



San Diego County Suicide
Prevention Council: An
Update on 2011 Activities

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The San Diego County Suicide Prevention Council (SPC) Action Plan – An Update of 2011 Activities

Suicide: Why is Prevention Important?

Suicide is a major preventable public health problem. It is estimated that approximately 1,000,000 people make a suicide attempt every year and every 15 minutes someone in the United States dies by suicide¹. In 2009, there were approximately 12.0 suicides per 100,000 people. This is the highest rate of suicide in fifteen years and it places suicide as the tenth leading cause of death in the United States. Furthermore, on an average, nine Californians² and one person in San Diego County die by suicide every day³. In San Diego County, adults between the ages of 25 and 54 have the highest number of suicides. In fact, suicide ranks second as a cause of non-natural deaths, behind alcohol and drug abuse, and ahead of motor vehicle crashes.

The risk factors for suicide are diverse and can vary with age, gender, or ethnic group. However, knowing the risk factors for suicide can help prevent suicides and reduce suicide rate. It is estimated that 90 percent of people who die by suicide have a diagnosable and treatable psychiatric disorder at the time of their death. Moreover, the cost of suicide and suicide attempts has immediate and far-reaching effects on families and communities. It is estimated that each suicide seriously impacts at least six other people⁴. While the statistics are alarming, suicide is preventable.

The SPC Approach

The goals for suicide prevention are simple: reduce factors that increase risk (risk factors) and increase factors that promote resilience (protective factors). The Vision of the **SPC is zero suicides in San Diego County, and its Mission is to prevent suicide and its devastating**

¹ http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/suicide/suicidal_thoughts.html

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http://www.dmh.ca.gov/Prop_63/MHSA/Prevention_and_Early_Intervention/docs/SuicidePreventionCommittee/FINAL_CalSPSP_V9.pdf

³ http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/hhsa/programs/phs/documents/CHS-Suicide_Report_2011.pdf

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http://www.dmh.ca.gov/Prop_63/MHSA/Prevention_and_Early_Intervention/docs/SuicidePreventionCommittee/FINAL_CalSPSP_V9.pdf

consequences in San Diego County. The SPC believes in using a public health approach to suicide prevention, collaborative and non-competitive partnerships, evidenced-based practices, culturally and linguistic sensitivity, coordinated and accessible services, and support for individuals, families, and communities to effectively reduce suicide rates in San Diego County.

Suicide Prevention Council: Background

The County of San Diego, Health and Human Services Agency (HHS), launched a suicide prevention action planning process in 2010. Informed by the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention and the California Strategic Plan on Suicide Prevention, a Suicide Prevention Action Plan Committee (SPAP-C) was formed to assist in the development of a San Diego County Suicide Prevention Action Plan (SPAP) and the creation of local strategies based on the input of a diverse and representative group of stakeholders. The purpose of the Suicide Prevention Action Plan for San Diego County was to propose strategies that will enhance efforts to increase understanding and awareness of suicide, decrease stigma associated with suicide, and ultimately reduces the number of suicides in San Diego County. After finalizing the Action Plan, the SPAP-C was renamed the Suicide Prevention Council to reflect its new role of providing oversight, guidance, and support in the implementation of the recommendations made in the Action Plan.

Suicide Prevention Council (SPC) Strategies: A Brief Discussion

After conducting a comprehensive needs assessment and planning process that involved stakeholders from multiple sectors throughout the county, the strategies were organized around three prevention elements proposed by the Institute for Medicine and highlighted in the California Strategic Plan: universal, strategic, and indicated strategies. Each strategy is described briefly in the table below.

Suicide Prevention Action Plan

Universal Strategies

- Targets the general public or a whole population group
- Aims to strengthen community support and social skills, remove barriers to care, enhance knowledge of what to do to help suicidal individuals, and increase access to help

Selective Strategies

- Targets high-risk groups that have a greater probability of becoming suicidal
- Aims to prevent the onset of suicidal behaviors

Indicated strategies

- Targets high-risk individuals that exhibit early signs of suicide potential
- Aims to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors among high risk individuals .
- Programs include skill building support groups, case management for high-risk individuals, and referral sources for crisis intervention and treatment

Partners in Action (2011)

The San Diego County Suicide Prevention Council (SPC) and its participating partners work to create a collaborative system of suicide prevention that focuses on offering broad-based prevention, intervention, and postvention activities and services in the county through increased collaboration among state and local agencies, private organizations, and communities.

Participating stakeholders or partners come from many diverse sectors of the county, such as faith-based communities, law enforcement, schools, mental health services, military, veteran affairs, social services organizations, media, local businesses, and many others.

In 2011, after a year-long process that involved more than 200 stakeholders from around the County, the SPC was proud to publish the San Diego County Suicide Prevention Action Plan (SPAP); the first completed plan in the State of California. The action planning process included monthly committee meetings to provide updates to SPC partners; an extensive needs assessment including quantitative information, focus groups, and key informant interviews; multiple subcommittee meetings to develop the recommendations for inclusion in our local suicide prevention action plan; a Summit with 40 key stakeholders to vet the draft recommendations and identify priorities; and final publication and release of the SPAP in October 2011. This

Other key highlights of the Suicide Prevention Council in 2011 include:

- Developed a 3-year SPC Strategic Work Plan to guide the collaborative efforts of the SPC through 2014;
- Convened a media briefing at CHIP on Responsible Reporting on Suicide in the Media in June 2011, with representatives from radio, broadcast, and print media, as well as public relations officers and law enforcement from partner organizations;
- Received a Board of Supervisor's Proclamation honoring the SPC during National Suicide Prevention Month in September 2011;
- In partnership with OptumHealth, conducted 19 QPR Suicide Prevention Trainings during one week in September and one week in November to 732 members of the general public;
- Made more than 15 presentations on the SPAP and SPC to secure buy-in and commitment to participating in the implementation of the recommendations, to groups including: Mental Health Board, BHS Quality Review Council, ADS PEI Provider Meeting, various community collaboratives, and the SANDAG Public Safety Committee.

SPC partners also conducted a variety of suicide prevention activities in 2011. The sections below illustrate the wide flavor of these activities occurring throughout San Diego County. Please note that the specific activities have been grouped under the strategies that they closely align with. In many cases, the activities may fall under more than one strategic category.

Universal Strategies

Universal Strategies refer to interventions that address an entire population. In this category, almost all the participating organizations embodied approaches that addressed broad risk factors. Either in the form of trainings to general public and health providers, delivering succinct messages, or by sharing practices that promote preventive measures, the partners, in 2011, introduced interventions in the community to meaningfully change the public opinion and stigma associated with suicide. San Diego County residents stand to benefit from the services and assistance provided by each of the participating organizations.

Activities in 2011

The SPC appreciates all organizations that have strived hard in the community to promote suicide prevention. Clearly, kudos goes to all organizations that adopted multiple

traditional and non-traditional channels to reach out to a wide population base. Some examples include:

Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention program (YRSPP) targeted government agencies, military, law enforcement, colleges, schools etc. by hosting suicide prevention trainings and presentations on reducing stigma associated with asking for help. The San Diego chapter of YRSPP provided education to approximately 25,000 people in the County. Similarly, AdEase, a Public Relations firm funded by the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, built the five-year campaign “It’s Up to Us” that broadcasted messages via multiple outlets such as television, radio, the Internet, billboards, etc. in both English and Spanish. The concept was to reduce the stigma of mental illnesses and encourage people to ask for help. The International Bipolar Foundation created a “*Say it Forward*” email campaign to educate as many as possible on mental illness. OptumHealth built training programs that give the general public skills necessary to recognize a crisis and warning signs that someone may be contemplating suicide. The training programs are offered to the general public, law enforcement (through the PERT academy), and case managers. In 2011, OptumHealth reached out to approximately 3,160 individuals through their trainings. As a community partner, OptumHealth also operates the county’s Access and Crisis line, and shares information about resources and best practices with other partners. Community Health Improvement Partners (CHIP) worked with their many SPC partners in 2011 to hold a media briefing to impact responsible reporting on suicide. CHIP, through its Behavioral Health Work Team (BHWT), also coordinated depression screenings at sites throughout San Diego County during National Depression Screening Week.

The list of partners who have made significant contributions through activities that align with Universal Strategies is endless. Organizations such as NAMI San Diego, Peer2Peer lines, PERT inc., Community Research Foundation, San Diego Police Department, Scripps Health, Sharp Neuva Vista, and Southern Indian Health Council are few others who have presented well-developed interventions to a wide population base and advocated prevention. Please see the attached spreadsheet “Suicide Prevention Activities in San Diego County (2011)” for other significant and impactful contributions made by various organizations in San Diego county.

Selective Strategies

Selective Strategies include education, training for providers working with high-risk population, and skill building and training for community members/clients. These strategies are

focused on at-risk groups that have a greater probability of becoming suicidal. The San Diego County HHSA and its partners' relentless efforts are well demonstrated in the diverse activities that were specifically offered to high-risk populations in 2011. Foster youth, older adults from all cultural backgrounds, veterans, all active duty military, and many other specific groups were targeted using screening tools and focused interventions.

Activities in 2011

In 2011, SPC partners have been very successful in offering tailored interventions to high-risk population who needed more than the universal strategies and less than the individualized indicated strategies. For instance, County of San Diego, Aging and Independence Services' program reaches out to older adults and adults with disabilities from different ethnic backgrounds by conducting presentations to providers and consumers. The agency is dedicated to Mental Health Prevention and Early Intervention to provide education, resources and outreach to older adults and providers within San Diego County regarding mental health services, resources and preventive activities. In the first half of 2011, the agency touched as many as 5,400 individuals and promoted awareness regarding mental health and dispelled myths, stigma and barriers surrounding older adults' mental health. A program offered by UPAC, Positive Solutions Program (PSP) conducted depression screenings in multiple senior resident locations and offered educational presentations that emphasized ways to get help and cope with depression. PSP program manager has also been doing training for BHETA on Suicide in Older Adults. The program reached out to more than 1,400 seniors from July 2011 to December 2011. Survivors of Suicide Loss provided support groups for survivors who are at high risk for suicide and for youth who have lost a loved one to suicide. The program held presentations on suicide prevention. The Suicide Prevention Education Awareness and Knowledge (SPEAK) program, conducted by San Diego Unified School District, provided targeted suicide prevention to San Diego youth. This program is a three - year comprehensive district wide suicide prevention program for 75 schools representing all of the district's schools that include 7th-12th graders. SPEAK's goal is to establish a training and educational program which will create a school wide climate to reduce stigma related to depression, increase the probability of a student's self- identification when they need help, increase peer support to those students who are at risk and improve the skills of gatekeepers in responding to at risk youth. Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Program (YRSPP)

is SPEAK'S primary strategy for educating both students and staff on suicide prevention. In 2011, SPEAK has reached out to 9,173 students, 2,245 SDUSD staff and 245 parents.

Numerous other interventions were also implemented in 2011 by organizations such as Casa de Amparo, Douglas Young Youth and Family Services, Episcopal Community Services, George Bailey Detention Center, Mental Health Systems – Courage to Call, The Trevor Project targeting the LGBTQ youth, and San Diego Youth Services. Most programs focused on risk screening, education, and training programs for the high-risk population. For a wider sample or more details of selected strategies, please review the spreadsheet “Suicide Prevention Activities in San Diego County (2011)”.

Indicated Strategies

Indicated interventions are aimed at people who are at the highest risk for suicidal behavior. These interventions are used for individuals whose behavior indicates that there may be a current risk of suicidal behavior. A more comprehensive assessment of suicidal behavior is conducted, along with the provision of services to assist the person to manage these risk factors more effectively without resorting to suicidal behavior.

Activities in 2011

In 2011, Community Research Foundation, through its Mobile Adolescent Service Team (MAST), provided field-based specialty outpatient mental health services at the school sites and in the homes of the students. MAST conducted a mental status exam, which included a suicide risk assessment, as part of intake assessment for every person that is referred to MAST; clinical staff also work closely, on an ongoing basis, with the teachers and staff of the Juvenile Court and Community School district in raising awareness of potential suicidability in students. Several other agencies such as the Children's Mental Health Services (HHSA) – Prime Ally program, County of San Diego HHSA - South East County Mental Health Child and Adolescent Outpatient Services, UCSD, Southern Indian Health Council, North County Lifeline, Family Health Centers of San Diego, Mental Health Systems, and Foster Family Agency Stabilization and Treatment program (FFAST) conducted by San Diego Center for Children targeted specific high-risk youth, conducted behavioral assessments, and/or provided required interventions and support groups.

For a full spectrum of activities that align with the Indicated Strategies, please review the spreadsheet “Suicide Prevention Activities in San Diego County (2011)”.

Conclusion

A survey of suicide prevention activities, currently active in San Diego County, has so far provided a good glimpse of overlapping as well as complementary activities that align well with the strategies proposed in the San Diego County Suicide Prevention Action Plan. These broad suicide prevention activities integrated within them evidence-based best practices, strong partnerships, and sustainable strategies to reduce the rates of suicide and suicidal behaviors. The broad-based efforts also demonstrate the partnering organizations’ high level of commitment and enthusiasm towards suicide prevention in the County.