Suicide is Not Just about Mental Illness

New CDC data demonstrate that life events, isolation, and other environmental and societal conditions play just as important a role in suicide as mental illness.

A collective statement prepared by the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention—the nation's public-private partnership for suicide prevention. For media inquiries, contact Kim Torguson (ktorguson@edc.org or 202-572-3737).

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Just-released data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the June issue of Vital Signs underscore that suicide is not explained by any single cause, but instead a range of factors—beyond mental health conditions alone—including relationship, substance use, physical health, job, financial, and legal problems. The findings further reinforce the need to address suicide prevention through a robust, coordinated, multi-sector approach that combines health care system efforts with community efforts. Focusing suicide prevention efforts solely in health care settings is insufficient.

According to the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention's (Action Alliance) 2012 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention (NSSP), developed in collaboration with the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General, community-based programs, policies, and services play an integral role in suicide prevention, as suicide is not just an issue at the individual level. A combination of individual, family, community, and societal factors influence suicidal behavior. Therefore, efforts to prevent suicide are more likely to succeed if they follow a comprehensive approach—one that involves health care systems and community working together.

"Schools, workplaces, health care systems, faith communities, neighborhoods all have a role to play in reaching out and helping people who may be in distress or crisis," said Dr. Jerry Reed, Education Development Center senior vice president and Action Alliance Executive Committee member. "We need to look at whole community responses if we want to reduce the suicide rate in the U.S."

The Action Alliance recently released the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention Implementation Assessment, a report that looks at state and federal prevention efforts across the U.S. The report highlights that, while there has never been more suicide prevention activity in our nation, there is still no one state implementing a robust comprehensive suicide prevention response. We must do more to ensure states and communities are involved in suicide prevention, and the Action Alliance and its partners are committed to bringing to scale comprehensive multi-level prevention efforts at the local and national level. To further advance community-based suicide prevention, the Action Alliance and its partners recently released two resources: 1) Transforming Communities: Key Elements for the Implementation of Comprehensive Community-Based Suicide Prevention (released by the Action Alliance), and 2) Preventing Suicide: A Technical Package of Policy, Programs, and Practices (released by the CDC).

The CDC data released today further demonstrate that situational life events may play a contributing role in many suicide deaths. These situational events include a crisis in the past or upcoming two weeks, physical health problems, relationship problems, and employment challenges or financial problems. We also know that even for those individuals who do struggle with thoughts of suicide, the vast majority recover. For every one person who dies by suicide, 278 seriously consider suicide but do not die. These untold stories demonstrate that hope and help are not only possible, but are happening every day. Reaching and providing comprehensive support to individuals in crisis can save lives, even if an individual has attempted suicide in the past. Nine out of ten people who attempt suicide and survive go on to live out their lives.

"People who attempt suicide are often acutely distressed or in crisis at that particular moment, however, with the right community support in place, we can better reach those who might be feeling hopeless and alone and connect them to help." said Bob Gebbia, CEO of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and co-lead of the Action Alliance's Transforming Communities Priority Work Group. "There are clear steps anyone, anywhere can take to help someone at risk."

There are a number of initiatives nationwide that empower individuals and communities to play an increased role in helping individuals who are in crisis or dealing with challenging life circumstances.

Key resources include:
- #BeThere: The U.S Department of Defense and U.S Department of Veteran Affairs' #BeThere campaign encourages individuals to take concrete actions to support service members and veterans.
- #BeThe1To: The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline's #BeThe1To campaign empowers individuals to support anyone in their life who might be thinking about suicide.
- Faith.Hope.Life: The Action Alliance's *Faith.Hope.Life* initiative provides resources to help faith leaders and faith communities celebrate reasons for living and to support individuals in their community struggling with mental health and suicide.
- Workplace: The Action Alliance's Workplace Task Force developed the *Comprehensive Blueprint for Workplace Suicide Prevention* to help employers make suicide prevention a core component of their wellness efforts and the *Managers Guide to Suicide Postvention in the Workplace* to help employers respond after a suicide.

Through partnerships with more than 250 traditional and non-traditional partners, the Action Alliance is working to ensure that suicide prevention occurs at the community level, where people live, work, and play. As the CDC data demonstrates, community settings play an important role in preventing suicide — and everyone has a role to play in supporting those around them who are navigating life's challenges.

The CDC data released today clearly emphasize the need to address the complexity of the top ten causes of death in the U.S. comprehensively, the need to develop coordinated community-based suicide prevention strategies—as well as the important role of the public in helping to prevent suicide by helping those who might be in distress or in crisis.

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The statement was crafted by partners from public and private sectors. Private sector partners include:

- American Association of Suicidology
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
- Education Development Center, Inc.
- Entertainment Industries Council, Inc.
- Reingold
- Suicide Awareness of Voices of Education
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
- The Trevor Project

FOR MEDIA PARTNERS:

Research shows that the media may influence suicide rates by the way they report on suicide. Evidence suggests that when the media tell stories of people positively coping in suicidal moments, more suicides can be prevented. We urge all members of the media working on these stories to refer to the Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide for best practices for safely and accurately reporting on suicide (such as including the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 800-273-TALK [8255]). For stories of persons with lived experience of suicidality and finding hope, refer to www.lifelineforattemptsurvivors.org.

NATIONAL ACTION ALLIANCE FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION:

The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention is the public-private partnership working to advance the *National Strategy for Suicide Prevention* and make suicide prevention a national priority. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration provides funding to EDC to operate and manage the Secretariat for the Action Alliance, which was launched in 2010. Learn more at actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org and join the conversation on suicide prevention by following the Action Alliance on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.