

CALIFORNIA STRATEGY FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION

This document is the first iteration of a California Strategy for Suicide Prevention. It is based on the work of participants at the SPAN-California Suicide Prevention Planning Conference - Furthering the National Strategy in California, convened in Sacramento, California, May 2004. It sets forth a list of recommended objectives for implementing the 11 goals of the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention (DHHS, 2001) within California in order to initiate and direct activities statewide to significantly reduce the rate of death by suicide. The contents will require refinement through an inclusive process that invites critical examination by government leaders, scientific and clinical professionals, and the general public alike.

GOAL 1: Promote Awareness that Suicide is a Public Health Problem that is Preventable

Objective 1.1

Develop and implement a public awareness program that destigmatizes suicide by changing social norms.

Objective 1.2

Develop annually a suicide media awareness kit that can serve as a reference for statistics, referrals and other relevant information.

Objective 1.3

Consult suicide survivors, suicide attempt survivors, and consumers of mental health services in the development of all public awareness strategies.

Objective 1.4

Tailor public awareness campaigns to the communities they are intended to serve.

Objective 1.5

Build relationships between interested parties and the local media to enhance suicide prevention messages.

GOAL 2: Develop Broad-based Support for Suicide Prevention

Objective 2.1

Develop a statewide public-private task force, appointed by the Governor and Legislature through a legislative mandate, to coordinate and implement the California Strategy for Suicide Prevention.

Objective 2.2

Delegate responsibility for suicide prevention programs and policies to the California Secretary of Health and Human Services.

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Objective 2.3

Identify funding resources to establish collaborative partnerships to advance suicide prevention.

Objective 2.4

Develop a California-specific resource guide for suicide prevention that includes data, literature, and training curricula.

Objective 2.5

Identify a lead organization in every California county to coordinate suicide prevention activities.

GOAL 3: Develop and Implement Strategies to Reduce the Stigma Associated with Being a Consumer of Mental Health, Substance Abuse, and Suicide Prevention Services

Objective 3.1

Develop a strategy to communicate social norms for discussing suicide with sensitivity.

Objective 3.2

Implement programs that promote help-seeking behavior.

Objective 3.3

Require primary care providers in California to screen for mental illness.

Objective 3.4

Conduct outreach to employers to implement suicide prevention programs for their workforce.

Objective 3.5

Conduct outreach to higher education centers to implement suicide prevention programs for their students.

Objective 3.6

Pass mental health parity legislation in California.

GOAL 4: Develop and Implement Suicide Prevention Programs

Objective 4.1

Implement a suicide prevention curriculum for all personnel who come in contact with youth who are preschool age to age 18.

Objective 4.2

Disseminate best practice suicide prevention programs.

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Objective 4.3

Develop programs that build upon individual and community-level suicide protective factors.

Objective 4.4

Develop programs that target individual and community-level modifiable suicide risk factors.

Objective 4.5

Require effectiveness evaluations for all funded suicide prevention programs in California.

GOAL 5: Promote Efforts to Reduce Access to Lethal Means and Methods of Self-Harm

Objective 5.1

Require all gun owners to undergo annual certification for gun safety.

Objective 5.2

Require all healthcare professionals to screen for the presence of lethal means and to inform clients and their families about the importance of restricting access to lethal means.

Objective 5.3

Pass legislation that would require all elevated bridges in California to install suicide prevention barriers.

Objective 5.4

Promote collaboration among suicide prevention advocates and gun safety advocates to reduce access to and availability of firearms (e.g., gun shows, shooting ranges).

GOAL 6: Implement Training For Recognition of At-Risk Behavior and Delivery of Effective Treatment

Objective 6.1

Establish suicide prevention training resources for healthcare providers in California.

Objective 6.2

Mandate suicide prevention training in schools preparing school counselors and health professionals (e.g., nurses, physicians, social workers, mental health workers).

Objective 6.3

Require suicide prevention training as part of the certification process for first responders (e.g., firefighters, EMTs).

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Objective 6.4

Provide suicide prevention training for faith-based professionals.

Objective 6.5

Require suicide prevention training for professionals working in institutional settings and state sanctioned institutions.

Objective 6.6

Provide training for teachers and other education staff on identifying and responding to persons at risk for suicide.

GOAL 7: Develop and Promote Effective Clinical and Professional Practices

Objective 7.1

Develop and enhance existing core competencies of health and mental health professionals for the recognition, assessment and initial management of suicidal behavior (e.g., primary care providers, medical students, school counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, emergency department personnel).

Objective 7.2

Establish basic skills for other disciplines that promote the recognition of emotional distress, assessment of suicide risk, and (where indicated) referral to mental and/or health professionals.

Objective 7.3

Promote the coordination of services and a multidisciplinary approach among those who assess and intervene with individuals at risk for suicide and substance abuse.

GOAL 8: Increase Access to and Community Linkages with Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

Objective 8.1

Provide no cost and/or affordable mental health and substance abuse services.

Objective 8.2

Implement effective utilization management guidelines for suicide risk in managed care and insurance plans.

Objective 8.3

Develop and disseminate tools (e.g., web sites, resource guides) for accessing mental health and substance abuse services for professionals and the public alike.

Objective 8.4

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Develop and support innovative ways to deliver crisis services (e.g., mobile, telephonic, Internet) to individuals who otherwise would not receive services.

Objective 8.5

Ensure that everyone at risk for suicide is linked to mental health and substance abuse services. These services should be accessible, timely, culturally appropriate, clinically appropriate, and age appropriate.

Objective 8.6

Develop guidelines for support programs for suicide survivors.

Objective 8.7

Develop support programs for suicide attempt survivors.

GOAL 9: Improve Reporting and Portrayals of Suicidal Behavior, Mental Illness, and Substance Abuse in the Entertainment and News Media

Objective 9.1

Provide and promote guidelines for responsible suicide reporting to practicing professionals and professionals in training who are involved in entertainment, news media and public relations.

Objective 9.2

Establish a state council comprised of entertainment and news media representatives, mental health professionals, and suicide prevention experts to serve as a resource and provide guidance to the media on the depiction of suicide and mental illness.

Objective 9.3

Provide a mechanism to offer public recognition for exemplary portrayals of suicidal behavior in the entertainment and news media.

GOAL 10: Promote and Support Research on Suicide and Suicide Prevention

Objective 10.1

Develop a California suicide research agenda that reflects state population needs.

Objective 10.2

Advocate for more research funds within California for research on suicide and suicide prevention.

Objective 10.3

Evaluate existing suicide prevention programs and promote implementation of effective programs.

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Objective 10.4

Create a California suicide prevention research consortium to facilitate communication and collaboration among researchers involved in suicide and suicide prevention research.

Objective 10.5

Create a statewide database of suicide prevention programs operating in California.

Objective 10.6

Promote and expand research on suicide and suicide prevention in California universities, colleges, and other organizations.

GOAL 11: Improve and Expand Surveillance Systems

Objective 11.1

Pass state legislation implementing mandatory reporting of suspected suicide attempts.

Objective 11.2

Increase the number of death review teams in California which address suicide across the life span.

Objective 11.3

Increase linkages among data systems that collect data on suicidal behavior.

Objective 11.4

Examine and expand existing behavioral risk surveys to include additional suicide, mental health and substance abuse questions.

Objective 11.5

Conduct behavioral risk surveys in non-traditional settings (e.g., juvenile detention facilities, homeless shelters) to better reach persons at risk for suicide.

Objective 11.6

Develop and implement standardized protocols for death scene investigations.

Objective 11.7

Develop and implement statewide criteria for the determination of suicide by medical examiners and coroners.

References

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2001). National strategy for suicide prevention: Goals and objectives for action. Rockville, MD. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service. Available at

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<http://www.mentalhealth.org/suicideprevention> or
<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports.htm>