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National Suicide Prevention Effort Sees Progress at One-Year Mark *Workplace Task Force Launched; Advances in National Strategy Revision and Research Agenda Recognized on World Suicide Prevention Day*

WASHINGTON, DC (September 9, 2011)—The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention marked its one year anniversary today by launching its twelfth task force—one focused on suicide prevention in the workplace. Roughly 80% of all suicides are by working-aged adults and the majority of those are employed at the time of their deaths. Initially, the Workplace Task Force plans to create a compelling business case for suicide prevention, designed to encourage more employers to initiate programs for their workforce.

Since its establishment, the Action Alliance has made significant progress toward both a revised *National Strategy for Suicide Prevention* and the first-ever, prioritized research agenda for suicide prevention. Drafts of each are expected to be released in April 2012. The new strategy will reflect developments in technology, increased knowledge about vulnerable populations, and advancements in science since the first edition of the *National Strategy* was released in 2001.

“I am encouraged by the progress we are making.” said Action Alliance private-sector co-chair, former Senator Gordon H. Smith, President and CEO, National Broadcasters Association “The Alliance has brought together over 200 highly respected national leaders representing 190 organizations and very quickly formed 12 task forces. With the help of these dedicated members, the Action Alliance is moving toward reaching its goal of a nation free from the tragic experience of suicide.”

In its first seven months, the Action Alliance launched three groups of task forces to help advance high-priority objectives for suicide prevention requiring national leverage: 1) infrastructure task forces (*National Strategy* revision, research prioritization, and data and surveillance), 2) high risk group task forces (American Indian/Alaska Native, Military/Veterans, and lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender youth), and 3) intervention task forces (youth in contact with juvenile justice, faith communities, clinical care and intervention, clinical workforce preparedness, and public awareness and education). Since their launch, each of these task forces has developed goals and objectives and cultivated memberships representing a wide range of private- and public-sector interests.

“One of the keys to success has been the collaboration between the government and private sector,” said John McHugh, Secretary of the Army and public-sector co-chair of the Action Alliance. “This organization has brought together an extraordinary group of experts, academics and leaders to work on some of the Nation’s most critical suicide prevention issues, many of which were identified ten years ago, but weren’t addressed until now.”

The new Workplace Task Force is co-led by Helen Darling, President and CEO, National Business Group on Health; Beverly Malone, CEO, National League of Nursing; and David Smith, Divisional Vice President of



Risk Management, Family Dollar Stores. Over the next 18 months, this group plans to deliver a compelling business case for employers to implement a comprehensive approach to suicide prevention, intervention and crisis response in the workplace.

“We live in a country where today more than 153 million people spend a significant portion of their lives in America’s workplaces,” stated David Smith. “Businesses have largely not recognized the symptoms, nor understood the impact the suicide of an employee or a family member of an employee has on co-workers and the business itself. Companies understand that there is a significant return on investing in safe working environments; what they need to appreciate is the return they can get from investing in mentally and emotionally safe environments—environments that promote psychological well-being and prevent suicide. The enhanced well-being of company personnel and their families positively impacts workplace productivity and corporate reputation.”

Other task forces have already made significant progress. For example, over the past six months, the National Strategy Task Force conducted a series of listening sessions and workshops to provide inputs to a revised strategy. “The collaboration in the process to update the *National Strategy* has been remarkable,” states Jerry Reed, co-lead of the task force. “When we are done, the nation will have a well-defined roadmap that we believe can reduce the numbers of suicide deaths and the devastating consequences of suicidal behavior in our country.”

The Research Task Force (RTF) has made major strides toward developing a prioritized research agenda that, if implemented successfully, will provide an empirical basis for reducing suicide deaths and suicide attempts in the United States. Working collaboratively with 12 public and private organizations and multiple Task Forces of the National Action Alliance, the RTF is crafting a research agenda-setting process that will: assess the current portfolio of public and private funding in suicide prevention research; identify what we know and what we need from research; and seek stakeholder input on important areas of suicide prevention research. As of August 2011, the RTF has recruited more than 500 participants from diverse backgrounds into this national dialogue about suicide research priorities.

Thomas R. Insel, MD, a co-lead of the Research Task Force said, “We have seen mortality from homicide, traffic accidents, and many medical causes decrease over the past two decades. Our goal is to ensure that suicide mortality drops in the decade ahead. As with many complex problems, policy relevant science and scientifically informed policy offer us the best hope of reaching that goal.”

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 Health and Human Services 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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