

MEDIA STATEMENT

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A Statement from the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention to Reporters Covering Mental Health and Suicide Prevention in the Wake of COVID-19

News media play an important role in prioritizing mental health and suicide prevention-related coverage and promoting help-seeking and connectedness among the public

“As we continue to see more research and survey findings related the mental health and suicide-related impacts of COVID-19, it’s important to remember the key role news media play in reporting on such critical issues impacting the American people. Research shows that the way news media report on suicide and suicide prevention can either promote hope and help seeking or increase hopelessness and risk of contagion. In addition, media reports help to create cultural, policy, and systems-level change. That’s why we urge all members of the media to carefully consider how best to cover stories involving mental health and suicide or suicide prevention to ensure those stories are contributing to an informed and prevention-focused narrative—especially during this time of increased anxiety and uncertainty. To assist news reporters in telling balanced stories, the [National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention](#) (Action Alliance), the nation’s public-private partnership for suicide prevention that recently launched the [Mental Health & Suicide Prevention National Response to COVID-19](#), developed the following suggested reporting guidance:

- **Represent data accurately, by including appropriate timeframes and context so as not to sensationalize or misconstrue data.**
 - Avoid speculating about the potential impact COVID-19 may have on suicide rates, as this can lead to normalizing suicide as a response to the current pandemic and could result in increased suicide contagion.
 - Keep in mind that certain communities and populations (i.e., American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, Latinx, LGBTQ) have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and may be experiencing different mental health and/or suicide-related trends than the general population.
 - Emphasize that increased outreach to crisis services does not necessarily mean more people are suicidal. Instead, it may mean more people are being made aware of a service or are connecting to care when they need it.
 - Highlight the importance of preparing now to address the potential future mental health and suicide prevention needs as a result of the pandemic.
- **Include help-seeking information and highlight the fact that help is available.**

- Feature information about local and national crisis services in any news stories about mental health and suicide prevention.
 - For emotional support specifically related to COVID-19, call the Disaster Distress Helpline (800-985-5990), or text TalkWithUs to 66746.
 - For those experiencing a suicidal crisis, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800-273-8255), or text the Crisis Text Line (text 'HOME' to 741741).
 - For those who identify as part of the LGBTQ community, call the TrevorLifeline (866-488-7386) or text START to 678-678.
 - For Veterans who are in crisis, call the Veterans Crisis Line (800-273-8255 and press 1) or text 838255.
 - For frontline workers dealing with anxiety, stress, fear, isolation, or other difficult emotions, text FRONTLINE to 741741.
- Highlight that while some populations—including LGBTQ youth, minorities, frontline workers, or those experiencing job loss and financial strain—may be experiencing increased mental health challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, help is available.
- **Promote stories about connectedness and actions everybody can take to help others.**
 - Highlight that research shows a sense of belonging and social connectedness improves physical, mental, and emotional well-being. In fact, connectedness is a proven protective factor against suicide.
 - Remind your audience that everyone can play a role in being there for the people in their lives, especially those who may be struggling or in crisis. There are [resources available](#) to help us stay connected, even during this uncertain time.

In addition, we encourage news media to consider reporting on the importance of: 1) increasing access to evidence-based treatments; 2) building a more coordinated, equitable, and sustainable mental health and crisis system services infrastructure; 3) establishing near real-time data collection systems; and 4) help-seeking by sharing the stories of people with lived experience.

Whenever reporting on suicide or suicide prevention, please refer to the suicide prevention field's full consensus guidelines, which can be found at [ReportingOnSuicide.org](#). In addition, specific guidance related to reporting on suicide during the COVID-19 pandemic is available [here](#)."

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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 (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 [theactionalliance.org](#) and join the conversation on suicide prevention by following the Action Alliance on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [YouTube](#).

MENTAL HEALTH & SUICIDE PREVENTION NATIONAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19:

The Action Alliance's [Mental Health & Suicide Prevention National Response to COVID-19](#) (National Response), brings together influential national organizations to address mental health and prevent suicide during and in the aftermath of the pandemic. Learn more at NationalMentalHealthResponse.org.