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MEDIA CONTACTS:
Action Alliance: Kim Torguson
(ktorguson@edc.org; 202-572-3737)
AFSP: Alexis O'Brien
(aobrien@afsp.org; 347-826-3577)

National Survey Shows Majority of Americans Would Take Action to Prevent Suicide

Americans overwhelmingly believe suicide can be prevented – and the public plays a role in saving lives.

WASHINGTON [September 12, 2018]—A national survey conducted online by The Harris Poll on behalf of the [National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention](#) (Action Alliance), the public-private partnership working to advance the [National Strategy for Suicide Prevention](#) (NSSP), and the [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#) (AFSP), the nation's largest suicide prevention organization, shows that Americans overwhelmingly (94 percent) believe that suicide can be prevented, and most (94 percent) would take action to help someone close to them who was thinking about suicide.

While the majority of Americans would encourage a friend or loved one in crisis to seek help from a mental health professional (64 percent) or doctor or other primary care health professional (53 percent), many also recognize that reducing the number of people who die by suicide also involves educating the public (59 percent), improving training for healthcare professionals (57 percent), and educating community leaders such as teachers and clergy (51 percent).

"It is promising to know that more than ever before, the American public wants to play a role in suicide prevention and recognizes that mental health is equally important as physical health," said Bob Gebbia, Chief Executive Officer, AFSP. "In addition to improving suicide related care in our health systems, we must also do more to support people where they live, work, and learn."

The survey findings also reinforce [data](#) released in June by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that show there is no single cause of suicide. According to the Action Alliance/AFSP national survey, the majority of Americans recognize that suicide has many contributing factors, such as: feelings of hopelessness (74 percent), being bullied (71 percent), financial issues (69 percent), relationships problems (64 percent), and losing a job (58 percent).

"Family members, friends, coworkers and others understand they can play a role in being there for someone who might be feeling alone, helpless, and isolated from various factors – whether that be a job loss, a breakup, or the grief of losing a loved one to suicide" said Bob Turner, Executive Committee

Private Sector Co-Chair, Action Alliance, and Senior Vice President (Ret.), Union Pacific Corporation. “For far too long, many people did not feel comfortable openly discussing this complex topic, but today we are at a tipping point in this country. The data show there is a readiness among Americans like never before to take part in tackling this issue to save lives in this country.”

Americans overwhelmingly agree they have an important role to play in preventing suicide – and most (78 percent) are interested in learning how they might be able to play a role in helping someone who may be suicidal – but they indicated they need more information and guidance on how to help. For instance, the majority of Americans (70 percent) recognize that most people who die by suicide usually show some signs beforehand, but only 31 percent say they can tell when someone is suicidal. Additionally, only 38 percent of Americans say they would provide someone who was suicidal with a phone number for a crisis hotline or other resource.

Some helpful and hopeful ways the public can be there for someone who might be struggling or in crisis:

- Learn the [warning signs](#).
- Take [action steps](#) and help to connect a person to professional care.
- Share the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number: 800-273-TALK – which provides 24/7, free, and confidential support. Military veterans may press ‘1’ for specialized care, or contact the Crisis Text Line by texting TALK to 741741.

“We are changing the conversation by confronting fear and misunderstanding with information and actions that help prevent suicide,” said Mark Weber, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs/Human Services, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and Changing the Conversation Priority Co-Lead, Action Alliance. “We are working across organizations to provide consistent and sustained messages that encourage people to offer and seek help with the same urgency as any other emergency situation.”

Highlighting stories of hope, help, resiliency, and survival is a key priority for the Action Alliance and its many national partners in the public and private sector, including AFSP. For every one person who dies by suicide, 278 seriously consider suicide but do not die. These untold stories demonstrate recovering from thoughts of suicide is possible—and happening every day.

During National Suicide Prevention Month (September) and National Suicide Prevention Week (second week of September), it is important for members of the news media to consider positively elevating awareness of this public health issue by highlighting stories that underscore: prevention works, resilience and recovery are possible, effective programs and services exist, help is available, and hope is a reality.

“In addition to further educating and engaging the public, and spreading messages of hope and connectedness, reducing the rate of suicide in the U.S. will also require larger, more sustainable investments be made like we’ve seen in other leading causes of death, like heart disease, HIV/AIDS, and prostate cancer,” said Dr. Christine Moutier, Chief Medical Officer, AFSP. “We’ve seen a significant decrease in death rates in these other health issues—and it’s time we do the same to address this ‘preventable’ health outcome.”

OTHER KEY FINDINGS:

The online survey – conducted by The Harris Poll in August 2018 among more than 2,000 U.S. adults – assessed public perceptions about suicide and mental health. The survey also found:

- More than 9 in 10 adults (94 percent) say they would do something if someone close to them was contemplating suicide.
- Nearly 4 in 5 adults (78 percent) are interested in learning more about how they might be able to play a role in helping someone who may be suicidal.
- More than 9 in 10 adults (94 percent) think suicide can be prevented sometimes/often/all the time.
- Nearly 3 in 4 adults (73 percent) would tell someone if they were having thoughts of suicide – which shows the importance of having non-judgmental conversations.
- When it comes to their own health, 4 in 5 US adults (80 percent) say mental health and physical health are equally important. In our current health care system, however, most adults (55 percent) say physical health is prioritized over mental health.
- Almost half (48 percent) of those who have spoken with others about suicide say it makes them feel better – showing that talking about suicide does help.

Link to full report: afsp.org/harrispoll.

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METHODOLOGY:

This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention from August 28-30, 2018 among 2,015 U.S. adults ages 18 and older. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated. For complete survey methodology, including weighting variables and subgroup sample sizes, please contact Farah Kauffman at fkauffman@edc.org.

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.lifelineforattemptsurvivors.org.

On September 11, the Action Alliance, in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, hosted a national webcast with members of the news media to discuss reporting on suicide. Take a look at the [archived webcast](#) to learn about best reporting practices and recommendations for safe and effective coverage.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL ACTION ALLIANCE FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION:

The [National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention](#) is the nation's public-private partnership working to advance the [National Strategy for Suicide Prevention](#) and make suicide prevention a national priority. The Action Alliance and its initiatives are supported by funding from the public and private sector including support from the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) to provide operational support via [EDC](#). Learn more at actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org and join the conversation on suicide prevention by following the Action Alliance on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#).

ABOUT THE AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION:

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention is dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide. AFSP creates a culture that's smart about mental health through education and community programs, develops suicide prevention through research and advocacy, and provides support for those affected by suicide. Led by CEO Robert Gebbia and headquartered in New York, and with a public policy office in Washington, D.C., AFSP has local chapters in all 50 states with programs and events nationwide. Learn more about AFSP in its latest Annual Report, and join the conversation on suicide prevention by following AFSP on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [YouTube](#). For more information, contact Alexis O'Brien, AOBrien@afsp.org or [347-826-3577](tel:347-826-3577).