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New Perception Poll Shows Adults in the U.S. See Mental Health and Suicide as High Priority Issues, and Still Face Barriers to Seeking Help

Knowing the how to help others and getting access to care continue to be among top barriers—underscoring urgent need for collective action

NEW YORK (Oct. 6, 2022) – According to a [newly released public perception poll](#), the majority of adults in the U.S. (94%) see suicide as a preventable public health issue and 83% say they would be interested in learning how they might be able to play a role about how to help someone who may be suicidal. Three of the nation's leaders in suicide prevention: the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention (Action Alliance) and the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC), and have again partnered with The Harris Poll to conduct a new national public perception survey of more than 2,000* adults in the U.S. to better understand the public's attitudes and beliefs about mental health and suicide prevention—as well as their awareness, expectations, and barriers to using our nation's crisis hotline services.

The survey findings—which build upon past surveys conducted by AFSP, SPRC, and the Action Alliance in [2015](#), [2018](#), and [2020](#)—show that while gains have been made in valuing mental health and suicide prevention, there are not consistent societal supports for mental health care and barriers exist, such as a lack of knowledge and training about these issues and lack of affordable and accessible care and support. The just-released findings have the potential to inform and transform our country's public health messaging and advocacy efforts regarding these critical health issues—especially now as more and more people in the United States are reporting mental health impacts.

Several key insights stand out in the 2022 survey findings:

Mental Health Is Increasingly Important, but Not Seen as Prioritized by Healthcare Systems

Exacerbated by the impacts of the pandemic and other world events, mental health has become a leading priority in the U.S. with people saying their own mental health is equally important to physical health (76%). However, only 31% of adults believe these issues are treated equally in our current health system, according to the polling data. More than 8 in 10 adults (84%) say that as a result of the pandemic, it's more important than ever to make suicide prevention a national priority and over 60% (up from 52% in 2020) have become more open to talking about mental health.

Since 2018, the number of people who report they ever thought they had a mental health condition has grown from 57% to 67% in 2022. As more people struggle with their mental health, adults in the U.S. see getting help from a mental health professional as a sign of strength (53%) and having open dialogue about mental health is widely seen as “brave” (57%).



Adults in the U.S. Believe Suicide Can be Prevented, But Need Education

Today, the majority of adults in the U.S. (94%) see suicide as preventable at least sometimes, and 75% (up from 71% in 2020) believe most people who die by suicide show signs beforehand. But only about 1 in 3 (36%) feel they can tell when someone is considering suicide, consistent with 2020 (33%). Adults in the U.S. overwhelmingly would take action if someone close to them was thinking about suicide (96%), but 8 in 10 people (83%, up from 78% in 2020 and 2018) would be interested in learning how they might be able to play a role in helping someone who may be suicidal. This survey shows there is a considerable gap between believing others show warning signs and being able to identify the signs and how to help.

Though most people believe suicide can be prevented, the poll tells us slightly more than half of people (51%) report feeling comfortable talking openly with others in public about suicide, on par with 2020 (49%). When asked about the reasons or barriers that would prevent people who are thinking about suicide from seeking help, more than half of adults in the U.S. (56%) believe not knowing how to get help, along with feelings of hopelessness (66%) and embarrassment (59%). However, if they were to reach out to obtain helpful resources or tips about coping with thoughts of suicide or helping a loved one who might be struggling, more than half of respondents reported that they would go to a mental health provider (57%, up from 50% in 2020) followed by turning to family or friends (52%), or a crisis line (46%).

This poll points to the opportunity to deepen public education that inspires people to reach out for help and to equip others who can help with lifesaving knowledge—however, eliminating barriers, such as access and affordability, is key.

“The 2022 data show that while progress has been made, we have a lot of work to do,” said Colleen Carr, Director of the Action Alliance. “To effectively lower rates of suicide and greatly improve mental health and wellness in the U.S., requires multi-sector collaboration to accelerate actionable and sustainable solutions. If we are serious about strengthening these issues, it will require leaders at all levels to take bold action now.”

Greater Access to Mental Health & Suicide Prevention Services, Resources, and Education are Needed

When it comes to accessing mental health services, the majority of adults in the U.S. (61%) believe providing better access to mental health care and talk therapy, couples counseling, family therapy, and tele-therapy would help reduce the number of people who die by suicide. Though less of a barrier than in 2018 (55%), cost was perceived to be a deterrent to seeking help with nearly half of adults in the U.S. (46%) saying inability to afford treatment keeps people who are thinking about suicide from seeking help, while others (44%) point to lack of access to treatment.

At the time of this poll, the country had just transitioned to the three-digit [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#). When asked about crisis hotlines, the survey finds that adults in the U.S. would expect a trained mental health provider or mobile crisis team (86%), a medical professional or ambulance (66%), or police/law enforcement (64%) to respond if they called for themselves or someone they know who was experiencing a mental health or suicide related crisis.



Across the continuum of mental health care, the need for accessible providers is clear—the majority (61%) of people say they would encourage someone thinking about suicide to seek help from mental health professionals. Nearly half would encourage them to seek help from a doctor or primary care health professional (49%). Along with accessible providers, training is an essential part of the solution.

“The poll findings show we are making progress in public perceptions regarding the importance of mental health, and that suicide is a preventable cause of death. It also points out barriers to help-seeking and opportunities to further public understanding of how to help someone who is struggling,” said AFSP CEO Bob Gebbia. “Without question, what we learned will strengthen AFSP’s public education campaigns and guide the development of programs and resources that the public indicates are needed to address their mental health needs and to prevent suicide. The findings also affirm AFSP’s current efforts to advocate for more accessible and affordable mental health care.”

National Action from Across All Sectors Is Imperative

To eliminate barriers to promoting hope and help-seeking—which can be key to saving and improving lives—education for providers and lay responders stands out as in past polls as an important component needed to address this public health problem. The majority of adults in the U.S. (78%) believe that training and education for professionals (first responders, health care providers, community leaders, faith leaders, the media, etc.) would be most helpful for reducing the number of people who die by suicide.

“The 2022 data reiterates that SPRC’s work to develop educational resources for mental health professionals, healthcare providers, and leaders in the field is vital for effective suicide prevention,” said SPRC Director Shelby Rowe. “These survey results, paired with the integration of lived experience and a focus on justice, equity, and diversity, help inform SPRC’s efforts in strengthening suicide prevention infrastructure across the nation.”

Research matters when it comes to shaping public messages that inspire people to act and to informing strategies that ensure help is within reach. That’s why the Action Alliance, AFSP, and SPRC have united to conduct regular national polling. The public is invited to learn more and take action through our [first-ever website](#), which synthesizes the poll data from 2015 through 2022 and provides quick access to helpful resources for the public.

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***METHODOLOGY:** The Public Perceptions of Suicide survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of SPRC and AFSP from July 18-20, 2020 among 2,054 adults in the U.S. 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 REPORTERS: 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, there are fewer suicides. 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 suicidal ideation and behavior and finding hope, refer to www.lifelineforattemptsurvivors.org. For safe reporting consult these [quick tips](#). When reporting on suicide, please include the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline number 9-8-8, which provides 24/7, free, and confidential support or the Crisis Text Line (text TALK to 741741). For guidance on reporting on 988, consider using the [988 media reporting guidance](#).

ABOUT PARTNERS:

***The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)** is dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide, including those who have experienced a [loss](#). AFSP creates a culture that's smart about mental health through public 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, with an Advocacy office in Washington, DC, AFSP has local chapters in all 50 states including Puerto Rico, 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](#).*

***Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC)** is the only federally funded resource center devoted to advancing the implementation of the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention. SPRC is supported through a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration ([SAMHSA](#)). SPRC builds capacity and infrastructure for effective suicide prevention through consultation, training, and resources for state, tribal, health/behavioral health, and community systems; professionals and professional education programs; and national public and private partners and stakeholders. SPRC is based at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center ([OUHSC](#)). Follow SPRC on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [YouTube](#).*

***National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention (Action Alliance)** is the public-private partnership working to advance the [National Strategy for Suicide Prevention](#) and make suicide prevention a national priority. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), through the Suicide Prevention Resource Center ([SPRC](#)) grant, provides funding to Education Development Center (EDC) to operate and manage the Secretariat for the Action Alliance, which was launched in 2010. Learn more at the Action Alliance [website](#) and join the conversation on suicide prevention by following the Action Alliance on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [YouTube](#).*