

AT-A-GLANCE

Moving Suicide Prevention Upstream

FROM CONCEPT TO ACTION

What is Upstream Suicide Prevention?

Upstream suicide prevention addresses the social, economic, and environmental root causes of suicide in communities before people experience suicidal crises. Upstream approaches promote protective factors like social connectedness, economic stability, safe and supportive environments, and coping skills at the population level through community-based initiatives, policy changes, and cross-sector partnerships. While intervention, treatment, and postvention are essential elements of a comprehensive approach to preventing suicide, upstream suicide prevention is focused on cultivating wellbeing in the places where we live, work, learn, play, worship, and love.¹

Why is it important?

Upstream suicide prevention offers powerful advantages by investing in systems that support the health and wellbeing of entire communities—not just individuals at risk. These approaches promote long-term, sustainable change by improving the conditions that shape people's lives, such as housing, education, employment, belonging, and social connection. In doing so, upstream strategies address not only suicide risk, but promote a broader set of positive outcomes—including reduced substance use, improved mental health, and greater safety and stability.

Upstream suicide prevention is long-lasting, future-forward, community-focused, maximizing resources for broad impact.

1. To learn more about shared risk and protective factors across multiple issues, see [Connecting the Dots](#).

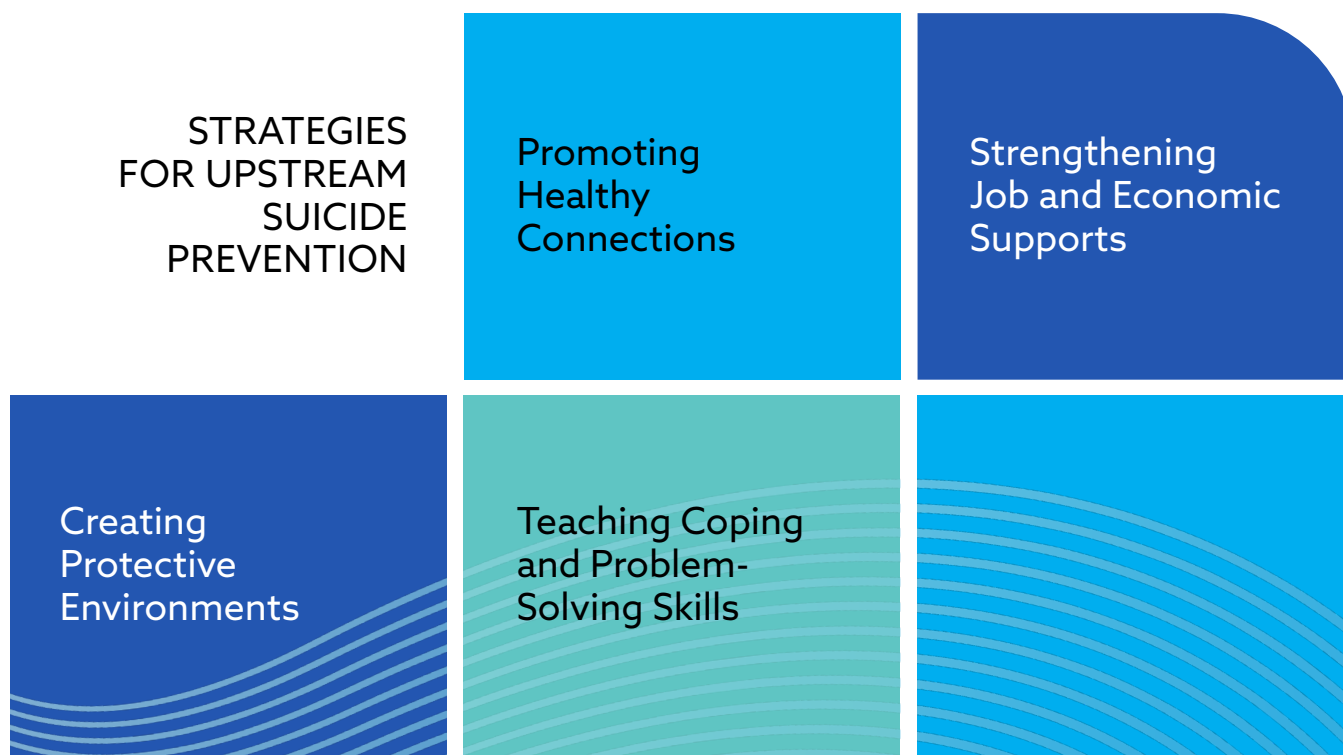
Because the drivers of suicide are complex and interconnected, upstream prevention cannot be carried out in silos. It requires close collaboration across sectors—health, education, housing, employment, faith, and more—and must be tailored to the strengths, needs, and lived experiences of specific populations. When communities define what wellbeing looks like and help drive solutions, upstream efforts are more likely to be effective and sustainable.

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Why should we focus on upstream prevention?

Upstream suicide prevention represents a strategic investment that delivers measurable, long-term returns for communities and systems. By addressing underlying factors before crises occur, upstream approaches reduce reliance on costly emergency services, treatment, and intervention programs. This shift from reactive to proactive prevention optimizes limited public health resources and can result in substantial cost savings over time while simultaneously yielding benefits at scale.

Additionally, upstream strategies promote cross-sector collaboration and strengthen community infrastructure. They focus on social determinants such as social isolation and economic security, improving overall community health and resilience across the lifespan. For policy makers and funders, this approach offers a cost-effective path to healthier, more resilient communities.



We all have a role to play in suicide prevention

What We Can Do

- Learn about policies that are evidence-based for upstream suicide prevention.
- Understand legislation that strengthens upstream suicide prevention through funding or codified cross-sector collaboration.
- Convene and engage constituent groups connected to upstream prevention to identify community-driven goals and strategies.



Consider Upstream Strategies

- Explore dedicated resources for upstream suicide prevention, separate from and equal to crisis or treatment programs.
- Match the scale of services like 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline with equally robust resources in prevention, wellness promotion, and community transformation.
- Incentivize cross-sector collaboration by allowing resources to support multi-agency initiatives that address shared risk and protective factors.
- Take time as a collaborative to discuss foundational topics in suicide prevention, including safe messaging, evidence-based and upstream strategies (from the CDC Suicide Prevention Resource for Action), and a comprehensive prevention approach.
- Address the needs of people at greatest risk of suicide.

Upstream suicide prevention means matching crisis response with robust investments in wellness, and community transformation.

Support Research and Innovation

- Prioritize research that measures the impact of upstream strategies (e.g., housing stability, food access, school belonging) on suicide-related outcomes.
- Encourage community-driven research and participatory evaluation models that reflect real-life conditions and strengths.

Track Progress Broadly and Transparently



Expand the use of community-level indicators that reflect upstream protective conditions and integrate these into behavioral health and public health dashboards.



Make data accessible, disaggregated, and usable for communities and coalitions doing the work.



Support efforts to evaluate upstream initiatives for inclusion in national registries such as the [SPRC Best Practices Registry](#) with the goal of building the evidence base over time.

Build the Ecosystem for Upstream Action

- Private sector partners, philanthropy, community leaders, and national coalitions have a role to play in supporting the expansion of upstream suicide prevention.

Mobilize Networks

- Leverage national and regional associations to amplify the visibility of upstream suicide prevention and connect practitioners to tools and success stories.
- Align public messaging with related strategies in affordable housing, food security, education, and economic development to show suicide prevention as part of a broader wellness ecosystem.
- Collaborate with upstream partners in areas such as safe housing, transportation, and youth development.
- Promote upstream suicide prevention successes at national conferences, within think tanks, and through interagency collaboratives.



Elevate What's Already Working

- Create learning communities or virtual exchanges for programs actively implementing upstream work.
- Submit your work to the [SPRC Best Practices Registry](#) to grow the evidence base.

Together, We Can Change the Story

Suicide is not inevitable. It is preventable—but only if we act with vision and coordination in communities, across states and at the national level. This moment is a turning point. With aligned resources, understanding what works, data infrastructure, and shared learning, we can promote wellbeing, security, and connectedness.



For more information visit: theactionalliance.org/upstreamsuicideprevention

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