



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COVID-19 Reinforces A Renewed Call to Make Suicide Prevention a National Priority

Over half of Americans are more open to talking about mental health according to just-released national survey underscoring need for urgent action

NEW YORK [September 1, 2020]—A [new national survey](#) of over 2,000 U.S. adults ages 18 and older shows that the majority of those surveyed (81%) say that, as a result of the pandemic, it's more important than ever to make suicide prevention a national priority. Conducted by The Harris Poll on behalf of the [National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention](#) (Action Alliance), the [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#) (AFSP), the [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#) (SPRC), and [Education Development Center](#) (EDC), the survey data also show 52% report being more open to talking about mental health as a result of COVID-19.

The survey, which builds upon similar surveys conducted in [2015](#) and [2018](#), shows respondents overwhelmingly believe suicide can be prevented (93%). While 95% of those surveyed said they would do something if someone close to them was thinking about suicide, most people (69%) identified barriers that keep them from discussing suicide with others, such as not knowing what to say (31%), feeling they don't have enough knowledge (28%), or not feeling comfortable with the topic (19%). These findings underscore the importance of equipping all Americans with the necessary tools and resources to feel empowered to have conversations about mental health and suicide prevention, and to take steps to care for their own mental health. Additionally, this data points to the critical role technology plays in providing support and services, particularly important given today's social distancing rules in the wake of the pandemic.

"These new findings indicate that the American people are ready for the nation to take action now to mitigate the short-term, and prevent any long-term, negative mental health or suicide-related consequences of the pandemic," said **Colleen Carr, director of the Action Alliance**. "These complex and urgent public health issues require multi-sector perspectives and solutions."

"Our new survey data indicate Americans are ready and willing to have open conversations about mental health, and they are feeling more empathic (66%). Likely through the COVID-19 pandemic, people are growing stronger in their understanding of mental health and are more supportive of each other. The next step we must take is to make sure that when they try to access mental health care, they are able to find effective, culturally competent, affordable care," said **Dr. Christine Moutier, AFSP's chief medical officer**.



Some helpful ways people can be there for someone who may be struggling or in crisis include:

- Recognizing the [risk factors](#) and [warning signs](#)
- Learning the [action steps](#) for talking with someone who might be suicidal
- Staying [socially connected](#) to family, friends, and loved ones
- Sharing the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number (1-800-273-TALK), which provides 24/7, free, and confidential support or the Crisis Text Line (text TALK to 741741).

“Our country has never witnessed a public health and economic event of this proportion in recent history. The pandemic continues to take a toll on many people’s health and well-being,” said **Dr. Jerry Reed, senior vice president for practice leadership at EDC**. “Yet, with challenges come opportunities. This data shows us that Americans see these issues as critically important and that they want to play a role in addressing them. We must take bold steps now to support those who are struggling and to emerge a stronger country.”

To help change the public conversation about these issues and empower Americans with action steps they can take to support others, as well as to strengthen mental health and suicide prevention, the Action Alliance recently launched the [Mental Health & Suicide Prevention National Response to COVID-19](#) (National Response). Working with public and private sector partners like AFSP, SPRC, and EDC, the Action Alliance’s National Response is committed to creating lasting cultural, systems, and policy changes that ensure equitable access to the care, support, and services—both in and outside of clinical settings. In addition, AFSP’s [Project 2025](#) continues to work to reduce the rate of suicide 20% by 2025 by focusing on four specific areas: primary care settings, emergency departments, the gun owning community and correction systems.

OTHER KEY FINDINGS:

The online survey—conducted in July 2020—assessed public perceptions about suicide and mental health. The survey also found:

- While most Americans (78%) view mental and physical health as being equally important, more than 51% said physical health is treated as more important than mental health in our current health care system.
- Most Americans (73%) said they are more aware of the importance of taking care of their own mental health during the pandemic, with many relying on positive coping mechanisms.
- If they were having thoughts of suicide, most Americans (73%) would tell someone, and people select different sources of support including:
 - Mental health provider (34%)
 - Family member (33%)
 - Spouse/significant other (32%)
 - Friend (30%)
 - Primary care doctor (25%)
 - Hotline/Crisis line (21%)
 - Clergy/Faith leader (14%)
 - Social media network (7%)
 - Coworker (5%)



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- Top sources for where Americans go to find resources/tips about coping with suicide—for themselves or a loved one—include mental health providers (50%), doctors or primary care health professionals (43%), hotline/crisis lines (41%), and internet searches (35%).
- Technology plays an important role in Americans accessing mental health care:
 - 25% have worked with their mental health professional through telehealth,
 - 20% have used mental health apps, and
 - 19% have engaged with another provider through telehealth.

METHODOLOGY:

The Public Perceptions of Suicide survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of EDC and AFSP from July 22-24, 2020 among 2,072 U.S. adults ages 18 and older. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated. For complete survey methodology, including weighting variables and subgroup sample sizes, please contact Kim Torguson at ktorguson@edc.org.

FOR MEDIA PARTNERS:

Research shows that the media may influence suicide rates by the way they report on suicide. Evidence suggests that when the media tell stories of people positively coping in suicidal moments, more suicides can be prevented. We urge all members of the media working on these stories to refer to the [Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide](#) for best practices for safely and accurately reporting on suicide. For stories of persons with lived experience of suicidality and finding hope, refer to www.lifelineforattemptsurvivors.org.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL ACTION ALLIANCE FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION:

The [National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention](#) is the nation's public-private partnership working to advance the [National Strategy for Suicide Prevention](#) and make suicide prevention a national priority. The Action Alliance and its initiatives are supported by funding from the public and private sector including support from the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) to provide operational support via [EDC](#). Learn more at actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org and join the conversation on suicide prevention by following the Action Alliance on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#).

ABOUT THE AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION:

The [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#) 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](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [YouTube](#).

ABOUT THE EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT CENTER:

The [Education Development Center](#) (EDC) is a global nonprofit that advances lasting solutions to improve education, promote health, and expand economic opportunity. Since 1958, it has been a leader in designing, implementing, and evaluating powerful and innovative programs in more than 80 countries around the world. For more information, visit www.edc.org and follow on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

ABOUT THE SUICIDE PREVENTION RESOURCE CENTER:

The [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#) (SPRC) is the nation's only federally funded resource center dedicated to advancing the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention. SPRC works with states, tribes, health systems, colleges and universities, and other public and private groups, bringing the latest science and interactive resources to support suicide prevention efforts across the country. The SPRC project is currently based at the nonprofit [Education Development Center](#). Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).