



**Riverside County  
Public Health**



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## **Suicide death of actor Robin Williams prompts call for discussion of depression**

The sudden death yesterday of acclaimed comedian and actor Robin Williams has focused attention on the need to increase awareness about mental illness and to extend help to anyone who may be battling depression.

Riverside County health officials also are calling for a renewed community dialogue about mental health and stepped-up education about recognizing signs of depression.

"Depression is an often misunderstood illness that can affect people's lives greatly," said Dr. Cameron Kaiser, public health officer for Riverside County. "Effective treatment is available, and with help no one with depression has to suffer in silence. But the first step is to reach out."

One in four adults will experience a form of mental illness in a given year. Serious mental illness, including severe depression, is a complex condition that requires professional care. It affects about

13.6 million Americans, about one in 17 people, in a given year. In 2012, there were 264 suicides in Riverside County.

Family members and friends can play an important role in helping to identify people who suffer from severe depression and may be at risk of suicide. Some of the signs include expressed feelings of hopelessness and desperation, extreme anxiety, sudden mood changes and increased drug and alcohol use.

“Stigma continues to be one of the barriers that prevents people from accessing care and treatment,” said Jerry Wengerd, director of the Department of Mental Health. “Many people with mental illness go through recovery and lead productive, happy, successful lives. One of the most important things we can do is to promote greater awareness about mental health and the resources that are available to help people.”

Williams, 63, was pronounced dead Monday after he was found unresponsive in his Northern California home. Officials believe Williams, whose struggles with depression and substance addiction were well known, likely committed suicide. His death shocked countless fans and friends who knew of Williams’ struggles but who indicated they had no idea the entertainer would take his life.

“The tragic death of someone so well-known impacts many in the community, but these are struggles that everyday people face each day,” Kaiser said.

Need help? HELPLine for confidential crisis/suicide intervention service available 24 hours: 951-686 HELP (4357)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-TALK (8255)

Or call 2-1-1 in Riverside County

The following is a list of links for services that are available from Riverside County:

[www.rivcoips.org/home/index.php/teen-suicide-prevention](http://www.rivcoips.org/home/index.php/teen-suicide-prevention)

[www.rcdmh.org](http://www.rcdmh.org)

[www.networkofcare.org](http://www.networkofcare.org)