

**FOR RELEASE**

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***Equipping Faith Leaders to Serve As Front Line Responders in Preventing Suicide***

*Action Alliance releases collective guidance aimed at providing leaders of all faiths with essential life-saving skills*

WASHINGTON, DC—New national faith competencies were released today by the [National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention \(Action Alliance\)](#) – the nation's public-private partnership for suicide prevention – to inform and equip faith leaders with the capabilities needed to prevent suicide and provide care and comfort to those affected by suicide. The new resource, [Suicide Prevention Competencies for Faith Leaders: Supporting Life Before, During, and After a Suicidal Crisis](#), developed with guidance from faith community leaders and national suicide prevention experts, presents feasible, practical, research-based actions that faith leaders can adopt immediately to help save lives and restore hope in faith communities nationwide.

Suicide remains the 10<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death in the U.S. Last year, over 47,000 lives were lost to suicide – which does not account for the nearly 11 million Americans who struggled with serious thoughts of suicide. To address this significant national public health issue requires a comprehensive approach to suicide prevention and strategies that reduce risk and strengthen protective factors – both within health systems and in community settings, like places of worship. Research shows that people in these kinds of crises are increasingly turning to faith leaders and faith community members for help and support, before they will seek care from mental health professionals.

“Faith leaders are often seen as emotional first responders and are in a position to demonstrate leadership,” said Dr. Melinda Moore, assistant professor in the department of psychology at Eastern Kentucky University and [Action Alliance Faith Communities Task Force](#) Private Sector Co-Lead. “Since faith leaders are uniquely positioned to provide frontline support, it’s important we help to equip them about what to do or say to their faith communities when it comes to suicide. Using these new competencies, faith leaders can help to strengthen the congregations in which they serve to build more resilient communities.”

The competencies are designed to help faith leaders – serving in both congregational and unique ministry settings (e.g., hospital, civil, and military chaplaincy) – develop the suicide prevention knowledge, attitudes, and skills required to effectively promote hope, help, and healing. The competencies address six key areas:

- > Pastoral Prevention
- > Pastoral Intervention

- > Pastoral Postvention
- > Pastoral Communication
- > Pastoral Leadership, Support, and Mentorship
- > Unique Organizational Ministry Settings

Developed by the Action Alliance [Faith Communities Task Force](#), the competencies were derived from two primary sources: 1) a set of competencies developed by a diverse working group of chaplains for the Defense Suicide Prevention Office of the U.S. Department of Defense; and 2) qualitative research conducted by Dr. Karen Mason, Action Alliance Faith Communities Task Force member and professor of counseling and psychology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and her colleagues. The Action Alliance's Faith Communities Task Force compiled, built on, and adapted these lists to develop a full set of competencies that would be applicable across various faith groups and settings, and used in many ways such as guiding course development, informing training policy development, and supporting the evaluation of education and training provided in seminaries, ministry preparation institutions, and continuing education settings.

"Strengthening connectedness to community is an important factor in decreasing risk for suicide," said Brandon Johnson, Public Health Advisor, Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and Action Alliance Faith Communities Task Force Public Sector Co-Lead. "With nearly 80 percent of Americans being affiliated with a formal religious group, according to a 2016 [Gallup poll](#), faith leaders can reach a very large portion of the millions of Americans who struggle with thoughts of suicide each year."

"In the unique role as a convener, the Action Alliance works with its hundreds of public and private sector leaders, including those representing the faith sector, to advance the [National Strategy for Suicide Prevention](#) (developed by the Action Alliance and the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General in 2012)," said Colleen Carr, Director, Action Alliance. "The new faith competencies resource, as well as the efforts of our Faith Communities Task Force and its *Faith.Hope.Life.* campaign, help to advance goal one of the *National Strategy* which calls for the nation to integrate and coordinate suicide prevention across sectors and settings, like diverse faith-based organizations and places of worship."

The Action Alliance Faith Communities Task Force launched the [Faith.Hope.Life.](#) campaign, which aims to provide guidance and resources to help faith communities promote mental and spiritual health, and support the needs of family and friends after a suicidal event. Through this work, the Action Alliance will continue to work with its hundreds of public and private sector partners to help support the nation's faith leaders, in recognition of the unavoidable, uniquely important role they play in supporting life, before, during, and after a suicidal crisis.

"I, like so many faith leaders, have the opportunity to interact with and preach to those who come to my place of worship," said Rabbi Dan Roberts, Rabbi Emeritus Temple Emanu El, Cleveland, Ohio, DD, DMin, FT. "To create healthy communities requires we help all – especially those who are struggling to find reasons to live or coping with suicidal loss. Having resources, like the new competencies, gives me the guidance to build a more resilient and supportive community."

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**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. For stories of persons with lived experience of suicidality and finding hope, refer to [www.lifelineforattempturvivors.org](http://www.lifelineforattempturvivors.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 [theactionalliance.org](http://theactionalliance.org) and join the conversation on suicide prevention by following the Action Alliance on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#).