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National Task Forces Take Lead to Prevent Suicides in America

WASHINGTON, D.C. November 19, 2010—The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention (Action Alliance), a public-private partnership created in September to address the preventable public health tragedy of suicide, announced today the creation of its first three task forces. The respective task forces will identify and develop systems and strategies to improve data collection and surveillance of suicidal behaviors in the United States, prioritize research on suicide prevention, and update the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention (NSSP) (<http://www.actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org/>).

Working together, these task forces will facilitate and expedite suicide prevention efforts nationwide.

“Creating the task forces is just the first step forward for the Action Alliance,” said former U.S. Senator Gordon H. Smith, co-chair of the Action Alliance and President and CEO of the National Association of Broadcasters. “Our ultimate goal is to end suicide in America. Much work remains to achieve our goal, but with dedicated and passionate experts leading the way, we will succeed.”

Sen. Smith championed passage of the 2004 Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act, which is named in memory of his son who died by suicide in 2003.

“Launching these first three task forces soon after the initial convening of the Action Alliance demonstrates our commitment to take decisive action and make a difference,” said U.S. Army Secretary John McHugh, co-chair of the Action Alliance. “I am optimistic that we will see significant developments in the suicide prevention field coming from the Action Alliance.”

The Data and Surveillance Task Force will address many critical issues including the need for more timely data on suicides and suicide attempts, both of which would improve intervention and prevention efforts. This represents a major advancement for suicide prevention since it currently takes several years to detect new trends as they develop. Dr. Robin Ikeda, Deputy Director of the Office of Noncommunicable Diseases, Injury and Environmental Health for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, will provide leadership for the group.

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“The Research Task Force will develop a dynamic, ongoing process that capitalizes on the latest discoveries, identifies the most significant gaps in current knowledge of suicide prevention, and prioritizes the nation’s research efforts,” said Dr. Thomas Insel, Director of the National Institute of Mental Health, and Research Task Force co-lead. “We will develop a process to prioritize topics in suicide prevention research; and with my co-chair, Phillip Satow of the National Council for Suicide Prevention and The Jed Foundation, the task force will look for ways to integrate science and service which is essential if we are to bend the curve of suicide rates and ensure that suicide deaths decrease dramatically in the next decade.”

“The National Strategy Task Force will update the NSSP by engaging experts and stakeholders in a comprehensive review process and issuing revisions to the NSSP section-by-section,” stated Dr. Jerry Reed, Director of the national Suicide Prevention Resource Center and task force co-lead. This will be the first effort to revise the Strategy since its release in 2001.

Additional task forces are being formed that will include a focus on populations with increasing or high rates of suicide deaths or attempts. An announcement is expected before the end of the year.

All task forces will include leading experts in the field, including researchers, epidemiologists, advocates, family members and others who are concerned and knowledgeable about preventing suicides.

In the U.S., suicide claims over 34,000 lives annually, the equivalent of 94 suicides per day; one suicide every 15 minutes. In the past year, 8.4 million adults aged 18 or older (3.7 percent of the adult population) thought seriously about taking their own lives, 2.3 million (1.0 percent) made a suicide plan, and 1.1 million (0.5 percent) attempted suicide. Significant work is occurring in states and communities across the nation to reduce the tragedy of suicide.

About The Action Alliance

The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention, a public-private partnership, provides an operating structure to catalyze planning, execution and accountability for updating and advancing the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention. The Alliance’s work will generate advancements for practitioners, policymakers, service providers, communities, families, agencies and other partners that play a vital role in reducing suicides in America.

Creating the Action Alliance was a key recommendation of the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention, issued in 2001. The Action Alliance was launched by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates on September 10, 2010, with input and support of many public and private sector stakeholders, including the National Council for Suicide Prevention and the Department of Veterans Affairs. For more information, see <http://www.actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org>.

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