The “University of Wyoming (UW) Lifesavers Initiative” aims to prevent suicide and suicide attempts among UW students with mental health and substance use disorder problems through comprehensive, collaborative, and coordinated services, including education, training, outreach, and support. The target population includes:

(1) UW students in general,

(2) UW students at high risk for suicide, including veterans, athletes who have sustained concussions, and victims of sexual violence; and

(3) UW faculty and staff. Wyoming (population 579,000) is the least populated state in the nation and ranks third nationally for individuals dying by suicide (24.6/100,000).

UW is the state’s only four year institution of higher education. Student enrollment is 12,397, 67% of whom are Wyoming residents, and there are 2,883 faculty and staff. Campus demographics indicate a primarily mono-lingual English, white/Caucasian campus (70%), with 6% Hispanic, 1% African-American/Black, 0.5% Native American, and 1% Asian. In the past 5 years, the number of hospital admissions due to mental health crises, suicide attempts, suicidal ideation, or substance use has more than doubled, from 24 in 2012 to 59 in 2017. In UW’s 2017 NCHA survey, students reported: binge drinking in past two weeks (43.7%), any time in the past 12 months feeling exhausted not from exercise (66.8%), feeling overwhelmed by all they had to do (72.8%), feeling things were hopeless (35.7%), feeling very lonely (45.8%), feeling so depressed that it was difficult to function (28%), and seriously considering suicide (9.3%). The structure of the proposal will follow the Strategic Planning model by the JED Foundation which includes: identifying students at risk, increasing help-seeking behavior, promoting social connectedness, developing life skills, restricting access to potentially lethal means, providing mental health services, and following crisis management protocols. Specific strategies include: suicide and substance use screenings with high risk populations, mindfulness and self-compassion trainings, Sources of Strength suicide prevention and resiliency training, outreach programs, promotion of the National Suicide Prevention Hotline through a social marketing campaign, updating and communicating our crisis response protocol, distribution of gun locks, and a coordinated care and referral system through the Lifesavers Coalition. We expect to serve 3,500 UW students, staff, and faculty annually, and 10,500 throughout the lifetime of the grant, and we propose the following outcomes of the UW Lifesavers Initiative:
A minimum of 25 students each year of the grant will be referred to mental health or substance use services as a result of screenings.
By May 2021, the number of students reporting feeling very lonely will decrease by 5%.
By May 2021, the total number of students seriously considering or attempting suicide at UW will decrease by 1%.