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Entertainment Industry Seen as Valued Partner in Reversing Trends of Suicide

New data underscore the role the entertainment industry can play in suicide prevention – and the importance of adopting best practices when depicting suicide

A collective statement prepared by the [National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention \(Action Alliance\)](#) and its public and private partners. For media inquiries, contact Kim Torguson (ktorguson@edc.org or 202-572-3737).

Just-released paper, "[Association Between the Release of Netflix's 13 Reasons Why and Suicide Rates in the United States: An Interrupted Times Series Analysis](#)" published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, shows the Netflix show was associated with a nearly 30 percent increase in suicide rates among U.S. youth ages 10-17 in April 2017, the month following the show's release, after accounting for ongoing trends in suicide rates. The study, conducted by researchers at several universities, hospitals, and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), part of the National Institutes of Health, reinforces the necessity of using best practices when portraying suicide in popular entertainment and in the media.

Looking at annual and monthly data on deaths due to suicide sourced from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [Web-based Wide-ranging Online Data for Epidemiologic Research](#), and using an interrupted time series segmented regression analysis, key findings include:

- Rates of suicide for 10- to 17-year-olds were significantly higher in the months following the release of the series (with significantly higher observed rates in April, June, and December 2017).
 - There were no significant trends in suicide rates in people 18 to 64 years of age during this period.
- The number of deaths by suicide recorded in April 2017 was greater than the number seen in any other single month during the five-year research period examined by the study.
 - In that month, there was a significant increase in suicides in young males.

"This research further underscores that the way television series and other forms of entertainment media depict suicide and mental illness *can* have unintended consequences for viewers—especially for young people," said study author Lisa Horowitz, PhD, MPH, clinical scientist in the NIMH Intramural Research Program. "We know more research is needed to better understand who may be at risk for iatrogenic effects of viewing entertainment media. In addition, we highly encourage members of the entertainment industry to adhere to best practice guidelines to help minimize exposure to explicit

portrayals of suicidal behavior among vulnerable individuals and to promote actions that help prevent suicide and save lives.”

To assist the entertainment industry in promoting accurate portrayals of suicide – a key goal of the [National Strategy for Suicide Prevention](#) – the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention ([Action Alliance](#)) collaborated with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration ([SAMHSA](#)) and the Entertainment Industries Council ([EIC](#)) to create the [National Recommendations for Depicting Suicide](#). The recommendations, which were informed by representatives from both the entertainment industry and the suicide prevention field, aim to help members of the entertainment industry—content creators, scriptwriters, producers—tell more balanced and authentic stories involving suicide and suicide prevention.

“Engaging with the entertainment industry is an important strategy to suicide prevention,” said Marie Gallo Dyak, chief executive officer of EIC. “The [National Recommendations for Depicting Suicide](#) serve as a valuable resource for content creators to offer guidance when they are including suicide in a story.”

The [National Recommendations for Depicting Suicide](#) includes nine recommendations to help content creators craft stories about survival, hope, and healing:

- Convey that suicide is complex and often caused by multiple factors.
- Show that help is available.
- Portray characters with suicidal thoughts who do not go on to die by suicide.
- Connect viewers to resources.
- Portray everyday characters who can be a lifeline.
- Depict the grieving and healing process of people who lose someone to suicide.
- Avoid showing or describing the details about suicide methods.
- Consult with suicide prevention messaging experts and people with personal experience.
- Use nonjudgmental language.

The recently released collective recommendations draw on suicide prevention best practices tailored for practical use by the entertainment industry.

“The Action Alliance will work with its many partners, including NIMH which serves on the Action Alliance’s [Executive Committee](#), to continue providing information and resources—as part of its [Real Stories Initiative](#)—to help the news and entertainment sectors effectively develop news coverage and on-screen depictions that educate the public about suicide and suicide prevention,” said Colleen Carr, director of the Action Alliance. “As the nation’s public-private partnership for suicide prevention, we are also committed to ensuring there is adequate investment in research that can help to better recognize who may be at increased risk for suicide in order to develop and implement comprehensive suicide prevention efforts across the country.”

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FOR NEWS MEDIA PARTNERS:

Research shows that the media may influence suicide rates by the way they report on and depict suicide. Evidence suggests that when the media tell stories of people effectively coping with thoughts of suicide, more suicidal behaviors and deaths by 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.lifelineforattempt survivors.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 launched in 2010. Learn more at theActionAlliance.org, and join the conversation on suicide prevention by following the Action Alliance on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [YouTube](#).