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## **Three High-Risk Populations Targeted for National Suicide Prevention Efforts**

### *Task Forces Focus on LGBT Youth, American Indians/Alaska Natives, Military/Veterans*

WASHINGTON, DC (INSERT DATE)—The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention today added three new task forces to address suicide prevention efforts within high-risk populations: American Indians/Alaska Natives (AI/AN); youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT); and military service members and veterans. This brings to six the number of task forces formed by the Action Alliance, the public-private partnership forged in September to advance the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention (NSSP) (<http://www.actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org>).

“I am heartened that we are focusing attention on communities hardest hit by suicide. By shining a light on their struggles I am optimistic we can help them identify solutions and bring hope for a better tomorrow,” said Gordon H. Smith, co-chair of the Action Alliance. Smith, a former U.S. senator who championed passage of the 2004 Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act following the loss of his son to suicide, now serves as President and CEO of the National Association of Broadcasters.

In the U.S., suicide claims over 34,000 lives annually - the equivalent of 94 suicides per day, or one suicide every 15 minutes. State and local prevention efforts are having a positive impact as rates of suicide have been falling among teenaged and elder males, two of the hardest hit groups. Suicides are increasing among other groups, however, such as AI/AN youth and military members.

Studies from organizations such as the Suicide Prevention Resource Center report that lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth are from 1.5 to seven times more likely to report having attempted suicide than their non-LGBT peers, while transgender youth are believed to have higher rates of suicidal behavior as well. Co-leading the LGBT Youth Task Force are Kevin Jennings, Assistant Deputy Secretary, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, U.S. Department of Education, and Charles Robbins, Executive Director of The Trevor Project, the leading national organization focused on crisis and suicide prevention efforts among LGBT youth.

“This task force will bring together the best minds in the country to combat suicide and make sure that every LGBT youth has the opportunity to grow up in a supportive, accepting community and to enter adulthood safely,” Robbins said.



For AI/AN youth and young adults ages 10-34, suicide is the second leading cause of death and is on the rise. Jointly leading the American Indian and Alaska Natives Task Force are Yvette Roubideaux, M.D., M.P.H. Director of the Indian Health Service; Larry Echo Hawk, J.D., Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior; and McClellan Hall, M.A., Executive Director, National Indian Youth Leadership Project.

“As our new task forces begin their important work to end the rising number of suicides in some segments of American society, I believe we can make a significant difference,” said Roubideaux. “For American Indian and Alaska Native communities, this assistance is especially needed.”

Leading the Military and Veterans Task Force are Dr. Jan Kemp, National Director, Suicide Prevention Program for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Ms. Maggie Haynes, Director of Combat Stress for the Wounded Warrior project. Research indicates that there are increased suicide rates among veterans, and suicide rates among service members recently reached historic highs within the Army and Marine Corps.

“Combined with initiatives already underway by the Department of Defense and the VA, this task force will further strengthen prevention, bringing together the best minds in the public and private sectors,” said Secretary of the Army John McHugh, co-chair of the Action Alliance. “This collaboration will form an important foundation for the nation’s suicide prevention efforts.”

Three weeks ago, the Action Alliance rolled out its first three task forces: Data and Surveillance, Research, and National Strategy for Suicide Prevention (NSSP). The respective task forces are beginning the work of identifying and developing systems and strategies to improve data collection and surveillance of suicidal behaviors, prioritizing research on suicide prevention, and updating the NSSP.

In the coming months, the Action Alliance will determine how to address suicide risk in other populations where data show evidence of increasing or high rates of suicides or suicide attempts. Other high-risk groups include Latina youths, older adults, individuals with disabilities, survivors of suicide attempts and of suicide loss, and working-aged men and women.

All task forces will include leading experts in the field, including researchers and scientists, advocates, family members, and others who are concerned and knowledgeable about preventing suicides. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, will provide support and technical expertise for the task forces and the Action Alliance, in cooperation with the private sector and other federal support.

### **About The Action Alliance**

The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention, a public-private partnership, provides an operating structure to catalyze planning, execution and accountability for advancing the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention (NSSP). From this alliance will grow advancements for practitioners, policymakers, service providers, communities, families, agencies, and other partners that play a vital role in reducing suicides in America.



Creating the Action Alliance was a key recommendation of the NSSP, issued in 2001. The Action Alliance was launched by HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates on September 10, 2010, with input and support of many public and private sector stakeholders, including the National Council for Suicide Prevention and the Department of Veterans Affairs. For more information, see <http://www.actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org>.

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