

**NEWS RELEASE** | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | November 11, 2021

## **Human Services announces new interactive behavioral health training program for educators**

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Human Services' Behavioral Health Division is announcing a new opportunity for all North Dakota professionals working in schools to help support the behavioral health of their students with emphasis on suicide prevention.

All private, public and tribal school administrators, teachers and support staff can access Kognito, a free online simulation-based learning program that will help enhance their knowledge of identifying signs of behavioral health concerns among students, learn effective conversation strategies, and find out how to refer to appropriate resources if necessary. Users can complete the interactive evidence-based modules at their own pace and receive feedback in real-time.

"Suicide prevention efforts are vital for North Dakota as behavioral health needs of students continue to grow," said Pamela Sagness, division director. "This program will equip education professionals beyond recognizing symptoms, so they can engage and continue to support students who may be struggling."

With COVID-19 rates increasing throughout the state, the behavioral health of North Dakotans, including students, is important to prioritize. According to the 2019 North Dakota Youth Risk Behavior Survey, the percentage of high school students in the state who have seriously considered attempting suicide has increased from 12.4% in 2009 to 18.8% in 2019. Also, over half (61.2%) of high school students reported their mental health was not good on at least one day during the 30 days prior to taking the survey.

The implementation of this program is supported through the Behavioral Health in Education Resources and Opportunities Technical Assistance Center in partnership with the Behavioral Health Division and the Central Regional Education Association. It is the result of Senate Bill 2311 passed by the 2021 North Dakota Legislature.

"I had the pleasure of working with a young lady from my legislative district in the development of this bill," said Sen. Joan Heckaman, sponsor of Senate Bill 2311. "School personnel play an important role in supporting the behavioral health of students."

Legislation was also passed in 2019 that provided mental health awareness resources and suicide prevention to education professionals including designating one individual within a school to serve as a behavioral health resource coordinator.

## **New interactive behavioral health training program for educators**

Page 2

"Addressing mental health and suicide prevention by providing training for those who work with youth in public and nonpublic schools is a positive step. This program could change lives. Hopefully schools will take advantage of this training opportunity. My sincere appreciation to the Behavioral Health Division for assisting with this legislation and to Sen. Heckaman for introducing the bill," said Rep. Cindy Schreiber-Beck, vice chairman of the House Education Committee.

Individuals interested in learning more about Kognito and how to access the interactive training program can visit [www.behavioralhealth.nd.gov/education](http://www.behavioralhealth.nd.gov/education) or contact the Behavioral Health Division at 701-328-8920, toll-free 800-755-2719, 711 (TTY) or [dhsbhd@nd.gov](mailto:dhsbhd@nd.gov).

The Behavioral Health Division is responsible for reviewing and identifying service needs and activities in the state's behavioral health system to ensure health and safety and access to quality services. It establishes quality assurance standards for the licensure of substance use disorder program services and facilities and provides policy leadership in partnership with public and private entities. For more information, visit [www.behavioralhealth.nd.gov](http://www.behavioralhealth.nd.gov).

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