

# SUICIDE PREVENTION GUIDE

SEPTEMBER 2021

Creating Hope Through Action



Pennsylvania Network for  
Student Assistance Services



## September is Suicide Prevention Month

In the United States, September is acknowledged as Suicide Prevention Month, with the week of September 5th-11th identified as National Suicide Prevention Week. Around the world, September 10th is recognized as World Suicide Prevention Day. The goal of annual suicide prevention observances is to provide education and encourage advocacy around this public health challenge toward which prevention efforts can and should occur every single day.

This September, the theme of Suicide Prevention Month is Creating Hope through Action. As communities here in Pennsylvania, nationwide, and around the world continue to experience the social, economic, and health-related impacts and disparities associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, this theme offers an important opportunity to work together to promote awareness, provide support, and take action to prevent suicide.

There has not been any conclusive data indicating that suicide rates have increased as a result of the pandemic. However, the ongoing stress and uncertainty of the pandemic remains a widespread concern. Furthermore, trauma, loss, racism, job and financial insecurity have continued to impact individuals' mental and physical health, and these concerns have disproportionately affected communities of color. Despite the challenges over the past year and a half, communities throughout Pennsylvania have shown creativity, flexibility, and commitment in their efforts to adapt to change and problem-solve together. It is through relationships and connections, both personal and professional, that many have found a sense of hope in these challenging times.

At the state-level and throughout local communities, many steps have been taken over the past year to create hope through action. The Governor's Suicide Prevention Task Force released a new four-year suicide prevention plan including 8 goals and objectives that represent Pennsylvania's priorities. The plan was developed collaboratively by multiple state agencies, members of the General Assembly, and Prevent Suicide PA, and it was based on input reflecting the experiences and recommendations of hundreds of community members statewide. Through various statewide grants and initiatives, there are efforts underway to prevent suicide among specific populations, to build capacity to address the needs of individuals in crisis, and to improve suicide-related data collection and reporting for prevention. Locally, county suicide prevention task forces and advocacy groups continue to promote awareness, offer education, and provide resources and support based on identified needs.

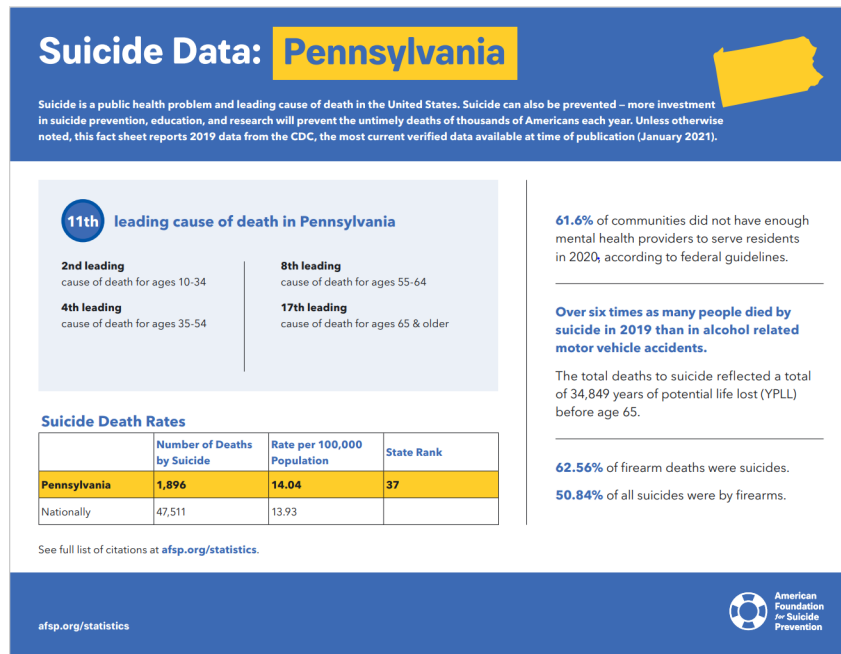
Everyone has a role in preventing suicide. In recognizing Suicide Prevention Month, we can work to reduce the stigma around suicide, suicide attempts, and mental health challenges, and we can reinforce the message that help is available. The following guide offers a broad range of suicide prevention resources and strategies for individuals, families, organizations, and communities. The information in this guide can be used during the month of September and throughout the year.

*Thank you for your willingness to create hope and take action to save lives.*



## Brief Statistics: Why Suicide Prevention Matters

We all want to live in healthy, happy communities that thrive in all aspects of wellness. Research shows us that the prevalence of suicide in the United States, as well as in Pennsylvania, has increased significantly, especially over the past decade. However, suicide rates decreased in 2019 and are projected to decrease based on 2020 data (CDC, 2021). Below is a graphic from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.



Data such as this helps us demonstrate the severity of the problem of suicide and the lasting impact it has on a community. The data doesn't just represent a number, but someone's mother or father, brother or sister, neighbor, or loved one who has, for one reason or another, temporarily lost hope.

When we promote resources like our hotlines and crisis centers, we frequently see increases in the number of people who reach out for help rather than struggling alone.

### Data Sources:

- [Center for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#)
- [Pennsylvania Youth Survey \(PAYS\)](#)
- [Department of Health Enterprise Data Dissemination Information Exchange \(EDDIE\)](#)
- [SPRC \(2020\) racial/ethnic trends in suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and suicide deaths](#)
- [Trevor Project Survey on LGBTQ+ Youth \(2021\)](#)



## Creating an Effective Message

Adapted with permission from *Moving Toward Prevention: A Guide for Reframing Sexual Violence*.  
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While focusing on prevention efforts can seem overwhelming at times, your words and actions can help save a life. Here are some overarching guidelines for the development of your messaging to prevent suicide.

### Evoked shared values

*Who are you attempting to influence? Schools? Faith-based institutions? First Responders?  
Identify the value you want them to work toward.*

**Example: Everyone deserves to feel safe, supported, and heard.**

### Acknowledge negative feelings, like discomfort, fear, or lingering doubts

*By acknowledging difficulty, doubt, and discomfort, you can help your audience manage their feelings and avoid using them as a reason to avoid the subject.*

**Example: I realize that talking about the issue of suicide can make some of us uncomfortable.**

### Model a journey toward change, it's starting point and pivotal moments

*Provide the next steps on how you will make prevention possible. Engage with survivors of suicide loss and individuals with lived experiences to light the way of healing for others.*

**Example: Many people have shared that hearing personal stories from survivors of suicide loss helped them feel connected and sparked hope, even in their most difficult times.**

### State the problem precisely

*Identify what piece of the problem you are wanting to address. Choose information or a fact to support it.*

**Example: Feelings of discomfort or shame make it hard for people to talk about suicide, and that silence makes it hard for people to reach out and find help.**

### Show Progress

*Identify examples (big or small) of how prevention efforts have helped your community.*

**Example: Trainings, such as QPR Suicide Prevention for Gatekeepers and Mental Health First Aid, have helped people learn to speak about these issues and offer support and assistance to people who are struggling with feelings of helplessness or despair.**

### Name concrete solutions

*Be realistic. Make it achievable.*

**Example: We will provide training to individuals throughout our community so they can learn how to recognize the signs, respond, and refer someone to safety.**



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## Words Matter

It can feel uncomfortable, and sometimes even scary, to talk about mental health and suicide prevention. By finding the courage within ourselves to engage in open discussions, we can help save lives. Here are some tips that may help when engaging in courageous conversations.

- Practice using nonjudgmental language when discussing suicide.
- Present suicide as a preventable event.
- When talking about a suicide death, utilize language that is sensitive to the grieving family.
- Use objective terms for suicidal events, such as “death by suicide” or “non-fatal attempt.”
  - Avoid using the words "commit or complete suicide." The phrase "committed suicide" is usually associated with a sin or a crime, which suicide is neither. Using the words "completed suicide" conveys success or accomplishing something good, which suicide is not. The proper term for someone who has taken their own life is "died by suicide." Also acceptable is "killed him/her/themselves" or "took their own life."
- When discussing the frequency of suicide, always emphasize the importance of every single life. This helps demonstrate that one loss is too many.
- Always provide information for assistance, such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255).



### For additional information on safe messaging:

- [Safe and Effective Messaging for Suicide Prevention](#): Evidence-based recommendations from the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC).
- [Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide](#): This guide important points for covering suicide, “do’s and don’ts” for safe reporting, and suggestions for online media/message boards/bloggers. Additional information can be found at <http://reportingonsuicide.org/>.
- [Framework for Successful Messaging](#): The National Action Alliance has provided this framework for public messaging (e.g., posters, PSAs, social media, websites, etc.) to ensure that suicide-related messages are safe, strategic, positive, and in line with best practices.

## Mental Wellness Resources

We are all on a spectrum for mental health. As we continue to transition from COVID-19 and make sense of recent events, it is more important than ever to bring mental health and well-being to the forefront of conversations. We all can play a vital role in promoting connectedness and resiliency.

### Self-care:

- [Managing Stress and Anxiety](#)
- [Resources to Support Mental Health and Coping with the Coronavirus](#): a compiled list from Suicide Prevention Resource Center of webpages and information sheets.
- [Mental Health Mobile Apps](#): a compiled list of mobile apps for mental health and wellness.
- [Virtual Calming Room](#): Jana Marie Foundation created a virtual calming room for students, teachers, and caring adults to find tools and strategies for managing emotions and building resiliency.

### For information on staying connected:

- [Active Minds](#): Active Minds has developed a resource page specifically geared toward supporting mental health during the pandemic.
- [Jana Marie Foundation](#): Jana Marie Foundation created a guide for building community while maintaining social distancing.
- [Aavidum](#): Striving to create communities where everyone feels understood and accepted.

### BIPOC Resources:

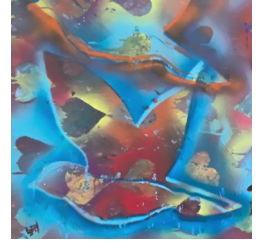
- [MHA BIPOC and LGBTQ+ Mental Health Facts, Stats, and Resources](#)
- [2021 MHA National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month Toolkit](#)
- [Culturally Competent Approaches and Resources](#)
- [Ring the Alarm: The Crisis of Black Youth Suicide in America](#)

### Toolkits and Programs for School and Community Settings:

- [Compassionate Resilience Toolkit by Wisconsin Dept. of Public Instruction, WISE Wisconsin, and Rogers InHealth](#)
- [Mind Matters by Jana Marie Foundation](#)
- [Mental Health Curriculum by Aavidum](#)
- [Prevent Suicide PA Suicide Prevention Online Learning Center](#)



## Suicide Prevention Awareness: Sample Action Steps



- Use a [virtual background](#) or [Facebook frame](#) (available to access from 9/1-9/30) or [download social media graphics](#) to help raise awareness.
- Host an educational training such as Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) Suicide Prevention for Gatekeepers Course, Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), or Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST).
- Post signs with positive messages around your school, workplace, or town. Be sure to include the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Number (1-800-273-8255 (TALK)) or Crisis Text Line (Text PA to 741741).
- Light a candle on September 10th to remember a loved one or to remind yourself that you matter.
- Work with your county commissioners to proclaim September as Suicide Prevention Month (see example at the end of packet) and attend “Awareness Day at the Capitol” in Harrisburg on Wednesday, September 29, 2021.
- Check in with your County Suicide Prevention Taskforce to find ways to support local efforts.
- Share posters and videos from the [Prevent Suicide PA Annual PSA Contest](#) for high school students to help spread awareness.
  - [Find out more about the 2022 contest, launching September 20, 2021](#)
- Visit [Suicide Prevention Online Learning Center](#) and take a free suicide prevention training.
- Attend a [Prevent Suicide PA Baseball Night](#) with the Phillies or Pirates or work with your local sports team to create a suicide prevention night.
- Participate in Drive Out Suicide by placing a [free suicide prevention magnet](#) on your car. Raise awareness about suicide prevention as a social justice issue within your community by sharing resources and education materials. Here are some links and resources:
  - <https://nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/September-2017/Suicide-Prevention-as-a-Social-Justice-Issue>
  - <https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/global-mhffc/responding-covid-19-mental-health-disparities>
  - [Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Antiracism - The Jed Foundation \(JED\)](#)

*The following national and international associations have developed resource guides containing additional lists of activities and ideas that can be implemented across settings:*

- International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP): [Suggested activities](#)
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center: [Suicide Prevention Month Ideas for Action](#)
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: <https://afsp.org/keepgoing>



## Crisis Resources

You are not alone. Many organizations are working each and every day to support you and your efforts with suicide prevention. Please consider using these crisis lines and resources in your messaging during Suicide Prevention Month.

### **National:**

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: **1-800-273-8255 (TALK)** or visit <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>
  - [Veterans Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#): **1-800-273-8255, press 1**
  - [Spanish Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#): **1-888-628-9454**
- Crisis Text Line: **TEXT PA to 741741** or visit <http://www.crisistextline.org/>
- The Trevor Project: 1-866-488-7386 or visit <https://www.thetrevorproject.org>
- Trans Lifeline: 1-877-565-8860 <https://www.translifeline.org>

### **Pennsylvania:**

- [List](#) of Crisis Intervention contact information by county.
- [County Task Force Resources](#): By county, available contact information is provided for crisis, the Suicide Prevention Task Force, local chapter of AFSP, and other local mental health/suicide prevention resources.

## National and State Organizations

### **National:**

- American Association of Suicidology (AAS): <http://www.suicidology.org/>
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP): <https://afsp.org/>
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC): <http://www.sprc.org/>

### **Pennsylvania:**

- Jana Marie Foundation: <http://www.janamariefoundation.org/>
- Aavidum: <http://aavidum.com>
- Prevent Suicide PA: <http://preventsuicidepa.org/>
- Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services (PNSAS): <http://pnsas.org/>
- Services for Teens at Risk (STAR) Center: [www.starcenter.pitt.edu](http://www.starcenter.pitt.edu)





## Social Media

### **Sample Social Media Posts** (to be copied or adapted):

*Today is World Suicide Prevention Day. Reach out to a friend and let them know you care. #JanaMarieFoundation #PreventSuicidePA #Aavidum*

*We all want our kids to grow up to be healthy, happy, and successful adults. If you know a young person who is experiencing a mental health concern or crisis, help is available. Text PA to 741741. #JanaMarieFoundation #PreventSuicidePA #Aavidum*

*It can feel scary and overwhelming when someone you love is experiencing a mental health crisis. Offering a listening ear and consistent support can be great ways you can show you care. Learn more at [preventsuicidepa.org](https://preventsuicidepa.org). #JanaMarieFoundation #PreventSuicidePA #Aavidum*

*You can play an important role in preventing suicide. Knowing the warning signs and how to ask the question can help save lives. Learn more at <https://janamariefoundation.org/candid-conversations/>. #JanaMarieFoundation #PreventSuicidePA #Aavidum*

*This year's World Suicide Prevention Day theme is "Creating Hope Through Action." We want you to know that there are resources available and people who want are here for you. If you or a loved one is in need of crisis support call 1800-273-8255 (or you can insert local crisis number). #JanaMarieFoundation #PreventSuicidePA #Aavidum*

*Today is World Suicide Prevention Day – Creating Hope Through Action. There is always help available. Visit <https://janamariefoundation.org> to learn more. #JanaMarieFoundation #PreventSuicidePA #Aavidum*

*Did you know Facebook has a way to reach out to a friend who may be in crisis? If you are concerned about a post you can contact your friend directly, or have Facebook send them a message that help is available. Learn more here:*

<https://www.facebook.com/fbsafety/photos/>

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*#JanaMarieFoundation #PreventSuicidePA #Aavidum*



## Sample Proclamation

An official signing of a proclamation by your county commissioners is a great way to publicize the kick-off for Suicide Prevention Month and the activities that will be taking place throughout the month. Below is sample proclamation verbiage:

### Suicide Prevention Month 2021

#### Suicide Prevention Day, September 10, 2021

WHEREAS, suicide is a leading cause of death in the United States; and

WHEREAS, in the state of Pennsylvania, one person dies by suicide every four hours, making it the second leading cause of death for ages 15-34 and the 4th leading cause of death for ages 35-54.; and

WHEREAS, nearly five million people in the United States have lost a loved one to suicide; and

WHEREAS, each member of our community is valued and irreplaceable; and

WHEREAS, talking openly about stress and psychological health builds trust, reduces barriers to care, and enables early intervention; and

WHEREAS, local and statewide suicide prevention efforts should be developed and encouraged to the maximum extent possible, and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED the [COUNTY] Board of Commissioners does hereby proclaim September 2021 as “Suicide Awareness and Prevention Month” and September 10, 2021 as “Suicide Awareness and Prevention Day” in [COUNTY].

Proclaimed this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2021.

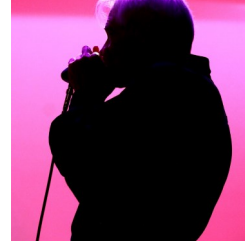
[COUNTY] Board of Commissioners,

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Name, Title



## Working Together.



Organizations across the state of Pennsylvania continue to work together to provide mental health and suicide prevention education and awareness events. Jana Marie Foundation, Garrett Lee Smith Youth Suicide Prevention Grant, Prevent Suicide PA, Aavidum, and the Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistant Services are proud to provide this informational packet to help you build awareness and take action to prevent suicide within your community.

### About Jana Marie Foundation

Jana Marie Foundation harnesses the power of creative expression and dialogue to spark conversations, build connections, and promote mental wellness among young people and their communities. The organization envisions communities working together to knock down walls and transform emotional distress into resilience and hope. Jana Marie Foundation is located in Centre County, Pennsylvania.

<https://janamariefoundation.org>

### About Garrett Lee Smith Youth Suicide Prevention Grant

The Garrett Lee Smith Youth Suicide Prevention Grant is a five-year federal SAMHSA grant awarded to the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) at the Department of Human Services. Using a two-tiered model, this project targets youth ages 10-24. Tier 1 is statewide and provides awareness, training, and screening activities to equip mental health professionals and the general public to increase identification and improve outcomes for youth at risk. Tier 2 works with target counties to promote systemic change to improve continuity of care between youth serving systems for those at risk of suicide.

### About Prevent Suicide PA

Prevent Suicide PA supports those who are affected by suicide, provides education, awareness, and understanding by collaborating with the community to prevent suicide, and reduces the stigma associated with suicide. The organization envisions having a Commonwealth where every life is valued, that everyone has the support necessary to get help when needed, and that hope and healing abounds in every person.

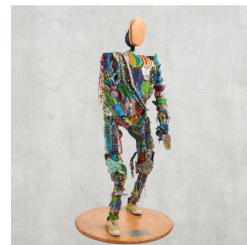
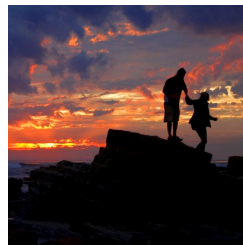
<http://preventsuicidepa.org/>



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## Working Together, Continued



### About Aavidum

Aavidum is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that empowers youth to shatter the silence surrounding depression, suicide, and other issues facing teens. The word Aavidum, which means “I’ve got your back,” was created by students after a classmate died by suicide. Aavidum uses free student-driven clubs, curricula, and other programming to inspire schools and communities to adopt cultures of care and advocacy, encouraging all members to have their friends’ backs. Aavidum exists in nearly 300 elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and colleges.

<http://aavidum.org/>

### About Services for Teens At Risk (STAR) Center

Services for Teens At Risk (STAR-Center is a suicide prevention program for teens and young children within the Division of Child and Adolescent Services at Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic and the Department of Psychiatry, University of Pittsburgh. From its inception in 1986, the program has been primarily funded through an appropriation from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to the University of Pittsburgh. The program combines clinical and outreach services designed to combat the problem of child and adolescent suicide. We provide outpatient assessment and treatment for depressed and anxious children and teens. We also offer acute treatment to depressed and suicidal teens via our Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP). STAR-Center Outreach adapts and disseminates what we have learned about best practice clinical care into practical guidelines for educational and community settings and offers trainings and consultations.

[www.starcenter.pitt.edu](http://www.starcenter.pitt.edu)

### About Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services (PNSAS)

The mission of the Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services is to provide leadership for developing a safe and drug-free environment and mental health wellness in schools and communities across the commonwealth. Barriers to learning will be removed and student academic achievement will be enhanced through collaborative prevention, intervention, and postvention services. The Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services provides technical support to counties and Student Assistance Programs (SAP) teams in schools districts, charter, cyber, and nonpublic schools across Pennsylvania. For more information about the Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services, visit <http://pnsas.org/>. Contact your local school to find out how their SAP teams can help provide support to children/adolescents and their families.

<http://pnsas.org/>



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