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ASSOCIATION OF SUICIDOLOGY



American
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for Suicide
Prevention



First National Guidelines for Workplace Suicide Prevention Released Today

A call to action for workplaces to make suicide prevention a health priority

WASHINGTON (October 10, 2019) — Today on World Mental Health Day, the [American Association of Suicidology](#) (AAS), [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#) (AFSP), and [United Suicide Survivors International](#) (United Survivors), announce their collaboration and release of the first ‘National Guidelines for Workplace Suicide Prevention.’ These Guidelines — built by listening to the expertise of diverse groups like HR, employment law, employee assistance professionals, labor and safety leaders, and many people who had experienced a suicide crisis while they were employed — will help employers and workplaces become proactively involved in suicide prevention in the workplace. Employers ready to become vocal, visible and visionary and who are ready to take the pledge to make suicide prevention a health and safety priority visit [WorkplaceSuicidePrevention.com](#).

“Our collaborative partners envision a world where workplaces and professional associations join in the global suicide prevention effort by building and sustaining comprehensive strategies embedded within their health and safety priorities,” said **Sally Spencer-Thomas, Psy.D., and President of United Suicide Survivors International and Co-Chair for the Workplace Committee of the American Association of Suicidology**. “Across the United States, workplaces are taking a closer look at mental health promotion and suicide prevention, shifting their role and perspective on suicide from ‘not our business,’ to a mindset that says ‘we can do better.’ We hope this groundbreaking effort helps provide the inspiration and the roadmap to move workplaces and the organizations that support them from inactive bystanders to bold leaders.”

Many different positions can benefit from these guidelines including leadership, HR, community collaborators who will partner in the process, investors who can contribute resources for the development and sustainability of these guidelines, evaluators who can assess the effectiveness of workplace suicide prevention, peers (co-workers, family and friends) who want to help, and many others.

“I lost two brothers to suicide and I am sure some of their co-workers saw and knew things I was not privy to. It is time to make workplace suicide prevention a top priority,” said **Dennis Gillan, a speaker for Mental Health/Suicide Prevention and President of DGIF LLC**. “We typically spend more time with our co-workers than our families and they will see the best and worst in us as workplace challenges arise. Mental health promotion and suicide prevention should be a part of every workplace culture. The opportunity is now, not after a workplace crisis.”

"Union Pacific is committed to suicide prevention in the workplace and in the communities we serve across the nation," said **Mark R. Jones, PhD, General Director Health and Medical Services for Union Pacific Railroad**. "We believe that by taking the pledge and adopting these new guidelines, we can be a force for elevating the national conversation about suicide — and for how to build strategies in the workplace to prevent the pain caused by suicide and suicidal behavior."



The guidelines, designed to be cross-cutting through private and public sectors, large and small employers, and all industries will:

1. Give employers and professional associations an opportunity to pledge to engage in the effort of suicide prevention. Sign the pledge here: [WorkplaceSuicidePrevention.com](https://www.workplacesuicideprevention.com).
2. Demonstrate an implementation structure for workplace best practices in a comprehensive, public health approach.
3. Provide data and resources to advance the cause of workplace suicide prevention.
4. Bring together diverse stakeholders in a collaborative public-private model.
5. Make recommendations for easily deployed tools, trainings and resources for both short-term action and comprehensive and sustained strategy.

“As Americans spend more time at work, it is vitally important we create workplaces that recognize and reward employees that look out for each other and who reach out when those around them are struggling. When people are willing to provide support in the place where they spend much of their time, we will have a higher chance of connecting those who need mental health treatment to the available treatment,” said [Maggie Mortali, MPH, AFSP Senior Director of the Interactive Screening Program and workplace mental health expert](#). “Everyone needs to know how to create a safe workplace. These guidelines should be used in every workplace across the nation, no matter how big or small the company. Workers’ well-being should always be a priority.”

The creation of the guidelines were prompted after the nation’s first Workplace Task Force was formed in 2010 to determine what role workplaces might have in assisting in the implementation of the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention. Now named the ‘Workplace Committee for Suicide Prevention and Postvention,’ this cross-disciplinary team of national experts is housed under the umbrella of the American Association of Suicidology. Over the past decade, this committee has successfully developed several blueprints and resources to help workplaces prevent suicide and to support workers facing suicide crises. More here: <https://suicidology.org/about-aas/committees/>

After the [CDC’s 2018 published report](#) that ranked suicide rates by industry, some employers started to feel more of a sense of urgency and requested tools to protect their workers from this form of crisis and tragedy. The Committee resolved to do something more impactful: to create a set of National Guidelines for Workplace Suicide Prevention. Over the next two years, the group enrolled over 200 partners into the effort and subsequently forged a core partnership to conduct an exploratory analysis. The purpose of this initiative was to develop an interactive, accessible and effective tool to help employers implement best practices to reduce suicides. Some of these best practices are about supporting despairing or grieving employees and others are about fixing psychosocial hazards at work that can drive people to suicidal despair.

“As partners in this effort, we aim to change the culture of workplaces to reduce elements that job strain like sleep disruption, job insecurity and low job control -- things shown to be connected to suicide risk. In addition, workplaces can challenge negative, fear-based, prejudicial and discriminatory thoughts that prevent people from reaching out for help, while at the same time promoting psychologically healthy norms and environments,” said **Colleen Creighton, Executive Director of the American Association of Suicidology**. “We know these guidelines will not only save



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lives, but will also alleviate intense emotional suffering by making changes to systems while helping individuals in the workplace.”

“As an academic suicide researcher and prior to that, an employee assistance clinical social worker, I am thrilled to see the culmination of research and best practices resulting in clear and standardized guidelines for which work organization and other workplace leaders can use to improve their overall efforts to reduce suicide,” said **Jodi Frey, PhD, LCSW-C, Associate Professor, School of Social Work, University of Maryland and Co-Chair of the Workplace Committee.** “These guidelines will help bridge the workplace with fields of public health and behavioral health to form stronger collaborations resulting in improved quality of life for employees and family members, while making significant strides to reduce the ever-increasing suicide death rate in the U.S.”

To learn more and to take the pledge, please visit WorkplaceSuicidePrevention.com and follow along on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/afsp), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/afsp), [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/afsp) and [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/afsp).

ABOUT AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SUICIDOLOGY (AAS)

Founded in 1968 by Edwin S. Shneidman, PhD, AAS promotes the research of suicide and its prevention, public awareness programs, public education and training for professionals and volunteers. The membership of AAS includes mental health and public health professionals, researchers, suicide prevention and crisis intervention centers, school districts, crisis center volunteers, survivors of suicide loss, attempt survivors, and a variety of lay persons who have an interest in suicide prevention. You can learn more about AAS at www.suicidology.org.

ABOUT AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION (AFSP)

[The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](http://www.afsp.org) 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](https://www.facebook.com/afsp), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/afsp), [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/afsp), and [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/afsp).

ABOUT UNITED SUICIDE SURVIVORS INTERNATIONAL (UNITED SURVIVORS)

United Suicide Survivors International is an independent international organization that serves as a home for people who have experienced suicide loss, suicide attempts and suicidal thoughts and feelings, and their friends and families — collectively known as people with lived experience with suicide — to leverage their expertise for large scale change. For more information, visit www.unitesurvivors.org or follow along on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/unitesurvivors), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/unitesurvivors), [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/unitesurvivors), and [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/unitesurvivors).