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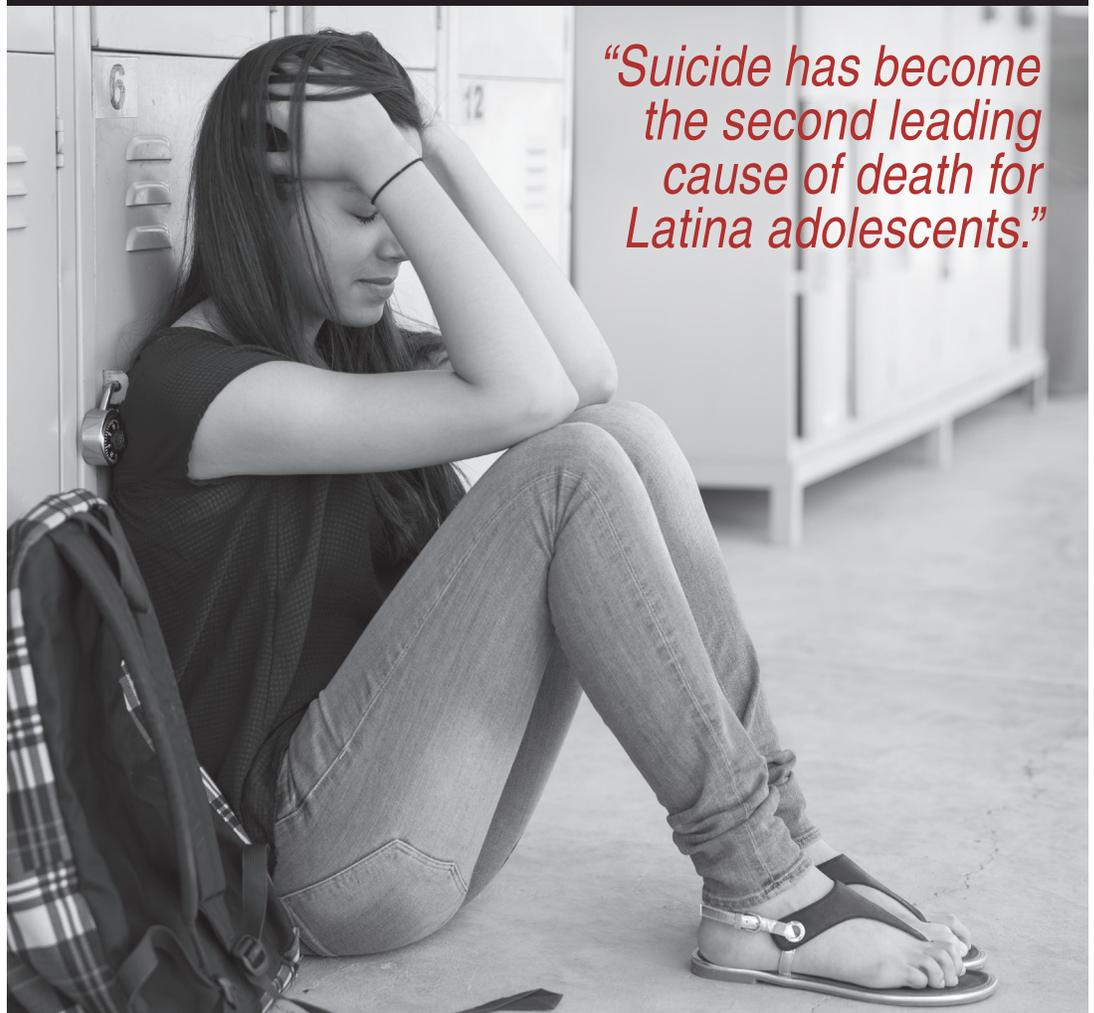
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# THE LATINA ADOLESCENT SUICIDE CRISIS IN NYS



*“Suicide has become the second leading cause of death for Latina adolescents.”*

Chairman Marcos A. Crespo • Carl E. Heastie, Speaker

# A Message from the Chairman

Spring 2017

In a world out of balance, where hunger and obesity exist side by side, this dichotomy has desensitized us to the needs of our most vulnerable citizens. This is precisely the case when we examine the alarming rates of Latina teen suicides and suicide contemplation. Suicide has become the second leading cause of death for Latina adolescents. Latina teens also attempt suicide at a higher rate than any other youth group.

A pervasive sadness and sense of hopelessness underlines their high rates of suicides and suicide attempts. Most of these young women are immigrants or U.S. born children of immigrants living in communities that lack the supporting mechanisms to integrate new Americans and their families into the complexities of our society.

The data found in this policy brief must be tempered with the reality that these facts and figures represent a real life and death situation for many young women. New York State needs to do more to address this crisis as its suicide prevention funding is dismally insufficient to combat suicide across all sectors of our society. Addressing the Latina adolescent suicide crisis will involve the allocation of proper state resources and the delivery of suicide prevention services by clinicians who are

both culturally and linguistically competent in the delivery of health care services.

To compound this problem, the current national discourse on immigration and new deportation policies by the Trump Administration are now increasing the level of hopelessness and depression in Latino communities. Experts fear that current suicide rates and suicide ideation will increase exponentially and we will lose many more of our children to suicides.

Latino members of the NYS Legislature are working on several fronts to address this problem in efforts described in this policy brief.



## Legislation Focused on Improving Children’s & Minority Mental Health

### A.3686/S.2465

**(Crespo/Hamilton)** – Directs the commissioner of education to require teachers colleges to provide a course of instruction in mental health first aid prior to graduation for these future teachers.

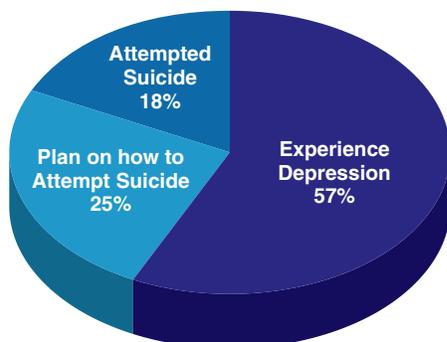
### A.4004/S.3550

**(Crespo/Hamilton)** – Relates to mandatory continuing education for teachers on mental health problems impacting school-age children.

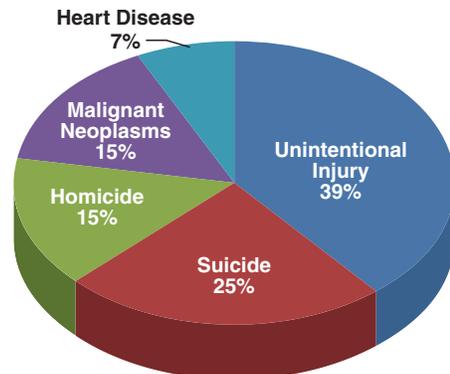
### A.6718/S.804

**(Sepúlveda/Alcantara)** – Relates to suicide prevention; provides that the office of mental health and the education department shall identify or develop materials for educators regarding suicide prevention measures and signs of depression among school-aged students; provides that related information shall be available on the Internet and may be included in schools.

### Latina Adolescent Suicide Ideation in NYS



### Top 5 Leading Causes of Death for Latinas Ages 15-19 in New York State



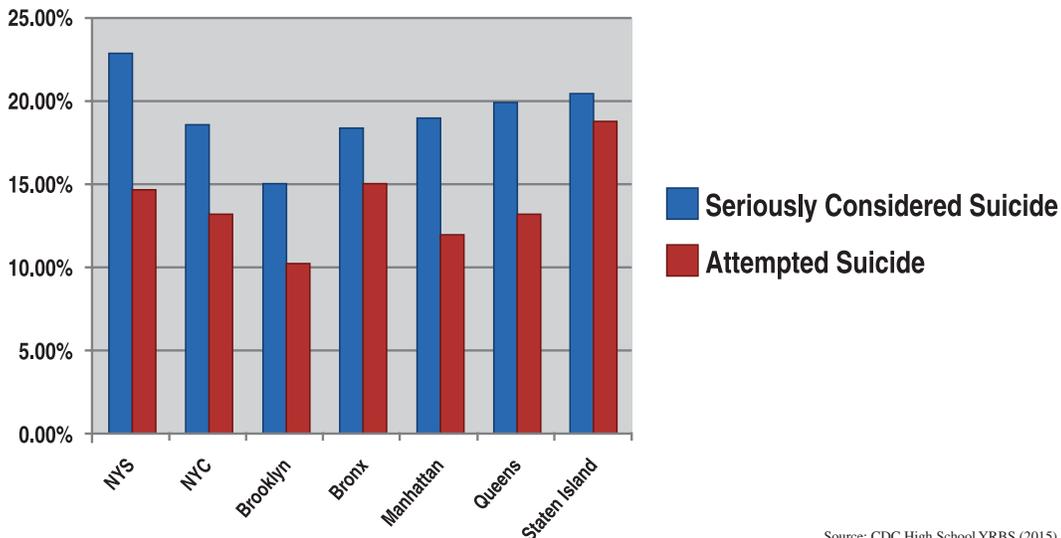
Source: NYS Office of Mental Health

**Assemblywoman De La Rosa** has drafted legislation which will **require culture awareness and competency training for all medical professionals** as part of their licensing requirements; requires biennial training in the non-discriminatory provision of medical services for physicians, physician assistants, dentists, dental hygienists, registered and licensed practical nurses, podiatrists, and optometrists; authorizes the department of education to develop the training in consultation with the department of health and other experts.

She is also preparing to introduce legislation which will enact the “minority mental health act” **to establish the division of minority mental health within the Office of Mental Health**; such division shall be responsible for assuring that mental health programs and services are culturally and linguistically appropriate to meet the needs of racial and ethnic minorities. NYS now has a population which is almost 50% minorities while NYC is over 65% minorities. Ensuring mental health services are properly designed for this new demographic reality is essential.

# The Facts: National, New York State & NYC

## Statistics for Latina Adolescents New York City & State (2015)



Source: CDC High School YRBS (2015)

1. Latina teens currently have the highest rate of suicide attempts among all adolescent groups in the U.S. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's 2015 youth high-risk behavior survey, 15 percent of Latina adolescents in the U.S. have attempted suicide. That's compared to 9.8 percent and 10.2 percent for white and black female teens, respectively. Nearly 26 percent of Latina teens considered suicide.

2. In 2015, some of the highest number of Latina suicide attempts were seen in Hawaii, Idaho, Maine and Montana. In Wyoming, data shows 21.7 percent of Latinas attempted suicide.

3. Among all genders, 35.3 percent of Latino high school students felt sad or hopeless, compared to 28.6 percent of white and 25.2 percent of black high school students. Almost 19 percent of Latino high school students seriously considered attempting suicide, compared to 17.2 percent of white and 14.5 percent of black high school students. And 11.3 percent of Latino high school students attempted suicide, compared to 8.9 percent of black and 6.8 percent of white high school students.

4. In the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey, 32.6 percent of Latino teens experienced feelings of depression for two or more weeks, 14.3 percent made a plan of how they would attempt suicide within the last 12 months and 10.2 percent attempted suicide one or more times within the past 12 months.

5. In 2015 for the entire United States, the highest U.S. suicide rate (15.1) was among Whites and the second highest rate (12.6) was among American Indians and Alaska Natives. Much lower and roughly similar rates were found among Hispanics (5.8), Asians and Pacific Islanders (6.4), and Blacks (5.6).

6. Females attempt suicide three times more often than males. As with suicide deaths, rates of attempted suicide vary considerably among demographic groups. While males are 4 times more likely

than females to die by suicide, females attempt suicide 3 times as often as males. The ratio of suicide attempts to suicide death in youth is estimated to be about 25:1, compared to about 4:1 in the elderly.

7. In New York City about 6% of adults report clinically significant emotional distress with highest rates seen in women, Hispanics, those with low incomes and chronic diseases like asthma and diabetes.

8. Over 50% of NYC suicides are committed by males age 25-54. About 30% of NYC's public high school students experience depression annually, 8.5% report a suicide attempt, 3% attempt that

required medical care. Recent trends show increases in attempts by young Latinas, younger and older Asian-American females.

9. An estimated 25.6% of Latina teens in New York State seriously consider suicide, up from 17% in 2011.

10. In New York City, Latina teens attempt suicide at more than twice the rate of white youths (13.3 percent versus 5.9 percent).

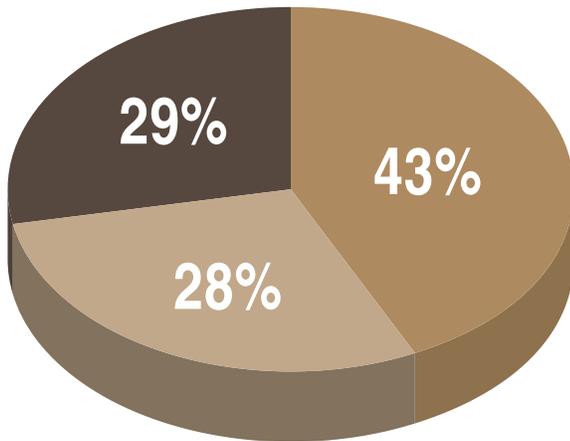
11. In New York City, the rate went up 3 percent in only two years. In Queens, that number almost doubled (20 percent) during the same period.



*"Among all genders, 35.3 percent of Latino high school students felt sad or hopeless."*

Continued...

## Female Suicide Rates Per 100 Deaths



- Latina Females
- Black Females
- White Females

Source: Publication 2016, Research from 2015  
<http://www.univision.com/univision-news/health/latina-teens-have-highest-rate-of-suicide-attempts-in-the-us>

***“Latina teens currently have the highest rate of suicide attempts among all adolescent groups in the U.S. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention”***

17. Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among Latina adolescents in NYS according to the NYS Office of Mental Health, Suicide Prevention Office.

- Rate of 2.6 per 100,000 population compared to 2.8 per 100,000 for Caucasian girls and 1.47 per 100,000 for African American girls

More information on what the New York State Office of Mental Health is doing to address this crisis can be found at:

- New York’s Suicide Prevention Initiative is sponsored by the NYS Office of Mental Health (OMH) and provides consultation, access to best practices, training and education, support for community coalitions, and school-based prevention programs to communities across the state.
- The Suicide Prevention Center of New York State, also sponsored by OMH, advances and supports state and local actions via education, training, consultation and coalition building to reduce suicides and attempts and to promote recovery of persons affected by suicide. Unfortunately, this division only has a \$600,000 budget for its state-wide work.
- New York Mental Hygiene law (§41.49) directs OMH to establish and conduct a special grant program for public or private schools and nonprofits to educate the public, and in particular parents, teachers, clergy, health and mental health professionals and adolescents, regarding identification and treatment of youth at-risk for suicide.

12. In Brooklyn and Staten Island, close to a quarter of the Hispanic teenage population contemplated suicide last year. In both boroughs, the suicide attempt rate increased 5 percent.

13. Most of these girls were U.S. born but have immigrant parents.

14. Luis H. Zayas, the Dean of the School of Social Work at the University of Texas at Austin, has spent years researching this epidemic and notes that many Latino parents are rigid about traditional gender roles and demand obedience to family needs.

15. Zayas described the disconnected relationships between mothers and daughters as a large contributing factor of Latina teen suicides. Instead of coping with stress with proactive activities and hobbies or diving into studies, these teens would get involved in wishful thinking of how they wish their parents understood where they were coming from.

16. When mothers and daughters were interviewed about their relationships, the study concluded that Latina teens who attempted suicide reported that they were not close with their mothers. Yet mothers of the Latina attempters reported that they were close with their daughters (and even their “best friends”). In contrast, for Latina non-attempters, the mothers and mothers and daughters had similar levels of understanding in their relationship.

## Sources

Suicide Statistics: [www.asfp.org](http://www.asfp.org)

<http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/latina-teenagers-suffering-silence-article-1.1889004>

<https://voicesofny.org/2014/07/suicide-haunts-latina-youth-in-nyc/>

Information taken from Office of Mental Health: NYS Suicide Prevention Office

**For more information on this or any legislative matter, contact Guillermo Martinez, Legislative & Communications Director for the Assembly Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force at 518-455-5514.**