Preventing Suicide

A Discussion with Research America Members

Bob Gebbia, CEO, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention,
September 14, 2022
This discussion is timely as September is National Suicide Prevention Month
More importantly, mental health and suicide prevention have become priorities, especially as a result of the pandemic
The Pandemic Impacted our Mental Health

- Isolation
- Human Loss
- Social & Political Unrest
- Increased Depression, Anxiety, Substance Use
- Financial Loss
Mental health became a priority

Use of tele-mental health

New Federal funding

Focus on health disparities

More information, less stigma

Increased demand for AFSP’s research, programs & advocacy
Our Mission
Save Lives and Bring Hope to Those Affected by Suicide
Our Positioning

We are the voluntary health organization that gives those affected by suicide a nationwide community empowered by research, education and advocacy to take action against this leading cause of death.
AFSP has 74 Chapters across all 50 States
Recently formed a chapter in Puerto Rico
Suicide is a health issue.
Suicide can be prevented.
The Scope of the Problem
Scope of the Problem

• Suicide is the 12th leading cause of death in the U.S. 45,979 people died by suicide in 2020
• Someone dies by suicide every 40 seconds
• Rates have been trending up slightly among youth, were high in 2020 for adults 25 to 34 years of age
• For every suicide, approx. 25 others attempt
• Suicide impacts families & friends, schools, workplaces and communities
Who is at risk?
Risk Factors

- Health
- Historical
- Environmental
Health Factors

Mental Health Conditions
• Depression
• Bipolar disorder
• Anxiety disorders
• Eating disorders

• Personality disorders
• Psychosis
• PTSD
• Substance use disorders
Other Health Factors

- Serious or chronic health conditions
- Chronic pain
- Serious head injuries
Historical Factors

- Family history of suicide
- Family history of mental health conditions
- Childhood abuse
- Previous suicide attempts
- Loss
Environmental Factors

• Access to lethal means
• Exposure/contagion
• Prolonged stress
• Stressful life event
PREVENTION

Protective Factors

• Mental health care
• Family and community support
• Problem-solving skills
• Cultural and religious beliefs
Mental health care is an important ingredient for preventing suicide.
The law requires insurance plans to cover mental health services the same as physical health services.
Past year highlights
Chapters delivered 2,000 progs (virtually & in-person), TSL, now in Spanish, with modules for older adults, workplaces, firearms owners, LGBTQ audiences

Launched new programs: It’s Real: Teens and Mental Health, Supporting Those At Risk, and Finding Hope
Developed programs to address MH & SP among underserved populations

Formed a partnership with National Latino Behavioral Health Assoc., culturally appropriate content available in Spanish

Strengthened our partnerships on LGBTQ suicide prevention

Created a quarterly Virtual Town Hall Series: Elevating Voices for Long-Lasting Change

Revised research grant priorities
Healing Conversations provides support to the recently bereaved.

*International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day* had 221 sites, in 50 states, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, and in 20 countries.
Our Interactive Screening Program engages with people who may be struggling anonymously and works to connect them with services.

It is in use at colleges, medical schools, workplaces, healthcare systems, VA, community settings.

The program reached a record of 175 sites, has connected 250,000 people.
Funded 34 new studies, bringing the current investment in research grants to $28M

AFSP funds a wide range of research: neurobiological, genetic, psychosocial, clinical, community interventions, and more

Held an *International Research Summit* with the International Academy for Suicide Research, 550 researchers, from 37 countries discussed latest findings, gaps in knowledge
Top 10 Research Findings

1. Suicide is related to brain functions that affect decision-making and behavioral control, making it difficult for people to find positive solutions.

2. Limiting a person’s access to methods of killing themselves can dramatically decrease suicide.

3. Ninety percent of people who die by suicide have an underlying – and potentially treatable – mental health condition.

4. Depression, bipolar disorder, and substance abuse are strongly linked to suicidal thinking and behavior.

5. Specific treatments and intervention – such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, Safety Planning – have been proven to help people manage their suicidal ideation and behavior.
Top 10 Research Findings

6. There isn’t a single reason when someone dies by suicide, life stresses combined with risk factors, such as childhood trauma, substance use, chronic physical pain – can contribute to someone taking their life.

7. Asking someone if they’re thinking about suicide won’t “put the idea in their head” – and might start a caring conversation.

8. Certain medications used to treat depression or stabilize mood have been proven to help reduce suicidal thoughts and behavior.

9. If someone can get through the intense, and short, moment of active suicidal crisis, chances are they will not die by suicide.

10. Most people who survive a suicide attempt (85 to 95 percent) go on to engage in life.
Held our annual Advocacy Forum virtually, advocates urged support for research, tele-mental health, implementation of 988

Federal appropriations for Lifeline and crisis services increased significantly

Capitol Days held in 50 States & D.C., we championed 203 bills, 53 signed into law

Our army of volunteer field advocates is growing, now over 40,000
988 is live

It’s a big accomplishment and cause for celebration
988 is live

It’s also just the beginning … of a transition to a more robust, more comprehensive, more effective crisis response system
Is 988 ready?

Federal investments have increased the Lifeline's capacity, and added incentive grants to states.

Local crisis center capacity must be strengthened, or wait times will increase, calls will go unanswered, people won't get help.

Centers must be adequately staffed, and trained to ensure quality, culturally competent care.
Can 988 save lives?

Yes, we must invest in a comprehensive crisis system, that includes:

• Use of mobile crisis outreach when needed
• Follow-up to callers
• Reduced reliance on law enforcement, emergency departments

Diverts from current efforts that do not always ensure safety, or treat underlying mental health conditions or suicidality
Can 988 save lives?

Yes, this model has life-changing, life-saving potential.
AFSP is a leading voice for public education...on caring for mental health, preventing suicide...and we are reaching millions
September is National Suicide Prevention Month
The campaign for the Out of the Darkness Walks offers hopeful messages, helping people know they are not alone and that more must be done to support mental health and suicide prevention.
Loss & Healing Messaging

Messages of hope and healing on social media through graphics crafted by our content experts
Social Media Performance

Followers: @AFSPnational has 742,000 followers across all social media accounts, over 1.1 million with chapter pages

Paid Social Media: reached 2.8 million people

Social Media Impressions: @AFSPnational had over 80 million total impressions
Audacy Partnership

AFSP has national partnership with Audacy

Examples include:
- Co-branded exclusive Out of the Darkness Walks radio station.
- Community Walk PSA radio campaign
- Guest panelists on Audacy’s I’m Listening Broadcasts
- Beneficiary of the We Can Survive Concert at Hollywood Bowl
Media & Entertainment

Provided advice on dozens of TV, film, other creative projects for entertainment platforms

Our analysis – at various stages, from earliest conception, to script drafts, and rough cut footage – allows us to work with content creators to encourage safety when storylines involve suicide, and accurately portray mental health for audiences.
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# CAMPAIGN RESULTS + AWARDS

## Social Media & Video Engagement

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## Campaign Ad Awareness & Impact

- 54% of young adults are aware of at least one of the campaign PSAs
- 61% of young adults are extremely/very comfortable supporting a friend who is struggling
- 67% of young adults talked to a friend about what they were going through, in past 6 months

## Donated Media

- Total Donated Media: $51M

## Fulfillment (Web + Instagram)

- Total Sessions: 2.3M
- IG Followers: 28.4k
AFSP, Suicide Prevention Resource Center, and National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention partnered to conduct a national public perception survey (2,000 adults) to understand public attitudes about mental health and suicide prevention.

Preliminary data points to:

- An increase in mental health literacy and understanding
- Most believe suicide is a preventable cause of death (94%)
- Most would take action if someone close was thinking about suicide (96%)
- Need for more education to support oneself, others who are struggling
- Difficulty accessing and/or affording mental health care
Expanding Partnerships
A nationwide initiative to reduce the annual U.S. suicide rate 20 percent by 2025.
The Four Critical Areas

- Firearms
- Healthcare Systems
- Emergency Departments
- Corrections Systems
What a 20% rate decrease looks like

Suicide Rate per 100,000

The 2015 age-adjusted suicide rate in the U.S. was 13.26 deaths per 100,000.

AFSP’s goal of 20% by 2025 would reduce the suicide rate to 10.3, the lowest it has been in more than 30 years.
The U.S. Suicide Rate Decreased in 2019 & 2020

Per 100,000
It’s an exciting, and promising time for our organization and our cause
Thank You!