

The Journal of **Employee Assistance**

EAPs and AI: The Future is Now

| Page 4



PLUS:

**You're Invited to
Transform Your World
in San Francisco!**

Page 12

**Artificial Intelligence
in EAPs: A Global
Survey**

Page 14

**Positive Psychological
Practices in EAPs: Results
of a Recent Survey**

Page 28



| By Sally Spencer-Thomas PsyD and
Jodi Jacobson Frey PhD, CEAP

Workplace Suicide Prevention: From Crisis

to Culture Change



Every year 727,000 people take their own life and many more make suicide attempts. Suicide does not just occur in high-income countries but is a global phenomenon, affecting families, communities and workplaces throughout the lifespan and is one of the leading causes of death among employed individuals, with some estimates approximating 80 percent of those who die by suicide are of working age (18-65) and these rates among working-age populations have been increasing¹². However, many suicides are preventable and while employers may increasingly be motivated in suicide prevention and intervention, few have a clear roadmap for meaningful action. As EA professionals, called upon by our employer clients to address this complex issue, we may feel lack the tools, resources, and leadership commitment needed to impact it.

In 2018, a coalition of national partners, including the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, the American Association of Suicidology, and United Suicide Survivors International, catalyzed by increasing concerns about workforce suicide rates, came together to address the absence of clear, actionable, and comprehensive National Guidelines for Workplace Suicide Prevention³. Partnering with industry leaders, HR professionals, safety experts, EA leaders, and employees with lived experience a framework was developed through surveys, focus groups and interviews, a framework was developed to provide strategies for work organizations of all sizes and sectors.

This initiative was further supported by US Centers for Disease Control reports⁴ ranking industries by suicide risk, with construction, mining, law enforcement, healthcare, and agriculture among the highest. During the recent COVID-19 pandemic, requests for guidance surged and employers have evolved from no longer asking *if* they should address suicide, but asking *how*. This escalation accelerated the launch of the HOPE (*Helping Our People Elevate through tough times*) Certification. This organizational-based credentialing process is intended to operationalize the National Guidelines and serve as a blueprint for proactive, systemic culture change for addressing workplace wellbeing concerns including addiction recovery and overdose prevention. Grounded in the National Guidelines for Workplace Suicide Prevention, the HOPE Certification⁵ equips organizations with tools and metrics to shift from reactive suicide crisis responses to proactive culture change. In this article, insights from the first two cohorts of the HOPE Certification are shared along with how this model can help EA professionals and work organizations move from risk management to resilience building.

For EA professionals, the Certification process, in addition to the National Guidelines, represents a major opportunity. Rather than being positioned only as crisis responders, it seeks to integrate EA providers can into the organizational strategy at every level, helping to build the systems, language, and leadership alignment needed to prevent suicide and support psychological safety. For decades, EA professionals have served as a bridge between employee distress and organizational wellbeing. Today, with increasing awareness of mental health and suicide prevention, especially in high-risk industries like construction, manufacturing, law enforcement and healthcare, EAPs are being asked to do more, often with the same or fewer resources. The HOPE Certification offers a structured framework for EA professionals to:

- Advocate for systemic approaches to mental health;
- Align EA services with larger safety and wellbeing priorities;
- Facilitate conversations about suicide prevention and substance misuse as workplace health issues, not just individual crises; and
- Partner across departments (safety, HR, etc.) to embed psychological safety into policy and practice.

The HOPE Certification is a learning and implementation program that helps organizations implement the National Guidelines. Developed by Dr. Spencer-Thomas and sponsored by United Suicide Survivors International, the certification is industry-agnostic. Its best practices can be implemented across organizations of varying sizes and sectors. Participating organizations work toward implementing nine core practices, grouped into three categories:

- **Upstream:** Leadership commitment, cultural communications and psychosocial risk reduction
- **Midstream:** Peer support, training, and universal screening
- **Downstream:** Crisis response, postvention planning, and strategic partnerships with EAPs



Feature Article – Workplace Suicide Prevention

During the year-long process, each organization creates a customized roadmap with measurable goals, and receives consultation, resources and support from experts and cohort peers.

Key Takeaways from the First Two Cohorts

The first HOPE Certification cohorts included US work organizations with a strong showing from construction firms, labor unions, and healthcare systems. EA professionals were often central to these efforts, providing subject matter expertise and helping coordinate internal stakeholder engagement. Some of the most compelling lessons learned included:

- **Cross-Functional Teams Create Accountability and Momentum** - Organizations that formed multi-departmental mental health task forces saw greater success. When safety leaders, HR directors, and EA providers worked together, their work became embedded rather than siloed.

Takeaway for EA Professionals: Leading or co-leading cross-functional workplace mental health initiatives, allows EAPS to provide system-level perspectives and insights, a key asset.

- **Storytelling Reduces Stigma and Builds Buy-In** - Hearing lived experience from coworkers, especially when those stories involved recovery, help-seeking, or loss, proved to be one of the most effective tools in culture change. Storytellers can be properly prepared for their role by EAPs.

Takeaway for EA Professionals: Train and support peer allies and storytellers. Partner with leadership to make storytelling part of regular meetings and safety briefings.



- **Postvention Planning is a Critical Gap** - Many organizations were unprepared for how to respond after a suicide loss. Through the Certification process, EA professionals helped develop postvention plans aligned with trauma-informed care and best practices in organizational communications.
Takeaway for EA Professionals: Leading or co-leading postvention planning efforts contributes to proactively developed templates, communication protocols, and staff support strategies.
- **Metrics Matter, But So Do Moments** - Many organizations were able to identify ‘bright spots’ such as increases in peer support engagement or visible shifts in leadership language with potential for transformational cultural change.
Takeaway for EA Professionals: Track both hard data and anecdotal indicators of success. Keep a log of leadership engagement, training participation, and qualitative feedback.

Spotlight: MINES & Associates – Peer Support for an Industry

MINES & Associates, under the leadership of Dr. Dani Kimlinger, exemplifies how EAPs can go beyond traditional services to drive organizational change. MINES & Associates, based in the US state of Colorado, has long been a leader in delivering innovative EAPs, wellness strategies, and organizational development services. Initially, a sponsor of the Colorado cohort that started in 2023, MINES decided to go through the process as a part of their own organizational development. Through their participation in the HOPE Certification, MINES took their internal practices and external influence to a new level, demonstrating how EAPs can model what they encourage their client organizations to do.

Driven by an awareness of internal and industry-wide gaps in mental health support, the MINES team developed comprehensive tool kits, harm-reduction strategies, and a proactive mental health emergency protocol. Rather than wait for crises to emerge, they created a scalable infrastructure for prevention and early intervention. Perhaps most notably, MINES spearheaded the formation of a national peer support network within the EAP and business psychology industry. This effort facilitated cross-organizational connection, reducing isolation for professionals in high-stress roles and embedding peer support into the professional identity of their field.

Internally, the HOPE Certification process nurtured leadership development as employees across functional roles took ownership of different facets of the certification roadmap. These efforts led to meaningful shifts not only in services, but in the organizational culture. MINES’ post-certification survey showed:

- 82 percent of participants agreed, “My organizational culture has improved because of the Certification program.”
- 78 percent reported improved offerings and communication related to mental health, substance use, and well-being.
- Staff noted that job strain due to client demands, a top concern in the pre-assessment, was significantly reduced through intentional team-based approaches, such as redistributing workload and increasing internal support mechanisms.

“The HOPE Certification gave us structure, but more importantly, it gave us momentum,” said Dr. Kimlinger. “As a behavioral health firm, we knew the importance of mental wellness, but this process helped us embody it. It challenged us to set a new standard for ourselves and our industry.”

What's Next: The Road Ahead

The HOPE Certification continues to grow, with new cohorts forming quarterly. Future iterations will expand industry-specific tools, such as:

- Culturally responsive materials for Spanish-speaking workers.
- Integration with Total Worker Health⁶ and Recovery-Friendly Workplace frameworks⁷.
- More robust evaluation strategies, including long-term tracking of EAP utilization and wellbeing indicators.

The HOPE Certification model has rapidly gained traction across the US, transitioning from pilot programs to a scalable national initiative. Following successful implementations in the states of New York and Colorado, where participating organizations reported significant increases in EAP utilization and enhanced mental health awareness, it is now being adopted in diverse sectors, including state agencies, municipalities, safety-critical industries like construction, and large healthcare systems such as Banner Health and CommonSpirit. EA professionals are encouraged to join these cohorts, either through employer participation, as sponsors for their clients and prospects, or as consultants.

For EAPs, this expansion presents a unique opportunity to serve as strategic partners to embed comprehensive mental health and suicide prevention frameworks within organizational cultures. By adopting the HOPE model, EAPs can move beyond traditional reactive roles, contributing proactively to leadership engagement, psychosocial hazard mitigation, and the development of peer support networks. Through this collaborative approach, and in tandem with the [EAPA Core Technology #7 - Consultation to work organizations to encourage availability of and employee access to health benefits covering medical and behavioral concerns](#) - EAP participants can not only enhance the effectiveness of their services but also position themselves as integral to fostering resilient, supportive workplaces.

To join this transformative movement and explore how your organization can implement the HOPE Certification, visit <https://www.unitesurvivors.com/hopecertification>. Together, we can create work environments where mental health is prioritized, and every employee feels supported.

¹ Sussell A, Peterson C, Li J, et al. Suicide Rates by Industry and Occupation - National Vital Statistics System, United States, 2021. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 2023;72:1346–1350. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7250a2>.

² Greiner B & Arensman, E. (2022) The role of work in suicidal behavior: Uncovering Priorities for Research and Prevention. Scandinavian Journal of Work and Environmental Health. 48(6):419–424. <https://doi.org/10.5271/sjweh.4051>

³ National Guidelines online: <https://workplacesuicideprevention.com/>

⁴ Peterson C, Sussell A, Li J, et al. (2020) Suicide Rates by Industry and Occupation - National Violent Death Reporting System, 32 States, 2016. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 69:57–62. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6903a1>

⁵ HOPE Certification online: <https://www.unitesurvivors.com/hopecertification>

⁶ Total Worker Health is a strategy of policies, programs, and practices that integrate protection from work-related safety and health hazards with promotion of injury and illness prevention efforts to advance worker well-being.

⁷ A Recovery-Friendly Workplace provides the policies, resources and support to foster a supportive environment that encourages the success of their employees in recovery from substance use disorders.

Sally Spencer-Thomas, PsyD is a clinical psychologist and mental health advocate for workplace mental health and suicide prevention. She is President of United Suicide Survivors International and co-founder of the HOPE Certification program.

Jodi Jacobson Frey, PhD, LCSW-C is Professor and Associate Dean for Research at the University of Maryland, Baltimore and Co-Chair of the Workplace Suicide Prevention Committee. She leads evaluation efforts for several behavioral health initiatives, including the HOPE Certification (co-lead) and Maryland's Recovery Friendly Workplace Program.

Dani Kimlinger, PhD, MHA, SPHR, SHRM-SCP is the CEO of MINES and Associates, an international business psychology firm, a cohort partner in the HOPE Certification, helping workplaces implement sustainable mental health strategies.

Workplace Suicide Prevention Resources

24/7 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline dial 988, text TALK to 741741 or 988lifeline.org for free support (English/Spanish)

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention *[After a Suicide: Postvention Toolkit for Workplaces](https://workplacesuicideprevention.com/)* primarily designed for organizational leaders and human resource professionals, but useful guidance for all levels of stakeholders in suicide response. <https://workplacesuicideprevention.com/>

US Centers for Disease Control *Critical Steps Your Workplace Can Take Today to Prevent Suicide - <https://blogs.cdc.gov/niosh-science-blog/2023/03/15/preventing-workplace-suicide/> Suicide Prevention Resources for Action - www.cdc.gov/suicide/resources/prevention.html*

The **International Association for Suicide Prevention** is dedicated to preventing suicide, suicidal behaviour, and alleviating its effects. Its *Global Initiative to Prevent Suicide Partnerships for Life Networks* is active in the six World Health Organization regions (Africa, Europe, Eastern Mediterranean, Southeast Asia, Americas and Western Pacific). www.iasp.info/

LivingWorks is a public service corporation focusing on understanding and preventing suicide providing evidence-based training programs like Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) and safe-TALK to empower individuals, organizations, and communities to help keep people safer from suicide. (English, French, Spanish, etc.) <https://livingworks.net/> The **Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention** offers free organizational training through **LivingWorks** to help keep workers safer from suicide and self-harm. www.preventconstructionsuicide.com/training 19250 Everett Lane, Suite 103, Mokena, IL 60448 815.305.9022

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a global, purpose-driven is an evidence-based, early-intervention approach for mental health first aid education that equips individuals with the knowledge and skills to provide support and train individuals to recognize and respond to mental health challenges, including suicidal thoughts. Widely accepted, its numerous instructive, multi-language videos are available free online. <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/> <https://mhfa.com.au/> <https://mhfainternational.org/>

The **National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention** provides a *[Comprehensive Blueprint for Workplace Suicide Prevention](https://theactionalliance.org/)*, an online resource providing guidance to workplaces to develop comprehensive suicide prevention programs, and *[A Manager's Guide to Suicide Postvention in the Workplace](https://theactionalliance.org/)*, a guide for addressing the aftermath of a workplace suicide. <https://theactionalliance.org/>

National Health Service, Education for Scotland offers a range of learning resources designed for continuous professional development, includes e-learning classes and other materials for suicide and self-harm prevention, assessment, strategy formation, and interventions. <http://learn.nes.nhs.scot/75503>

The **Suicide Prevention Resource Center's Best Practice Registry** provides information, prevention support, training, and resources with demonstrated effectiveness to assist work organizations and individuals in developing suicide prevention programs, interventions and policies. <https://bpr.sprc.org/>