions that can keep people—particularly men—from seeking support or talking openly about mental health.

Personally, Dan's most important—and often most humbling—leadership role is at home. He and his wife are raising six children ranging in age from 1 to 21, giving him more than two decades of firsthand experience with fatherhood—and the unusual distinction of navigating young adulthood, adolescence, elementary school, and toddlerhood at essentially the same time. His experiences as both a psychologist and a dad have shaped his interest in how fathers can challenge traditional stereotypes about masculinity, model emotional health, and show their children that strength and vulnerability are not opposites.

Dr. Tara Feil is a clinical psychologist passionate about helping people grow in resilience, well-being, and meaningful human connection. She began her career working alongside mentors at The Catholic University of America, the American Association of Suicidology, and the National Institute of Mental Health, studying the lives of suicidal individuals and their families. That work sparked a lasting interest in understanding what helps people flourish and what makes life worth living. Dr. Feil taught psychology courses at the University of Kansas, presented her research nationally and internationally, and been featured as a TEDx speaker. She regularly speaks and writes about the psychological and relational resources that help people navigate adversity and strengthen well-being.

Scott Van Dyke was born and raised in the Bismarck/Mandan community, where he currently resides alongside his lovely wife and two beautiful children. Scott has been employed with Sanford Health on the Behavioral Health Psychiatry Unit as an Occupational Therapist for the past 10 years. In his role, Scott works alongside individuals experiencing a wide range of mental health challenges, including suicidal ideation, addiction, depression, anxiety, OCD, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and personality disorders. His passion for helping others centers on assisting individuals show strengths, develop meaningful coping strategies, build daily living skills, and create healthy routines to support one's mental health and overall well-being.

Dave Erickson is beginning his 37th year of teaching at Hettinger Public School and is proud to have spent his entire teaching career serving the students and community of Hettinger. Throughout his career, Dave has taught in the areas of Special Education, Anatomy, Kinesiology and has served as the Elementary Principal for the last 5 years. In addition, he is currently teaching Health Education to Hettinger's 6th through 12th grade students, as well as serving as the Driver Education Instructor. Outside of school, Dave enjoys spending time with his wife Joey; son Kye and daughter-in-law Michelle, who reside in Mandan; and daughter Bethany and grandson Emmett, who reside in Hettinger.

Katie Houle, LMSW, is a Clinical Administrator at the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services, Behavioral Health Division. Katie oversees North Dakota's System of Care grant initiative which focuses on developing a more comprehensive children's behavioral health service continuum. Katie has a diverse background serving children, adolescents, adults, and their families within inpatient psychiatric settings, providing intensive in-home therapy, and as a mobile crisis clinician. Katie received her master's in social work from the University of Michigan School of Social Work and was a Global Social Work Scholar.

Jeremy Brown is the Director of Operations at FirstLink, where he has served since 2018 in various roles spanning community resource curation, outreach leadership, and crisis center operations. He has provided crisis intervention to help-seekers directly on the 2-1-1 Helpline and 9-8-8 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline and works closely with partners to strengthen North Dakota's crisis response network. Jeremy is a certified instructor in Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST), Adult and Youth Mental Health First Aid, and is trained to deploy the Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale risk assessment. He holds InformUSA certifications as Community Resource Specialist and Database Curator, demonstrating expertise in navigating complex human service systems to provide effective resource referrals. As a survivor of suicide loss, Jeremy blends professional expertise with lived experience to reduce stigma and empower communities to respond with confidence and compassion.