



Ashland County Health Department

**Ashland County
2023 Suicide Death Summary Report
Prepared by: Ashland County Health Department
March 25, 2024**

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to take a deeper dive into the suicides of Ashland County citizens by looking at various demographics and data points of those who have died by suicide in 2023.

This is the second year that ACHD and partners reviewed suicide deaths. 2022 was the first year that Ashland met and completed an official report although data was provided in 2021 to the Ohio Department of Health.

Included in this report is information about the nature and makeup of the review committee, data, demographic information, and charts related to the 2023 review. A comparison of the number of deaths in previous years is included. A summary of findings rounds out the report with suggestions for the next steps toward prevention.

Ashland County is a rural county in Ohio with a population of about 52,447 at the 2020 census. The major area of population concentration is the city of Ashland which is about 20,000. The remainder of the population is distributed among various small towns and townships. Ashland County is mostly White at 96.5% making this community homogenous with a median household annual income of \$58,168 with less than 11% of people in poverty. Currently, Ashland has an unemployment rate of 4.5% which is slightly higher than the state rate of 3.7%.

This report will compare with known data from 2021 and 2022 to begin comparisons for future years. Although ODH provided the number of suicide rates from previous years (2016 and forward), we were not able to get all the demographic information at the time of this report.

Submitted by:

Vickie Taylor, Health Commissioner

Contents

Suicide Fatality Review Committee for Ashland County3
 Purpose and Objectives3
 SFR Meeting Frequency and Structure3
 Committee Members and Partner Agencies3
 Review Process and Data Collection4
SFR Data, Charts, and Findings5
 Number of Suicide Deaths and trends.....5
 AGE and SEX5
 Race and Ethnicity6
 Community Breakdown7
 Mechanism (manner of death).....7
Discussion and Implications9
Next Steps for Ashland County9
References10

Suicide Fatality Review Committee for Ashland County

Purpose and Objectives

Two major objectives were presented to the committee for the meeting which was held on March 22, 2023:

1. Review for data accuracy for submission to ODH and for report creation.
2. Determine what we can do to reduce suicide rates in Ashland County.

SFR Meeting Frequency and Structure

Due to the small numbers of suicides and overdoses in Ashland County, the Health Commissioner calls and conducts a joint review of both types of cases as provided for in Section 307.6410 of the Ohio Revised Code. Currently, this is an annual meeting but can meet more frequently should the numbers warrant more frequent meetings.

In January and February, the Health Commissioner pulls the death data report from ODH and determines which cases are classified as suicide. This list of names is given to the county coroner's office to verify and pull local reports and autopsy information.

The Vital Registrar pulls death certificates. The Deputy Registrars work on finding obituaries and other public data. The Health Commissioner uses this information to start the database spreadsheet.

Once the deaths are verified as suicide, the names are given to the rest of the committee members.

Committee Members and Partner Agencies

The committee consists of the following:

ACHD Health Commissioner

ACHD Medical Director

ACHD Director of Nursing or delegate

Chief of Police for the City of Ashland

A representative from the Ashland County Sheriff's Department

Coroner or designee

Executive Director of the Mental Health and Recovery Board

Director of Ashland County Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (since this is a combined meeting)

A representative from University Hospital (often the pharmacist)

Ashland County Prosecutor

Director of Ashland County Job and Family Services

Review Process and Data Collection

Each case was reviewed by completing the **Suicide Death Investigation Form** provided by the national CFRP (<https://ncfrp.org/resource/suicide-specific-investigation-form/>). From this form, data is pulled and put into an Excel spreadsheet for data review. Each death is given a unique identifier before the process begins and that identifier is used throughout the review process for data presentation.

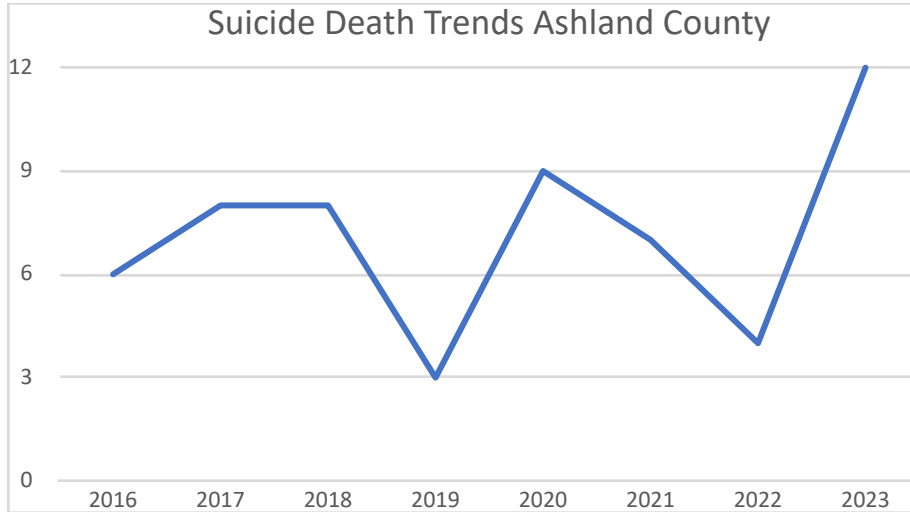
Records used for investigation include:

- Death Certificates
- Coroner's reports
- Obituaries
- Law Enforcement Reports
- Past criminal history
- Autopsy reports (if performed)
- Job and Family Services involvement
- Treatment for mental health or drug use interventions

SFR Data, Charts, and Findings

Number of Suicide Deaths and trends

Chart 1: Suicide Deaths per year (data are from ACHD Vital Statistics and ODH Suicide reports).



In 2023 Ashland County saw a sharp increase in the number of suicide deaths. The review committee could not find a single determining factor for the increase. However, as this report will highlight in the following pages, suicide deaths with the manner being gunshot is on the rise. According to the CDC (<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7248a3.htm>), firearm suicide rates increased in 2019 through 2023 and it is apparent from Ashland County that trend increased here. Some speculation is that the mental health issues, exasperated by the COVID-19 pandemic, of social isolation, relationship stressors, and substance use lead to an increase in suicides overall.

AGE and SEX

This is the first year that we have been reviewing suicide deaths and that Ashland County is reporting juvenile suicide. It is also surprising to see the oldest victim was 95.

Chart 2: Number of Suicides among Ashland County Residents by Age

Age	2023		2022		2021	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
0-18	1	8%	0	0%	0	0%
18-24	0	0%	2	50%	2	29%
25-34	1	8%	0	0%	1	14%
35-44	4	34%	1	25%	1	14%
45-54	1	8%	0	0%	0	0%
55-64	3	25%	1	25%	3	43%
65+	2	17%	0	0%	0	0%

Total	12		4		7	
--------------	-----------	--	----------	--	----------	--

2023	2022	2021
Average age 48	Average age 35.5	Average age 41
Youngest 17	Youngest 23	Youngest 19
Oldest 95	Oldest 57	Oldest 64

When reviewing the data by sex, more men than women in Ashland County die from suicide. In both 2021 and 2022 only one female fell victim to suicide while in 2023 there were 2.

Chart 3: Number of Suicides among Ashland County Residents by Sex

	2023		2022		2021	
Sex	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Males	10	83%	3	75%	6	86%
Females	2	17%	1	25%	1	14%
Total	12		4		7	

Race and Ethnicity

Race:

With the demographic of Ashland County being over 96% white/non-Hispanic, it would not be surprising that all of the deaths were categorized as such. For all three years of comparison, the race/ethnicity of the total suicides was White/non-Hispanic.

Education Levels

Chart 4 below is a summary of the education levels of each of those who have died from suicide. In all three years, the majority had at least a high school education and some college. This year showed the highest number of those who did not graduate from High School with one being in school, one Amish, and one who never completed school. Demographics for Ashland County show that about 90% of county residents are high school graduates or higher and 22% have a bachelor's degree or higher. Ashland County does have a private University.

Chart 4: Number of Suicides among Ashland County Residents by Education Level

	2023		2022		2021	
Education	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Did not Graduate from High School	3	25%	0	0%	1	14%

High School Graduate or GED	7	59%	2	50%	3	43%
Some College	1	8%	2	50%	3	43%
College Graduate or Higher	1	8%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	12		4		7	

Community Breakdown

One’s zip code can be a social determinant of health and determining factors for higher risk for certain illnesses and diseases. According to Healthy Northeast Ohio (healthyneo.org). The mental health index is a measure of social determinants and health factors correlated with self-reported with poor mental health. Both Ashland City and Loudonville have a high mental health index meaning of 72 and 64.3 on a scale of 0 (low need) to 100 (high need).

More information can be found at healthyneo.org/Ashland County.

Chart 5: Number of Suicide Deaths among Ashland County Residents by Zip Code

Zip Code/ Area	2023		2022		2021	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
44805 - Ashland City	6	50%	2	50%	6	86%
44838 - Hayesvilles	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
44840- Jeromesville	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
44842 - Loudonville	2	17%	1	25%	1	14%
44848 - Nankin	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
44859 - Nova	1	8%	0	0%	0	0%
44864 - Perrysville	2	17%	0	0%	0	0%
44866 - Polk	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
44874 - Savannah	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
44880 - Sullivan	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
44837 - Greenwich (partial AC)	1	8%	1	25%	0	0%
Total	12		4		7	

Mechanism (manner of death)

In examining the mechanism by which suicides were completed, three years saw significant use of firearms as the manner used. Interestingly, we see an increase in the number of women using firearms as a method. According to the CDC, this is a national trend over the formerly used methods of poisoning and suffocation (https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db433.htm#section_4). The increase in firearm suicides in the county has law enforcement

officials concerned. A lengthy discussion ensued regarding this topic and conclusions are yet to be determined.

Chart 6: Number of Suicide Deaths among Ashland County Residents by Mechanism.

Manner of Death	2023		2022		2021	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Gun Shot	9	75%	4	100%	5	71%
Hanging	2	17%	0	0%	2	29%
Drugs used as a cause of death	1	8%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	12		4		7	

Discussion and Implications

The extreme increase in suicide rates in Ashland County was a concern for this committee. That along with the amount of gunshots as a mechanism for suicide is of concern to Law Enforcement. Firearm suicides account for more than half of suicide deaths according to the CDC (<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/suicide.htm>). Multiple studies have linked the accessibility of firearms with suicide rates (NCBI; Brent; Cummings; Miller and Hemenway; and Yoder). Ashland is a rural county with a Republican voter base and strong rights to own firearms. In June of 2022, Senate Bill 215 took effect allowing qualifying adults in Ohio to carry a concealed handgun without the need for a concealed handgun license.

Many of the cases reviewed determined that at least one handgun or rifle was NOT locked up and access to the victims was easy and immediate.

Next Steps for Ashland County

The following suggestions were provided to develop more steps in addressing suicide in Ashland County:

- Continue with education on suicide rates and how to identify signs of depression
- Host grief recovery sessions.
- Provide information throughout the county on mental health services available within Ashland County. **
- Continue to build upon the ACEs programming started in Ashland County.
- Conduct a Public Health Campaign on the importance of storing guns properly and locked away.
- Stress the 9-8-8number access to the population.

** Note: Although Ashland County has 239 mental health providers per 100,000 people (2022 stat from Healthneo.org) often people report there is a lack of providers and the wait time for appointments is long (often months out).

References

Brent DA. Firearms and suicide. *Ann NY Acad Sci.* 2001; 932:225-39.

Brent DA, Bridge J. Firearms Availability and Suicide: Evidence, interventions, and future directions. *American Behavioral Scientist.* 2003;Vol. 46(9):1192-1210.

CDC, "Notes from the field: Firearm Suicide Rates, by Race and Ethnicity – United States, 2019-2022 (<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7248a3.htm>) Accessed 03/25/2024.

Cummings P, Koepsell TD. Does owning a firearm increase or decrease the risk of death? *JAMA.* 1998 Aug 5;280(5):471-3.

Miller M, and Hemenway D. Gun prevalence and the risk of suicide: A review. *Harvard Health Policy Review.* 2001; 2:29-37.

Miller M, and Hemenway D. The relationship between firearms and suicide: A review of the literature. *Aggression and Violent Behavior.* 1999; 4(1):59-75.

Yoder Slater G. The Missing Piece: A Sociological Autopsy of Firearm Suicide in the United States. *SLTB* 2011; 41(5):474–490.