



2011–2012 Annual Report

**The National Action Alliance  
for Suicide Prevention**



## INTRODUCTION

**A Clear Vision.** The [National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention](#) (Action Alliance) is the public-private partnership advancing the *National Strategy for Suicide Prevention* (NSSP) by **championing** suicide prevention as a national priority, **catalyzing** efforts to implement high-priority objectives of the NSSP, and **cultivating** the resources needed to sustain progress. Its vision is a nation free from the tragic experience of suicide.

*"...never have I been witness to such an immense collaboration. I think the opportunity to build on that energy and make real effective change to save lives can really go to the next level. **This is the best chance we have ever had to reduce death by suicide in this country.**"*

—Eduardo Vega, Executive Committee member and Suicide Attempt Survivors Task Force co-lead of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention

**A Year of Action and Growth.** Established in September 2010, the Action Alliance has completed its second year, which was marked by substantive accomplishments and progress, including the following:

- Complete revision of the [NSSP](#), the nation's suicide prevention roadmap
- Progress on major initiatives such as:
  - » Developing a prioritized suicide prevention [research agenda](#)
  - » Improving suicide [data and surveillance](#)
  - » Transforming [health care delivery systems](#)
  - » Improving [clinician training](#)
  - » Incorporating suicide prevention into [health care reform](#)
  - » Advancing suicide prevention for [high-risk populations](#)
  - » Promoting suicide prevention in the [workplace](#)
- Expanded national support and infrastructure for suicide prevention, with nearly 200 public- and private-sector senior leaders devoting time and resources to this partnership

*"We are in a unique and commendable position to make significant progress in reducing the burden of suicide in our country. We are simultaneously releasing an updated [NSSP], establishing the first-ever prioritized research agenda to highlight research areas most likely to produce breakthroughs, and actively advancing the national suicide prevention agenda."*

—Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

**The Action Alliance Annual Report.** The Action Alliance is pleased to present this report outlining its accomplishments over the last 12 months. Whether you are a founding Action Alliance member or learning about the Action Alliance for the first time, this report will help you understand the Action Alliance's history, goals and priorities, accomplishments, and progress in its second year.



2012 Katie Deal

## ACTION ALLIANCE OVERVIEW

On September 10, 2010, the secretaries of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Defense gathered with the nation's top experts in suicide prevention to launch the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention (Action Alliance). The Action Alliance quickly developed into an action-oriented assembly of volunteers making progress on objectives requiring collaboration and leverage at the national level. During its first year, the Action Alliance established a strong [foundation](#), naming Secretary of the Army John McHugh and former Senator Gordon Smith, now president and CEO of the National Association of Broadcasters, as co-chairs; appointing an [Executive Committee](#) (EXCOM), comprised of members from the top ranks of public- and private-sector organizations to provide leadership and strategic direction for the Action Alliance; establishing [task forces](#) to enhance the national infrastructure for suicide prevention and promote suicide prevention interventions among high-risk populations and in specific settings; forming a sustainability committee to cultivate new resources; utilizing the expertise of advisory groups to guide its work; and, with funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), forming a [Secretariat](#) to support its leadership and operations.

*“Whether or not we succeed will depend on making progress on our priorities. We can save lives if policymakers, health care systems, the media, and others will join with us.”*

—The Honorable John M. McHugh,  
Action Alliance Co-Chair

A diverse and high-level membership is the backbone of the Action Alliance. [EXCOM members](#) are drawn from a variety of sectors, ranging from business and health administration to the entertainment industry and organizations serving high-risk populations, such as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) populations, veterans, and American Indian/Alaska Native populations. In addition to their involvement in task forces, members are also advancing suicide prevention within their own organizations and systems and forming partnerships that are critical to the success of the Action Alliance. Often, these relationships give them the connections they need to collaborate on important suicide prevention projects that extend beyond the work of the Action Alliance. For example, the relationships developed through the Action Alliance contributed to Facebook adding the capacity to connect at-risk members with online counselors, and the Entertainment Industries Council has leveraged Action Alliance relationships to intervene after several highly publicized suicides of entertainment celebrities.

In its second year, the Action Alliance emerged as a prominent force in the suicide prevention field, poised to bring about change. The leaders of the Action Alliance's 14 task forces harnessed the energy of the Action Alliance's members to write and launch a major revision of the NSSP that charts the course of the nation's suicide prevention efforts for years to come. While final edits were being made, the Action Alliance chose four priorities on which to focus its efforts, as well as an improvement goal against which to measure its success.



## GOAL AND PRIORITIES

In its second year, the Action Alliance set an ambitious goal—to save 20,000 lives in five years—and four priorities to serve as starting points for action. The goal is attainable with the implementation of the NSSP, success on the Action Alliance’s four priorities, and discoveries that will come through the prioritized research agenda (scheduled for release spring of 2013).

The priorities, which follow, were selected for their potential to produce the systems-level change necessary to substantially decrease the U.S. suicide rate:

**1. Integrate suicide prevention into health care reform and encourage the adoption of similar measures in the private-sector.** The Action Alliance believes that health care reform offers an exceptional opportunity to make the large-scale system changes that can prevent suicide. Successful integration of suicide prevention into health care reform will naturally spill over into private health systems. The Action Alliance is working in partnership with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to ensure that suicide prevention is integrated into CMS policies and program guidance to providers under Medicare and Medicaid.

**2. Transform health care systems to significantly reduce suicide.** The Action Alliance will promote the adoption of “zero suicides” as an organizing goal for clinical systems transforming care through leadership, policies, practices, and outcome measurement. Building on the momentum of *Suicide Care in Systems Framework*, a report of the Action Alliance’s Clinical Care and Intervention Task Force, the Action Alliance will recruit pioneer health and behavioral care systems from across the country to implement this innovative framework within their respective organizations and provide the support and tools they need to render state-of-the-art suicide care.

**3. Change the public conversation around suicide and suicide prevention.** The Action Alliance will leverage media and national leaders to fundamentally transform attitudes and behaviors related to suicide and suicide prevention. Its goal is to change the national narratives to ones that promote hope, connectedness, social support, resilience, treatment, and recovery. Promoting both stories of hope and a cultural norm of providing social support and connectedness to vulnerable individuals can improve the outcomes for people struggling with thoughts of suicide.

**4. Increase the quality, timeliness, and usefulness of surveillance data regarding suicidal behaviors.** The Action Alliance will work with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and others to improve data and expand existing data systems. Bold and significant progress can be made to improve suicide-related statistics, thereby enabling policymakers and program developers to make data-driven planning decisions.

*“Some might consider a goal of saving 20,000 lives in five years audacious, but we believe that suicide is a preventable public health issue and it would be irresponsible of us not to set a goal of saving as many lives as possible.”*

—The Honorable Gordon H. Smith,  
Action Alliance Co-Chair

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*“Quality surveillance data for suicide, suicide attempts, and suicide ideation is key. We need accurate, comprehensive, and timely information to identify specific areas of concern, monitor trends, guide action, and track progress towards our goal of saving 20,000 lives in the next five years.”*

—Thomas R. Frieden, MD, MPH, Director of CDC; EXCOM member,  
Data and Surveillance Task Force co-lead

# NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION

On the second anniversary of the Action Alliance's launch, and coinciding with World Suicide Prevention Day, the Action Alliance and the Office of the Surgeon General released the revised NSSP to a national audience. EXCOM members Surgeon General Regina Benjamin and Jerry Reed, Director of the Suicide Prevention Resource Center, co-led the Action Alliance task force that revised the NSSP, incorporating advances in science and policy accrued over the decade since the original NSSP was released in 2001.

The [NSSP](#) emphasizes the role every American can play in protecting friends, family members, and colleagues from suicide and provides a roadmap for suicide prevention in the United States for years to come. The launch event, which garnered extensive coverage in the media, featured a panel of speakers that included the Action Alliance co-chairs, secretary of HHS, vice president of Global Public Policy of Facebook, deputy secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, president and CEO of ValueOptions, administrator of SAMHSA, and the surgeon general. The event also highlighted the work of a veteran, a high school peer leader and the executive director of a senior living community, to demonstrate the role every American can play in preventing suicide. During his remarks, Action Alliance Co-Chair Senator Gordon Smith stated that “[T]he updated national strategy is a declaration that we can't let up the pressure on the goal of reducing the suicide rate in this country.”

During its third year, the Action Alliance will continue to raise that pressure by disseminating information about the revised NSSP, via ongoing discussions and events and robust trade and social media outreach, across the various sectors that have critical roles in reducing the death toll from suicide.

## The NSSP Advances Suicide Prevention by:

- Fostering a positive public dialogue; countering shame, stigma, and silence; and building public support for suicide prevention
- Addressing the needs of vulnerable groups and seeking to eliminate disparities, by tailoring programs to the cultural and situational contexts in which they are offered
- Coordinating and integrating suicide prevention with existing efforts addressing health and behavioral health, and ensuring continuity of care
- Promoting changes in systems, policies, and environments that will support and facilitate the prevention of suicide and related problems
- Bringing together public health and behavioral health
- Promoting efforts to reduce access to lethal means among individuals with identified suicide risks



## TASK FORCES

The Action Alliance's 14 [task forces](#) are strengthening the national suicide prevention infrastructure and promoting suicide prevention among high-risk populations and in specific settings. They have significantly expanded the circle of those working in suicide prevention and fostered public-private collaboration in ways unimaginable two years ago. Following are highlights of the task forces' work this year:

**[Clinical Care and Intervention:](#)** Building on its release of the [Suicide Care in Systems Framework](#) report, the task force developed a strategy to work with behavioral health care organizations on systematic approaches toward a "zero-suicide" goal for their patient populations. Next year, as an Action Alliance priority, this task force will develop an online toolkit to assist health systems adopting this goal.

**[Clinical Workforce Preparedness:](#)** The task force queried key stakeholder groups in all 50 states—including educational institutions, accreditors of educational institutions, and licensing boards—on guidelines for suicide prevention training for clinical specialties across the spectrum. Consensus guidelines will be released in 2013.

**[Data and Surveillance:](#)** The task force reviewed existing national data systems and identified action steps to enable the collection of more complete and timely information on suicides and non-fatal suicidal behaviors. This task force is now also supporting the Action Alliance's data and surveillance priority.

**[Military/Veterans:](#)** In partnership with National Guard Chaplains' offices, the task force hosted suicide prevention summits for faith-based organizations in five states. The chaplains also implemented Partners in Care, a program that coordinates support for Guard members and their families from faith communities.

**[Public Awareness and Education:](#)** The task force helped promote the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, resulting in 42 million gross impressions among the public; helped inform journalists about the NSSP; and promoted the Action Alliance and the Lifeline in the 2012 PRISM Awards Showcase's national airing. Next year, the task force will be heavily involved in the Action Alliance's "changing the conversation" priority.

**[Research Prioritization:](#)** The task force conducted literature and research reviews, burden calculations among subpopulations, and analyses of methodological barriers to breakthroughs in suicide prevention research. The task force will next convene a panel of experts to integrate these inputs and prioritize the research pathways and objectives most likely to reduce suicides and suicide attempts by at least 20 percent in five years and 40 percent or greater in 10 years, if fully implemented. The final prioritized research agenda is due in the spring of 2013.

**[Workplace:](#)** The task force produced public service announcements (PSAs) that featured CEOs encouraging greater support from other business leaders for suicide prevention in the workplace. Other support-generating strategies utilized by the task force included conference presentations, articles, webinars, newsletters, and websites. Next year, the task force will complete an online resource directory, a business case for suicide prevention, and additional PSAs.

**[Youth in Contact with the Juvenile Justice System:](#)** This task force developed a comprehensive report to advance suicide prevention awareness, programming, and training in the juvenile justice system and improve collaboration between the juvenile justice and mental health systems. The report, which was the result of an 18-month review of literature, policies, programs, and practices, will be released later in 2012. Additionally, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention embedded suicide prevention into its existing grant mechanisms.

Several Action Alliance task forces, including American Indian/Alaska Native, Faith Communities, LGBT Populations, NSSP, Suicide Attempt Survivors, and Survivors of Suicide Loss, will soon be completing other actions that will catalyze future change in bold and exciting ways.



## COMMUNICATIONS

The Action Alliance focused its communications efforts in Year 2 on strengthening communication among its members and with the suicide prevention community. Through an enhanced website, internal and public newsletters, social media, print materials, and other channels, the Action Alliance supported members' collaboration between meetings and publicized landmark achievements. This past year saw a marked increase in participation on our social media sites, which proved to be vital avenues for keeping members and other interested parties informed about Action Alliance achievements and advances in the field, as well as to spur conversation.

We now have more than 1,500 followers on Facebook and more than 800 subscribers to our public newsletter. The Action Alliance blog also saw an increase in readership this past year with more than 6,500 views. This longer format medium allowed us to highlight the writings of Action Alliance members on key topics in suicide prevention.

In the coming year, the Action Alliance will increase its external communications efforts to raise its public profile within and outside of the suicide prevention community. The Action Alliance will undertake efforts to clearly define its brand and make it generally recognizable as *the* organization leading public-private collaboration around national suicide prevention priorities. It will also work in coordination with the sustainability committee to boost media placement efforts, bringing more attention to significant Action Alliance accomplishments and its goal of saving 20,000 lives.

## SUSTAINABILITY

SAMHSA provided start-up funding to the Action Alliance Secretariat, housed at the national Suicide Prevention Resource Center, for program and infrastructure development and awarded additional funds at the beginning of Year 2, allowing the Action Alliance to expand its activities, increase Secretariat staffing, and support meeting logistics. Private-sector organizations added in-kind contributions of human resources, with a monetary equivalent of \$1–1.5 million, in addition to substantial direct funding for task force work.

The Action Alliance is exploring funding options outside of the seed money provided by SAMHSA, an effort that is vital to the future success and stability of the organization. Broadening the funding portfolio to include more private-sector investors will help ensure long-term sustainability and success. The Action Alliance formed a sustainability committee to pursue additional funding, and toward that end, the committee has developed a case statement describing the magnitude of the public health burden of suicide and the unique role the Action Alliance must play if the nation is to reduce that toll.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The Action Alliance is poised to advance the revised NSSP and catalyze change throughout the field of suicide prevention through the diverse work on its four national priorities and of its task forces. For example, the Action Alliance will release and promote a national prioritized research agenda; a toolkit for behavioral health organizations to transform health systems and reduce deaths by suicide in clinical settings; strategies for reducing the risk of suicide in the juvenile justice system; and guidelines for improving the skills and knowledge of clinicians. The task force that revised the NSSP is moving into a role of prioritizing, then broadly monitoring and evaluating, key NSSP objectives.

As the Action Alliance achieves success in advancing its work and as more people realize they have a role in preventing suicide, the Action Alliance will achieve the audacious goal of saving 20,000 lives in the next five years. The Action Alliance expects that such success will generate more support, partners, and resources to accelerate the suicide prevention movement by tackling more national priorities, and, someday soon, achieving the vision of a nation free from the tragic experience of suicide.

Suicide is one of our nation's most urgent and preventable public health challenges, and we all have a role to play in preventing it. There are many ways to get involved with the Action Alliance and in suicide prevention.



To learn how, visit: [www.actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org](http://www.actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org)

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