

## **Suicide Prevention: A Comprehensive Approach**

Suicide is classified as a serious, but preventable, public health problem in the United States, according to the U.S Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or CDC. The harmful impact of suicide or attempted suicide extends not only to the victim, but also to [families and the community at large](#), like the residents of Lee County.

The CDC has become one of the national leaders in developing tactics to lessen the risk of suicide. The agency has developed these strategies through cooperation with a myriad of organizations that have connections with addressing the needs of people experiencing suicidal ideation and others who have been impacted by suicide and suicide attempts across the United States.

### ***Two Primary Goals of Suicide Prevention Strategies***

The underlying causes of suicide are variable. According to the experts at the CDC, strategies designed to prevent suicide have two primary objectives:

- Reduce suicide risk factors
- Increase resilience and coping factors

The accomplishment of these goals necessitates the involvement of individuals, families, and the community at large. As is discussed in this article, the approach to preventing suicide must be consistently comprehensive.

### ***CDC Strategic Approach to Suicide Prevention***

The CDC developed a comprehensive, seven-part strategy to prevent suicide. The elements of this strategy are:

- Identify and support people at risk
- Create protective environments
- Promote connectedness
- Teach coping and problem-solving skills
- Strengthen economic supports
- Strengthen access and delivery of suicide care

- Lessen harms and prevent future risks

### ***Identify and Support People at Risk***

A key element of a comprehensive and ultimately effective suicide prevention strategy is the development of a means to identify and support people at risk. The CDC crafted a four-prong approach to identifying and supporting individuals at risk of attempting to take their own lives:

- Gatekeeper training
- Crisis intervention
- Treatment for people at risk of suicide
- Treatment to prevent re-attempts

Gatekeepers encompass a broad range of individuals including emergency room personnel, primary care physicians, clergy, teachers, and so forth. Gatekeeper training involves ensuring that healthcare professionals of different types are well-versed in identify those at risk for suicidal ideations. It also involves training gatekeepers to know where to refer potentially suicidal individuals to appropriate, capable professionals.

Effective crisis intervention is a crucial means of supporting people at risk. This includes appropriate crisis intervention for people in an emotional or mental health crisis not involving specific threats of suicide as well as for those actively suffering from suicidal ideations.

On a related note, targeted and accessible treatment for people at risk of suicide must also be available within a community. Accessible treatment is proving to be one of the more significant challenges when it comes to suicide prevention, in part because of the mounting costs associated with all types of healthcare.

Finally, the percentage of individuals that attempt to take their lives and then re-attempt is significant. Thus, identifying and supporting people at risk must include ongoing treatment to prevent a re-attempt.

### ***Create Protective Environments***

The second element of a comprehensive suicide prevention program is the proactive creation of protective environment. The CDC identifies a trio of action steps to structure these protective environments:

- Reduce access to lethal devices among individuals at risk of suicide
- Organizational policies and culture
- Community-based policies to reduce excessive alcohol use

Creating protective environments requires multi-faceted action and is even controversial in many communities. There is near uniform agreement in communities that efforts must be taken to reduce excessive alcohol use as a means of reducing the risk of suicide. Controversy arises, however, when it comes to reducing access to lethal devices, particularly firearms, among people at risk of suicide.

### ***Promote Connectedness***

Mental health researchers, including those at the Mayo Clinic, are nearly universal in their belief that strong, health interpersonal connections play a vital role in suicide prevention. The CDC suicide prevention strategy enumerates two primary tactics that are demonstrated effective at promoting connectedness and reducing the risk of suicide:

- Peer programs
- Community engagement activities

The theory is that participation in suitable peer programs strengthen the connectiveness between people. Increased connectiveness has been demonstrated to lessen the risk of suicide in many cases.

The promotion of connectedness also necessitates community engagement activities. As mentioned previously, suicide is classified as a serious public health problem by the CDC. Combating public health problems successfully requires community engagement. Community engagement as a means of promoting connectedness to prevent suicide includes everything from public suicide prevention education programs engaging the active support of the community at large for people potentially at risk of suicide.

### ***Teach Coping and Problem-Solving Skills***

Teaching coping and problem-solving skills is a vital element of a comprehensive suicide prevention program. The key to the teaching of coping and problem-solving skills is that the instruction must be age appropriate. In addition, teaching coping and problem-solving skills must also be what might best be called cohort-specific. For example, the coping and problem-solving needs are different from a working woman than they are for a teenage boy.

### ***Strengthen Economic Supports***

Strengthening economic support lessens the risk of suicide in a number of ways. A notable number of people at risk of suicide are facing financial challenges. Not only to financial

challenges in and of themselves increase the risk of suicide for many people, limited funds reduce access to appropriate professional intervention.

### ***Strengthen Access and Delivery of Suicide Care***

As alluded to a moment ago, a key element of reducing the risk of suicide is strengthening access and delivery of professional preventative care. Two primary suicide care delivery issues that need to be addressed are enhancing insurance coverage to ensure it includes professional therapeutic intervention for people at suicide risk. In addition, the major issue of professional provider shortages in underserved must be addressed.

### ***Lessen Harms and Prevent Future Risks***

Finally, comprehensive suicide prevention must include postvention. Postvention is a means of preventing individuals who have attempted taking their own lives from repeating that conduct.