

Island County Behavioral Health Impact Situation Report

This situation report presents the potential behavioral health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic for Island County to inform planning efforts. The intended audience for this report includes organizations or individuals who are responding to or helping to mitigate the behavioral health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to identify and provide localized data similar to the COVID-19 Behavioral Health Group's weekly statewide Behavioral Health Impact Situation Report. This report summarizes data from CDC Syndromic Surveillance Database, WhidbeyHealth, the United States Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey, Island County 911 Call center data, and the Island County CARES program. These analyses examine the likely current and future impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and potential for substance use issues among Island County residents.

Key Takeaways

- Psychological distress, suicide ideation, and drug overdose/alcohol related emergency department visits have increased over the previous four-week period.
- The latest U.S. Census Bureau estimates suggest that more rural Washington adults had daily feelings of anxiety when compared to the September data.
- This month Island County 911 Call center data is a new feature of this report. When compared to October 2019, October 2020 Island County 911 calls increased across all behavioral health indicators that include mental health, overdose, welfare checks, non-criminal mental health needs, and suicide threats/attempts.

Impact Assessment

This section summarizes data analyses that show the likely current and future impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and potential for substance use issues among Island County residents.

Syndromic Surveillance

Syndromic surveillance data are collected in near real-time from hospitals and clinics across Washington, and are always subject to updates. [This system](#) is the primary source of Emergency Department (ED) data for Washington. WhidbeyHealth, the public hospital district for Island County, currently does not

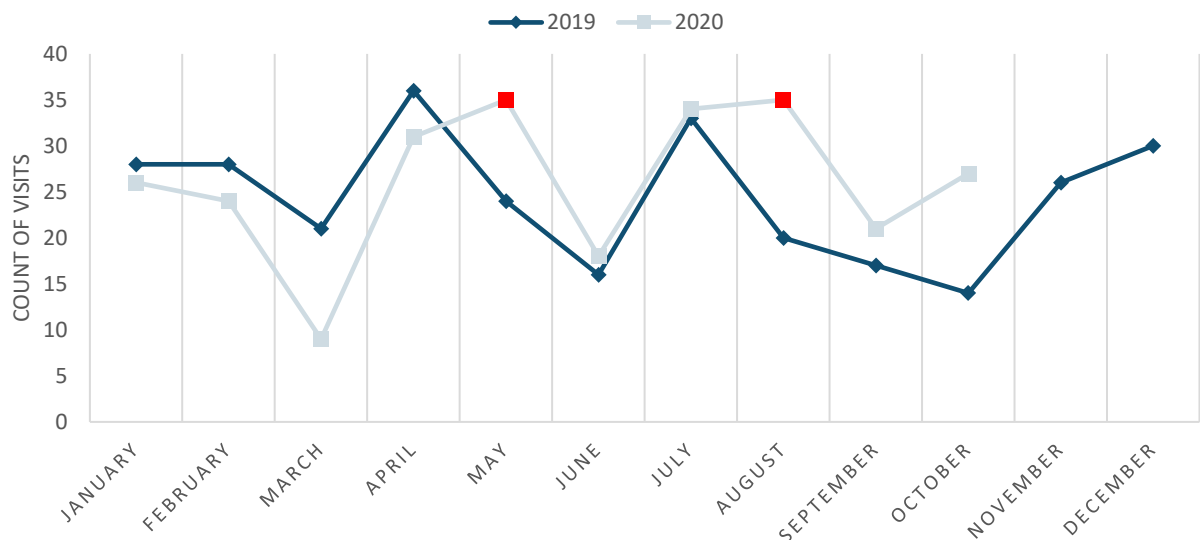
submit to the reporting system, and all Whidbey Island ED data used for this report was shared directly from WhidbeyHealth.

Across Washington State, relative to 2019, there was a 40–50% decline in volume of visits across care settings that corresponds to the “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order implemented on March 23rd, 2020. Although total ED visit counts appear to have returned to pre-pandemic levels, the below indicators are presented as counts of ED visits, rather than percentages of ED visits, to account for unstable denominators.

Psychological Distress¹

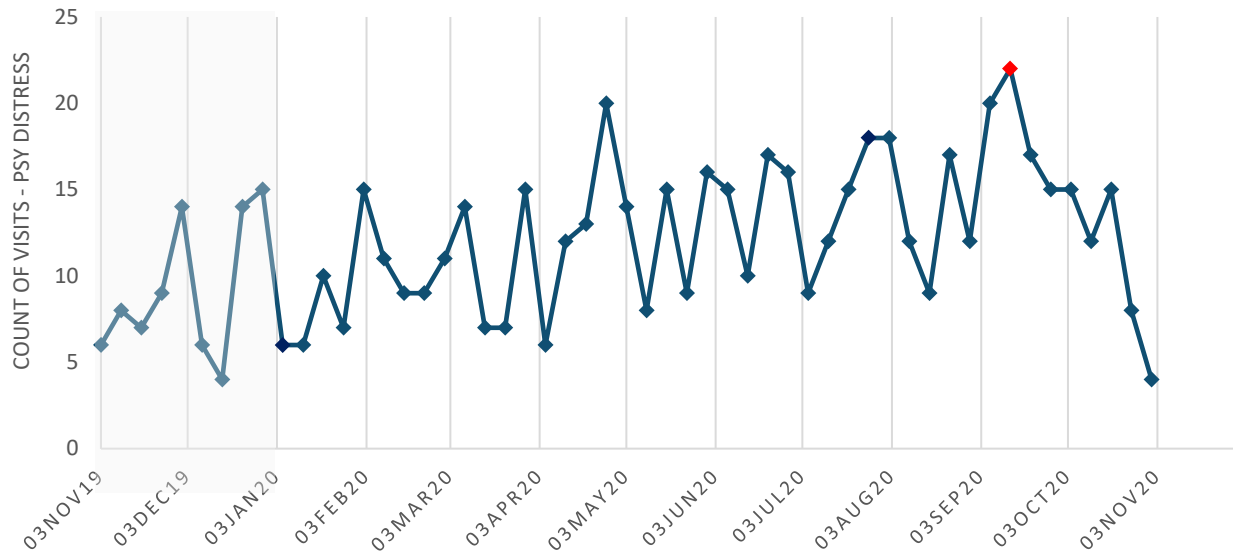
According with the WH ED Surveillance data, **October had an ED visit count for psychological distress that was higher when compared to September 2020** and significantly different from the counts from September 2019. In comparison, the CDC surveillance report showed lower counts in October 2020 when compared to September 2020 counts and continued decline throughout the month.

Graph 1: Count of emergency department visits for psychological distress on Whidbey Island: 2020 vs. 2019 (Source: WH ED Surveillance)



¹ Psychological distress in this context is considered a disaster-related syndrome comprised of panic, stress, and anxiety. It is indexed in the Electronic Surveillance System for the Early Notification of Community-based Epidemics (ESSENCE) platform as Disaster-related Mental Health v1. Full details are available at <https://knowledgerepository.syndromicsurveillance.org/disaster-related-mental-health-v1-syndrome-definition-committee>.

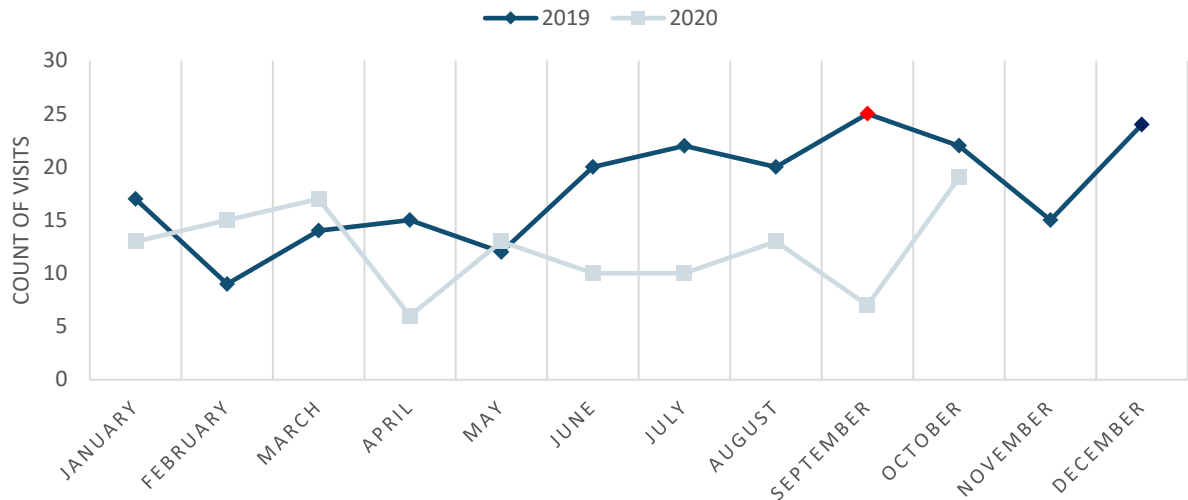
Graph 1.2: Count of emergency department visits for psychological distress for Island County residents who received service outside of Whidbey Health: 2020 vs. 2019 (Source: CDC ED Surveillance ESSENCE)



Suicidal Ideation and Suicide Attempts

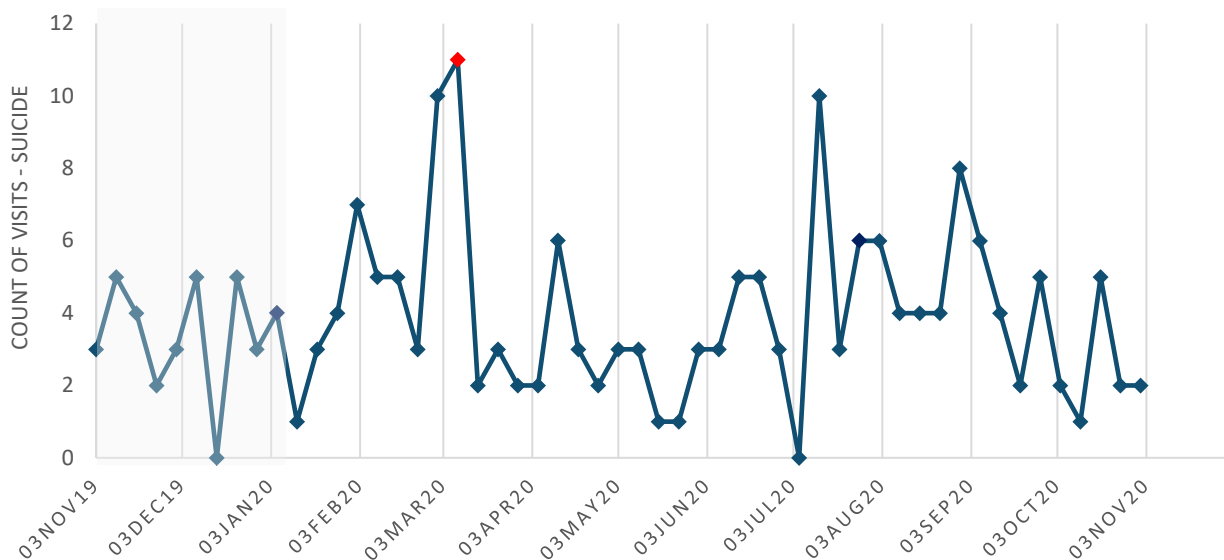
October counts indicate a continued trend of increased ED visits for suicidal ideation. According to the Whidbey Island ED visit counts for suicidal ideation and attempts, in October, the emergency department saw the highest count for 2020. ED visits for suicidal ideation and attempts are still lower than 2019 counts. Again, across Washington State, relative to 2019, there was a 40–50% decline in volume of visits across care settings that corresponds to the “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order implemented on March 23rd, 2020. Although it is difficult to determine with certainty if 2020 suicide ideation and suicide attempt counts are lower than 2019 because of this decline in visits, it is reasonable to surmise this is the case based on the increase in suicide attempt and ideation calls from local 911 call data.

Graph 2: Count of emergency department visits for suicidal ideation and/or Attempt on Whidbey Island: 2020 vs. 2019 (Source: WH ED Surveillance)



In October, we see a drop in ED visits for Island County residents seen outside of Whidbey Island when compared to the September 2020 data; continuing the trend of fewer ED visits for suicide ideation seen across the State.

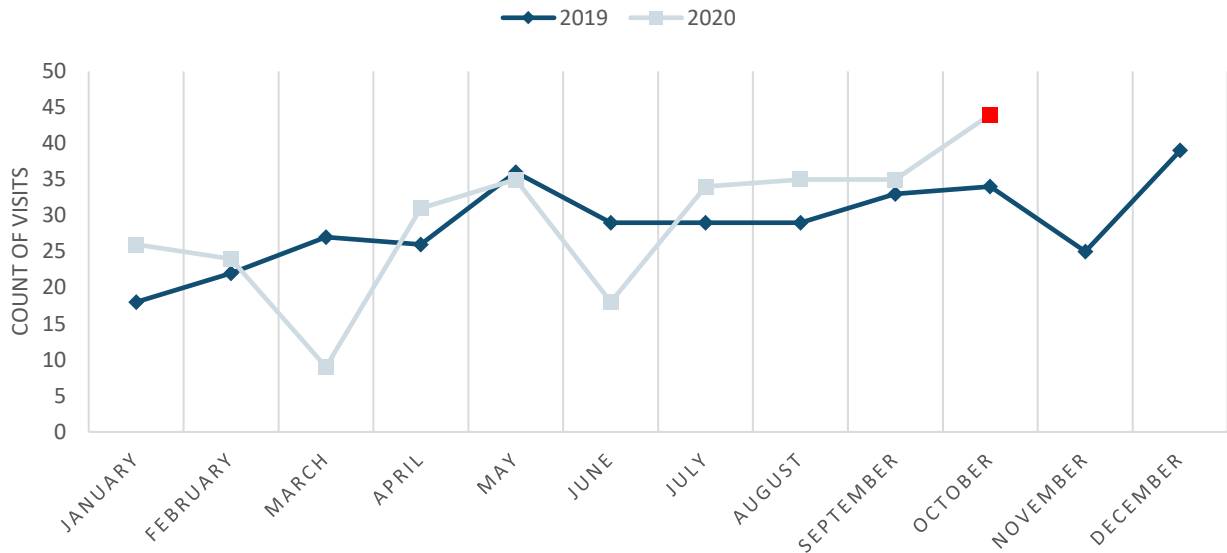
Graph 2.2: Count of emergency department visits for suicidal ideation for Island County residents who received services outside of Whidbey Island: Past 12 months (Source: Source: CDC ED Surveillance ESSENCE)



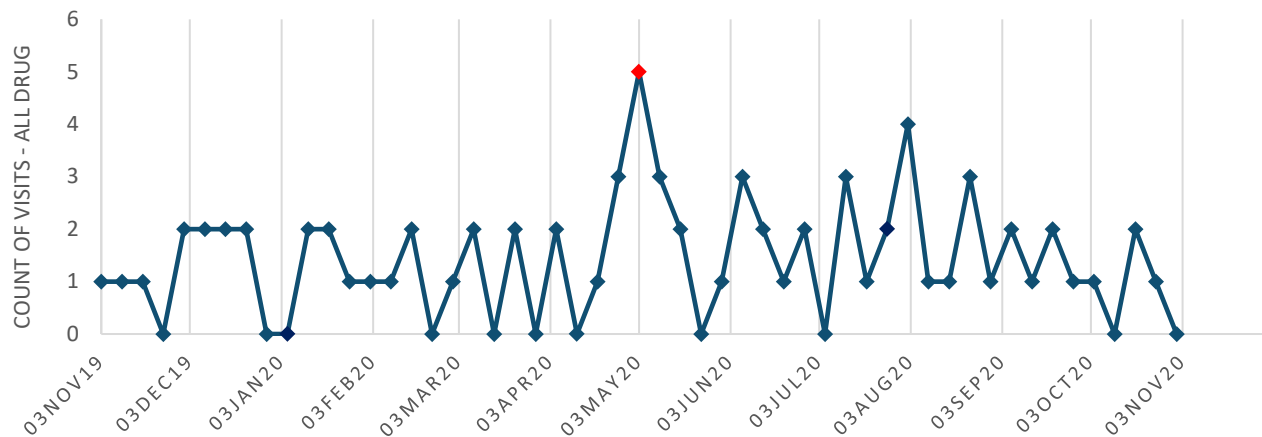
Substance Use — Drug Overdose² and Alcohol-Related Emergency Visits

As with psychological distress related ED visits on Whidbey Island, **drug overdose counts continue to be higher when compared to 2019 counts.** In October 2020, we saw a decrease in counts of ED visits for alcohol and for overdose of any drug for Island County residents seen in an ED outside of Whidbey.

Graph 3: Count of emergency department visits for alcohol and for overdose by any drug Whidbey Island: 2020 vs. 2019 (Source: WH ED Surveillance)



Graph 3.2: Count of emergency department visits for alcohol and for overdose by any drug for Island County residents who received service delivery outside Whidbey Island: Past 12 months (Source: Source: CDC ED Surveillance ESSENCE)

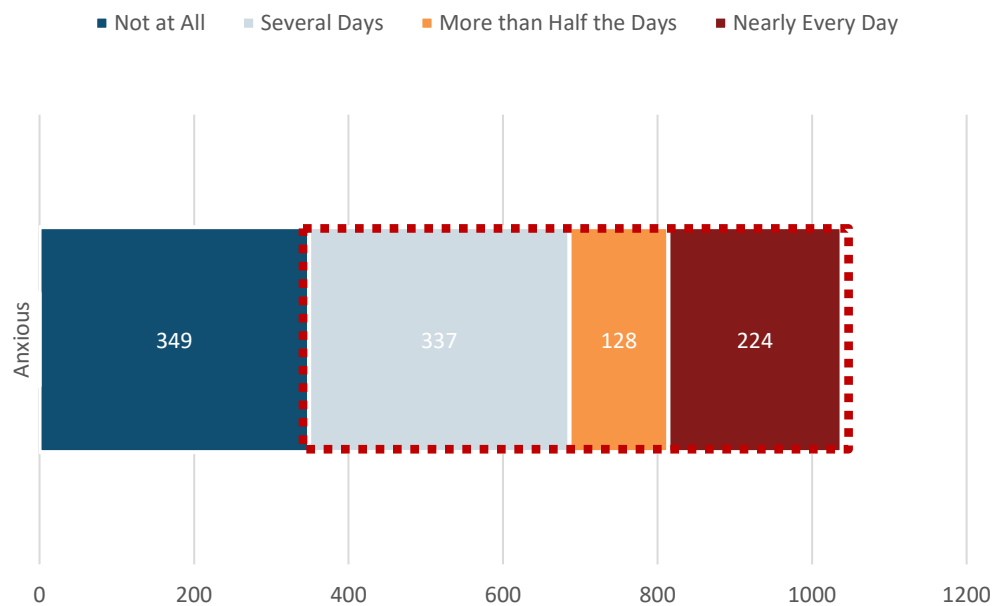


² This definition specifies overdoses for any drug, including heroin, opioid, and stimulants. It is indexed in the Electronic Surveillance System for the Early Notification of Community-Based Epidemics (ESSENCE) platform as CDC All Drug v1. Full details available at <https://knowledgerepository.syndromicsurveillance.org/cdc-all-drug-v1>.

General Surveillance — Symptoms of Anxiety and Depression

Survey data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau³ between September 30th – October 12th suggest the majority of rural Washington adults experience frequent feelings of anxiety. **Six hundred and eighty nine respondents (66%) reported experiencing symptoms of anxiety on at least several days in the first few weeks of October, with 21% reporting experiencing anxiety nearly every day.** In addition, 10% of rural Washingtonians reported “yes” when asked, “in the last 4 weeks, did you receive counseling or therapy from a mental health professional such as a psychiatrist, psychologist, psychiatric nurse, or clinical social worker?” Yet, more respondents noted they had been unable to access much needed mental health services.

Graph 4: Estimated rural Washington adults with feelings of anxiety least several days, by week: September 30th – October 12th (Source: U.S. Census Bureau)

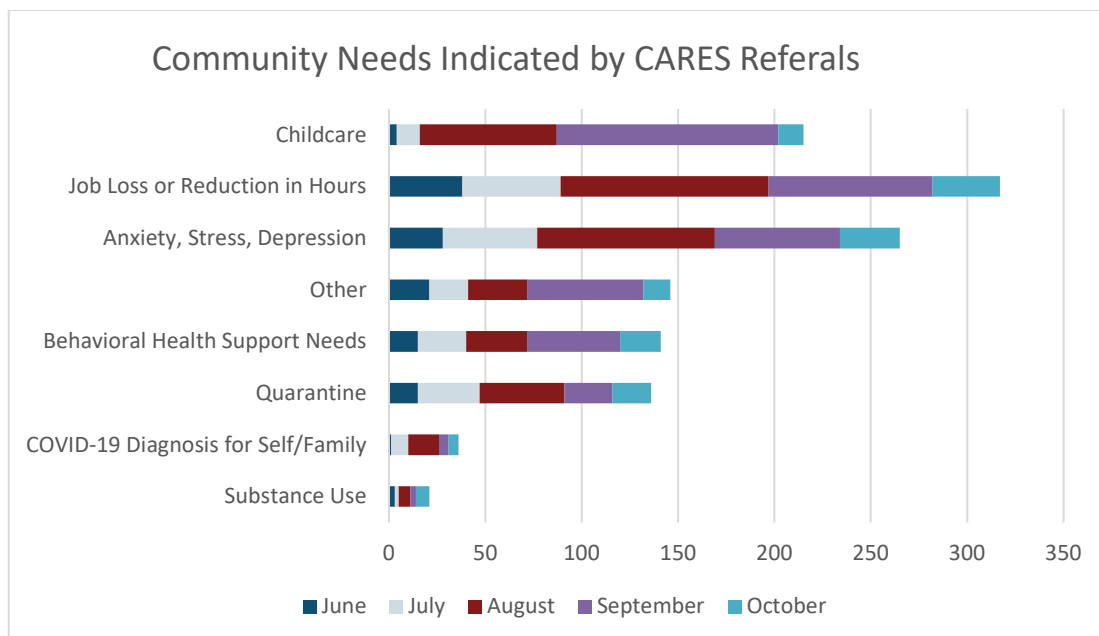


³ 5 In May, the U.S. Census Bureau began measuring the social and economic impacts during the COVID-19 pandemic with a weekly Household Pulse survey of adults across the country. Four questions ask survey respondents how often they have experienced specific symptoms associated with anxiety and depression over the past week.

Island County CARES Support Program Activity

The Island County Human Services countywide referral line launched in June 2020. Behavioral Health support specialists help Island County residents address their stress and anxiety about COVID-19 as well as provide financial assistance through CARES funds. The CARES funding was accessible through September of 2020. As of October 2, 2020 Island County Human Services staff are no longer able to provide financial assistance but continue to help residents address their behavioral health needs and provide resource navigation. This change is reflected in the decrease in the number of referrals. As of November 2, the support line has fielded 1111 referral for services with 146 of those referrals occurring in October. Service request fell within eight categories including: COVID-19 Diagnosis for Self/Family; Substance Use; Childcare; Behavioral Health Support Needs; Quarantine; Anxiety, Stress, Depression; and an “other” category. Examples of request for “other” needs include requests for financial and housing assistance. In the month of October, the majority of referrals, 24%, indicated a need for support with job loss or reduction in hours. Followed closely by requests for support with anxiety, stress, or depression with 21% of individuals requesting this service. Considered together, the data suggest that Island County residents are struggling with employment security and behavioral health needs.

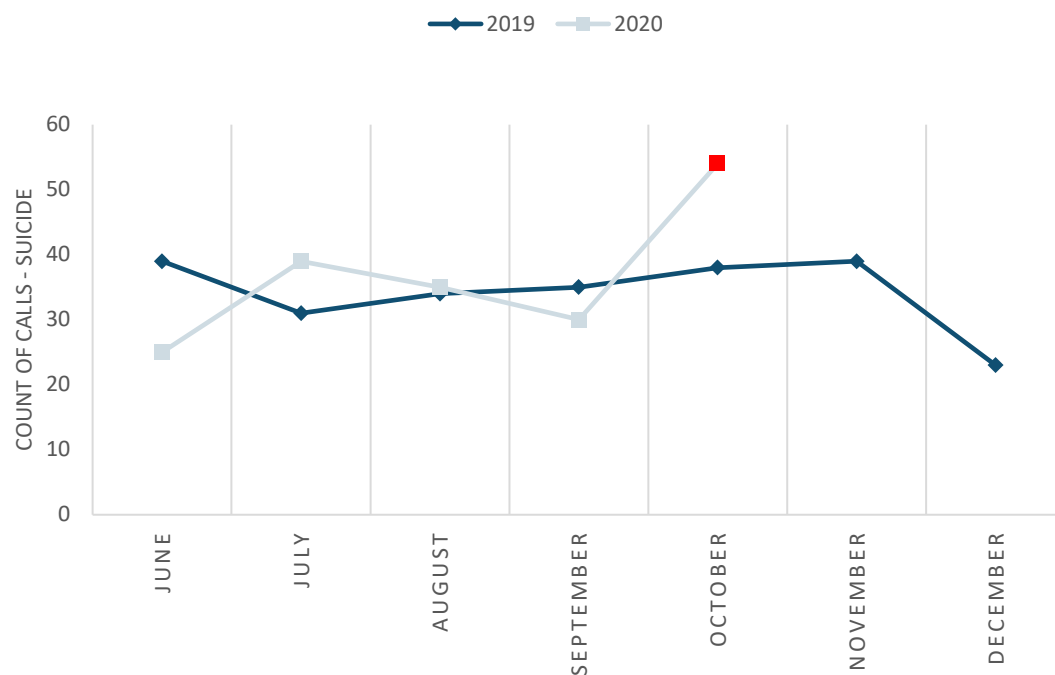
Graph 5 Referrals to the ICHS CARES Program, by month: 2020 (Source: Island County Human Services)



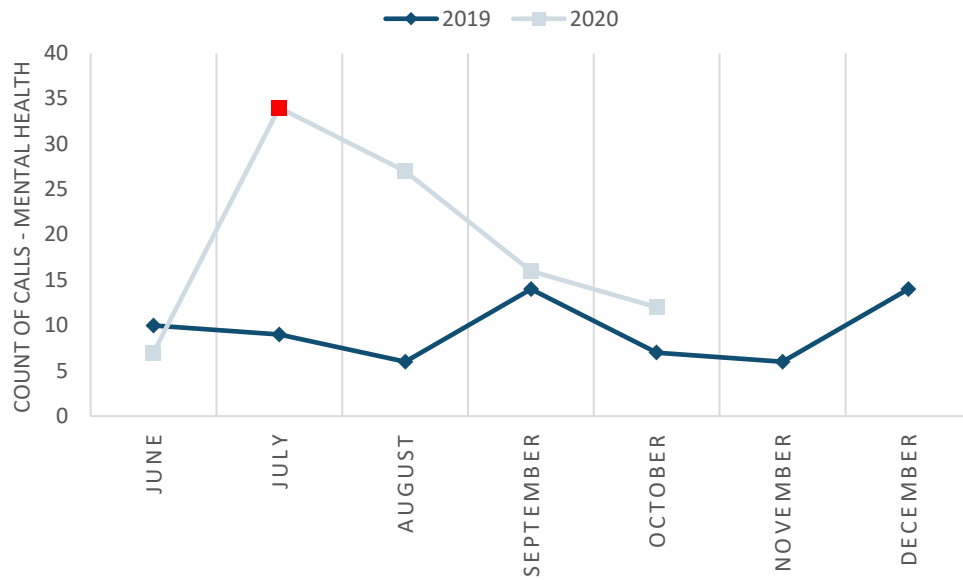
Crime – 911 Calls

Local 911 call data when comparing 2019 to 2020 show an increase in calls related to mental health, overdose, welfare checks, non-criminal mental health needs, and suicide threats/attempts. In October 2020, there were 54 calls made to city and county law enforcement agencies for Suicide Threats/Attempts, a 40% increase when compared to 2019 call data. Calls for both non-criminal Mental Health assistance and for Overdose assistance increased from October 2019 to October 2020 (Graph 6, 7, 8). This data coincides with the increase in referrals regarding mental health crises, including suicide attempts and suicide ideation from law enforcement to the Island County Embedded Behavioral Health program.

Graph 6: Year-over-year change in Suicide Threat/Attempt 911 calls, by month: 2020 vs. 2019
(Sources: ICOM)



Graph 7: Year-over-year change in Mental Health Non-Criminal 911 calls, by month: 2020 vs. 2019 (Sources: ICOM)



Graph 8: Year-over-year change in Overdose 911 calls, by month: 2020 vs. 2019 (Sources: ICOM)

