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First-of-its-Kind Clinical Workforce Guidelines Create Framework for Suicide Care

New training guidelines establish a foundation for better preparing health, human services, and behavioral health professionals

Washington, D.C. – Today, the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention released the comprehensive [*Suicide Prevention and the Clinical Workforce: Guidelines for Training*](#) to assure that the U.S. clinical workforce is adequately prepared to treat persons at risk for suicide. The Action Alliance’s Clinical Workforce Preparedness Task Force spent over three years developing the guidelines to serve as the foundation for creating suicide prevention training programs in health and human services professions, such as nursing, social work, medicine, school counseling, and the full range of behavioral health and primary care disciplines. This initiative was designed so that each discipline could use the guidelines to develop specific continuing education curricula and train new clinicians to deliver optimal suicide care.

It has been well documented that clinicians from a wide range of professions and varied work settings routinely encounter individuals at risk for suicide. Studies further show that many of these professionals do not have a level of confidence in dealing with suicidal individuals due to a lack of prior training.¹

“A confident, and well-trained clinical workforce is critical to reducing the rate of suicide in the United States,” said Brian J. Boon, Ph.D., Co-Lead of the Action Alliance’s Clinical Workforce Preparedness Task Force and President/CEO, CARF International. “As various disciplines in the health and human services community begin to adopt and adapt the guidelines specific to their profession, this nation’s clinical workforce will have the capacity to provide timely assessment and intervention to those individuals at risk. This will also lead to better and consistent care across the healthcare spectrum.”

The Action Alliance’s Clinical Workforce Preparedness Task Force is focusing on support and engagement from key stakeholders in the health and human service professions, educational institutions and professional licensing entities – highlighting the role each play in suicide prevention. It is anticipated that this effort will require a three-phase change process to ensure a competent enabled workforce.

- The first phase requires awareness of suicide as a major public health issue. Professional, health and human service disciplines can and should address the gaps in training, supporting the need for a minimum set of training guidelines for the clinical workforce.

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- The second phase of change will be the adaption of the guidelines specific to each discipline by educational institutions, and licensing bodies.
- The third phase is the evolution to a practice environment where clinical disciplines, educational systems, and licensing bodies require a minimum standard skill set in the training of each discipline.

These efforts will advance the ultimate aspirational goal of the Action Alliance of saving 20,000 lives in the next five years.

“As we advance the competency of the broad clinical workforce, and the settings within which they serve individuals at risk of suicide, we are confident that the rates of suicides will begin to decline in the U.S.,” said Doryn Chervin, Dr.P.H., Executive Secretary of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention and Vice President and Senior Scientist at Education Development Center, Inc. “We are at a critical point in suicide prevention, and the U.S. clinical workforce plays a key role in how we address and care for individuals struggling with suicide. We strongly encourage leading professional organizations to adopt these guidelines. It’s all about recognizing individuals at risk for suicide, treating them properly, and saving lives.”

¹ References

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The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention (www.ActionAllianceforSuicidePrevention.org) 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, through the Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) operates the Secretariat for the Action Alliance, which was launched in 2010 by former U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and former U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates with the goal of saving 20,000 lives in five years.

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