

Mental Health Awareness Month 2021

Chapter & Volunteer Toolkit

#MENTALHEALTH4ALL



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

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Introduction

#MentalHealth4All Campaign

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Introduction

This toolkit provides an overview of how our partners can participate in the Mental Health Awareness Month (MHAM) campaign, #MentalHealth4All.

AFSP's social media: @AFSPnational

- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Instagram](#)

Campaign Overview: #MentalHealth4All

This May for Mental Health Awareness Month, we're sending the message that no one's mental health is fully supported until everyone's mental health is supported. That's why for our **#MentalHealth4All** campaign, we're encouraging everyone to get involved by taking one simple action to encourage their friends, family, and community to take care of their mental health. Everyone has different experiences with their own mental health, and their own preferred methods of care and support. It's important that we all remain open and ready to listen to others' points of view and perspectives, especially during this challenging time. We all have mental health, and by taking one simple action, we can create massive collective change to support **#MentalHealth4All**.

#MentalHealth4All Actions

During Mental Health Awareness Month in May, we have developed actions each of us can take. Please help us amplify on your own channels by resharing from @AFSPnational on all platforms.

Introduction

#MentalHealth4All Campaign (cont.)

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For Yourself

- Open up to someone close to you about something that you've been coping with.
- Identify three simple self-care activities that work for you, like exercising, meditating, or journaling.
- Schedule a check-up to talk to a doctor about your mental health, as well as your physical health.
- Add crisis resource numbers to your phone and encourage a loved one to do the same.

For the People in Your Life

- Let people in your life know you're a safe person to talk to about mental health, and actively listen and engage when someone comes to you for help.
- Connect people in your life who have shared interests, such as music, gaming, sports, art and more!

For Your Community

- Advocate for mental health policies that ensure that everyone in your community has access to mental health care, suicide prevention training, and funding for local crisis resources.
- Get involved with your local AFSP chapter, or join an Out of the Darkness Walk, and help transform your community into one that's smart about mental health, where everyone has support when they need it.
- Bring an AFSP mental health education, research or support program to your school, workplace, or community center.

Events Calendar

May



AFSP will be hosting a variety of free virtual events through the month of May.

Please consider joining these events and sharing them with your friends, family, neighbors, teachers, etc. We will be hosting a live concert with a musical group, Facebook Live Q&A, webinars about how to advocate for smart public policies and a Live Town Hall on Facebook with families who have been affected by suicide, plus many other events.

After the first of May, check afsp.org/may for details about how to join these events.

Spreading Awareness Social Networks

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Join us in sharing our #MentalHealth4All content through your own social media channels during Mental Health Awareness Month - there is power in numbers! To highlight the specific actions you are taking, please use the hashtag #MentalHealth4All. We also encourage you to use the social graphics and GIFs we have created - all can be found [here](#). You can also now update your Facebook frame [here](#)!

As always, please share content from @AFSPnational

Facebook

Post Copy Option 1

- Today begins #MentalHealthAwarenessMonth. Join us and @AFSPnational as we share actions to support #MentalHealth4All and encourage our friends, family, and communities to get involved to prevent suicide.

Post Copy Option 2

- In recognition of #MentalHealthAwarenessMonth, I'm joining @AFSPnational to encourage everyone to take action to support mental health. Everyone can make a difference! #MentalHealth4All

Post Copy Option 3

- This #MentalHealthAwarenessMonth, I'm joining @AFSPnational to take actions to prevent suicide. Let's support #MentalHealth4All by starting a conversation with someone close to you about a tough topic or advocating for legislation that addresses the disparity in #mentalhealth care access for underrepresented communities. Check out afsp.org/may for more information. #AFSPAAdvocacy





Spreading Awareness Social Networks (cont.)

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Instagram

Post Copy Option 1

- It's more important now than ever that we take care of our #mentalhealth. This #MentalHealthAwarenessMonth, we're joining @AFSPnational in sharing actions everyone can take to support #MentalHealth4All

Post Copy Option 2

- This #MentalHealthAwarenessMonth, take action with us and @AFSPnational to prevent suicide. From reaching out to someone and having a #RealConvo about mental health to advocating for legislation that addresses disparities in #mentalhealth care access in underrepresented communities, we can all play a role in supporting #MentalHealth4All #AFSPAdvocacy

Post Copy Option 3

- We can all take simple actions to make a difference. This #MentalHealthAwarenessMonth, I'm learning new ways I can support #MentalHealth4All and help save lives. Join me!

Twitter

Post Copy Option 1

- In honor of #MentalHealthAwarenessMonth, I'm joining @AFSPnational in spreading awareness about the actions we can all take to support #MentalHealth4All & #StopSuicide

Post Copy Option 2

- No one's #mentalhealth is fully supported until everyone's mental health is supported. It's important that we take care of our mental health in order to support #MentalHealth4All #MentalHealthAwarenessMonth #MHM2021

Post Copy Option 3

- This #MentalHealthAwarenessMonth, join me in spreading awareness about the actions we can all take to support #MentalHealth4All. afsp.org/may



Spreading Awareness Public Policy

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AFSP furthers our mission of saving lives by advocating for federal and state level legislation that addresses disparities in access to mental health care and suicide prevention resources.

One way to reach out to your public officials is by publishing a **“Letter to the Editor.”** Below is an overview of how to send a letter to an editor of your local media outlets and followed by an example email template.

How to Send a Letter to an Editor

- Letters usually run from 150 to 250 words.
- Call your local newspaper for length limit and submission information. There often is a special e-mail address specifically for submissions (e.g., letters@newspaper.com).
- The draft following is about 200 words. You can “make it your own” by filling in personal information about why you are advocating for mental health. Be sure to stay within the length limit.
- Put the letter in the text of the e-mail. Do not send it as an attachment, or it will not be accepted.
- Include your name, city or town, and a daytime phone number (preferably cell phone) so a paper can verify information.
- A newspaper may propose edits or cuts to shorten it. That is fine, as long as the meaning of the message does not change.
- Letters should be submitted as soon as possible to allow for timely publication.
- If your letter is printed and posted on the Internet, please email aobrien@afsp.org with a link to the story.



Spreading Awareness Public Policy (cont.)

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Outreach Email Template

Dear Editor,

May is Mental Health Month. It is important that we work to break down barriers to mental health care access. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's theme for the month is #MentalHealth4All. From parity in insurance coverage to ensure equal access to mental health care and benefits to expanding the mental health workforce by encouraging new behavioral health professionals to practice in rural and underserved areas, there are many ways that we can support those struggling with their mental health and save lives.

During this month, I am urging my public officials to prioritize suicide prevention and mental health. I'm asking them to pass state legislation that funds 9-8-8 and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline the same way as 9-1-1. This legislation will increase funding to local crisis call centers and ensure that those in crisis receive support from someone in their own state and are connected to local resources. It is vital that every state pass this legislation before 9-8-8 is fully implemented in July of 2022.

«Personalize Your Message»

We must prioritize our mental health as much as our physical health and encourage those struggling to seek help.

Together, we can ensure #MentalHealth4All.

Spreading Awareness PSAs

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If your organization has relationships with radio stations who donate airtime for Public Service Announcements, please find suggested messaging below.

15 second version

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. No one's mental health is fully supported until everyone's mental health is fully supported. Learn more about the **#MentalHealth4All** campaign from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention at [A-F-S-P dot org slash May](https://www.afsp.org).

30 second version

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention is sending the message that no one's mental health is fully supported until everyone's mental health is fully supported. As part of the **#MentalHealth4All** campaign, we're asking you to take one simple action to encourage your friends, family, and community to take mental health seriously. Learn more at [A-F-S-P dot org slash May](https://www.afsp.org).

Appendix

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Impact Messages

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Below are AFSP's impact messages, which can complement social media posts, virtual events, talking points, or marketing collateral.

- AFSP funds groundbreaking [suicide research](#), laying the foundation for the most important findings in the field. This year we're funding 38 new studies, bringing our total current investment to \$20 million, with 100 ongoing studies.
- Through [research](#), we can discover new ways to save lives. Most of the world's leading suicide prevention researchers have been supported by AFSP at some point in their career, and these studies have made major contributions in preventing suicide.
- Through our 32,000 volunteer [Field Advocates](#), we're leading the way in mental health and suicide prevention advocacy with over 50 state laws and 13 major federal policies being enacted into legislation in the last few years alone. Most recently AFSP played a lead role in establishing 9-8-8 as the three-digit number for people in crisis. Sign up [here](#) to join us!
- Our [Interactive Screening Program](#) is used by mental health services at hundreds of schools, workplaces and other organizations, giving people a safe and anonymous way to reach out for support. ISP has connected over 180,000 people to help they would not have sought otherwise.
- Our suicide prevention education programs change attitudes, culture, and behavior. One example: Teachers who've received our [More Than Sad](#) training had increased engagement with struggling students, and increased referrals of students to needed help, as compared to those without the training.
- Since launching in 2015, [AFSP's Talk Saves Lives™](#) education program -available in person or virtually -has reached nearly 150,000 people across all 50 states with science-informed education about suicide, and how we can all help prevent it.
- With the outbreak of COVID-19, our local chapters met the challenge by adapting our programs from in-person to virtual, with over 500 presentations in four months alone, including the debut of our new program, [Enhancing Mental Health During COVID-19](#).

Impact Messages (cont.)

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- We launched a campaign effort at the start of the pandemic to educate the public about the importance of safeguarding mental health for you and loved ones through traditional and social media. The [Taking Care of Your Mental Health blog](#) alone reached over 900,000 people in March 2020.
- We're collaborating with leading organizations and workplaces to bring national suicide prevention programs to communities across the country, including: Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST), Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), and Attachment-Based Family Therapy (ABFT).
- We're working in collaboration with the [media & entertainment industry](#) to shine a light and hopefulness on mental health and ways that we can support people who are struggling -long before a suicidal crisis. By working with content creators, the stories told are informed by research, portrayed in ways that hope and recovery is possible and safe for viewers who may be struggling.
- Through our [Seize the Awkward](#) campaign young people everywhere have access to inspirational messages, conversation starters and social media tools to reach out to a friend and check in on their mental health. The campaign features original music video ["Whatever Gets You Talking"](#) and has reached more than 42 million people since 2018.
- AFSP has forged new territory in working with the firearms owning communities across the U.S. to learn how to prevent suicide. Through a [partnership](#) with the National Shooting Sports Foundation, a trade organization, our suicide prevention programs and materials and education on safe storage, are reaching gun retailers and ranges and firearms owners in 40 states.
- Through our partnership with the leading Emergency Medicine organization, the American College of Emergency Physicians, a new suicide prevention tool and app called [ICARE](#) has been developed to make suicide prevention care more readily available in Emergency Room settings.

Impact Messages (cont.)

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- We're a "grassroots-meets-science" organization with a longstanding dedication to supporting survivors of suicide loss. Our nationwide network of local chapters helps deliver programs like [Healing Conversations](#), which gives those who have lost someone the opportunity to speak with a trained peer, who can share comfort and resources.
- Over a two-year span, 600 mental health professionals participated in AFSP's Suicide [Bereavement Clinician Training Program](#) to increase their understanding of the unique needs of people bereaved by suicide.
- On the Saturday before Thanksgiving each year, AFSP supports hundreds of large and small [International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day](#) events around the world, in which suicide loss survivors come together to find comfort and understanding through their shared experience.

Talking Points

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- Suicide deaths saw a decline in 2020.
 - Provisional data from the CDC on suicide deaths for the year 2020 have been published in The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA). According to the new data, deaths by suicide declined from 47,511 to 44,834 (5.6%) between 2019 and 2020. Suicide has reportedly decreased from the tenth to the eleventh leading cause of death as COVID-19 became the third leading cause of death.
 - This decrease is encouraging from an overall population level, however, it is important for people to keep in mind the following as these data do not include suicide rates and are not final.
 - COVID-19 and associated mitigation efforts such as physical distancing do not alone cause suicide. Suicide is complex, risk is dynamic, and an individual's personal risk factors combined with precipitants such as evolving experiences with isolation, depression, anxiety, economic stress, and suicidal ideation, and access to lethal means may lead to periods of increased risk.
 - This decrease in the total number of suicide deaths may not be a decrease in suicide deaths for all groups- as the pandemic has had a disproportionate effect on particular populations. We do not yet have the data to consider suicide in specific populations based on demographic factors such as age, gender and racial/ethnic background or social determinants such as income, access to health care and stressors that minoritized communities may experience.
 - We may not understand the entire impact of COVID-19 on suicide deaths for another year or longer as the impact of COVID-19 may last beyond the pandemic and suicide mortality data take time to collect and analyze in a meaningful way. Additionally, we know there can be a time lag in the manifestation of distress even months after the acuity of a traumatic or stressful period is over.

Talking Points (cont.)

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- The decline in suicide deaths is trending in the right direction towards AFSP's Project 2025 initiative to reduce suicide rates by 20%.
 - However, not every state and demographic have reported a decline.
 - For youth, the rate of suicidal ideation rose to 1:4 during the pandemic.
- While suicide risk factors, such as anxiety, social isolation, economic stress, and suicidal ideation have increased during the pandemic, it is important for everyone to understand that suicide risk is complex and protective factors also play a powerful role.
 - Early data from states, such as Florida, Massachusetts, Utah, and Hawaii, show that the overall suicide rates **declined or saw no change** in 2020, compared with previous year. This early data helps dispel this common misconception.
 - In [Florida](#), suicide rates in 2020 saw a 13 percent drop from the previous year, and a 16 percent drop from 2018
 - Reports suggest that suicide rates in [Massachusetts](#) from March-May of 2020 were in line with the expected range based on recent years' trends
 - In [Utah](#), the number of suicide deaths did not increase in the first 39 weeks of 2020; the number of suicide deaths is consistent with the previous three years
 - Suicide rates in [Hawaii](#) decreased to 124 suicides from April through December 2020, which is lower than the 150 suicides in the same nine-month periods from 2015 to 2019
- While this data is encouraging from an overall population level, it is imperative we do not let up on addressing suicide risk factors or implementing evidence-based suicide prevention strategies.
- Suicide is not a simple issue to solve nor one in which there's a one-size-fits-all approach, but we all can play a role in preventing suicide by safeguarding our own and others' mental health, educating one another on mental health and suicide, as well as providing resources for particular communities, such as youth,

Talking Points (cont.)

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- **Youth and Young Adults:** While the shift towards remote learning has protected physical safety for children and teachers, continued isolation, the loss of loved ones or economic hardship, can impact children's mental health. While there is currently no concrete data demonstrating causation between remote learning and children's mental health or suicide, there are steps parents, teachers, and other caring adults can take to protect the mental health of our children during this time. These include: taking care of your own mental health, having honest conversations with your children, sticking to routines as much as possible, ensuring your children get physical exercise, and enlisting the help of a mental health professional when needed.
- **Minoritized Communities:** Health disparities have been prevalent for decades and have been even more exacerbated by the COVID-19 particularly when it comes to mental health in medically underserved communities. LGBTQ, American Indian, Alaska Native, Black and Latinx and other communities continue to face elevated suicide risk and long-standing cultural and socioeconomic barriers, such as limited access to mental health care or limited information about how to access resources and get help. These disparities cannot continue and it is incumbent on political leaders and the medical community to take the necessary steps to create a mental health care system that is equitable for everyone.
 - There are data points that indicate that Black, Latinx and Asian American communities are creating mental health programs, such as [The Confess Project](#) and the [Loveland Foundation](#). At AFSP, we are committed to building partnerships and implementing programs designed to address these challenges, accelerate suicide research related to underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, and elevating voices in our field that represent diverse communities.

Talking Points (cont.)

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- The public health crisis of COVID-19 has been incredibly trying from both a physical and mental health perspective, however it is encouraging to see the way people have come together within their communities to support one another; the increasingly open dialogue among friends and family, in the media, and within workplaces regarding mental health; and the prevalence of telemedicine and other tools that make mental health resources more accessible than ever.
- When suffering is high, history has shown that human survival instinct, coping, and resilience is very strong.
- After vaccines are distributed and the pandemic dissipates, we must remember the lessons learned about mental health during this time and continue work to protect mental health and prevent suicide.
 - A survey conducted by The Harris Poll on behalf of AFSP and other mental health organizations has revealed the importance of making suicide prevention a national priority as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Key findings from the survey include:
 - 81% believe it's more important than ever before to make suicide prevention a national priority
 - 93% of respondents overwhelmingly believe that suicide can be prevented
 - 66% of Americans are ready and willing to have open conversations about mental health, and they are feeling more empathetic
 - 78% think that mental health and physical health are equally important. For those who don't, mental health (15% vs 8% for physical) is nearly 2Xs more likely to be important and has even grown in priority since 2018 (11% mental health; 9% physical health).

Talking Points (cont.)

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- It is more important than ever that people take proactive measures to decrease risk and protect their own and others' mental health.
 - Reach out to someone in your life to see how they are doing and find ways to stay connected
 - Have open, honest conversations with close friends and family about a topic you may have difficult feelings about or let your group of friends know you're comfortable talking to them about anything they're going through
 - Practicing self-care by exercising, meditating, and consuming the news in measured doses, and seeking professional help if needed
 - People with mental health conditions need to stay in regular contact with their provider and, given the recent removal of regulatory barriers, now have more opportunity to do so via tele-health
 - Remind people that those who may be experiencing an emotional crisis or thoughts of suicide can connect 24/7 with free, confidential services—that help keep people out of Emergency Departments, which are strained during this time
 - For emotional support related to COVID-19, call the Disaster Distress Helpline (800-985-5990), or text TalkWithUs to 66746.
 - For those experiencing a suicidal crisis, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800-273-8255), or text the Crisis Text Line (text 'TALK' to 741741)
- You can also support everyone's mental health by:
 - Advocating for legislation that addresses the disparity in mental healthcare access for underrepresented communities.
 - Bringing suicide prevention education, research or support programs to your school or workplace to ensure that more people around you know that mental health is a vital part of everyone's life.
 - Spreading the word about your local AFSP chapter to ensure that every member of your community has the support they and their loved ones need during a difficult time.

Talking Points (cont.)

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- Everyone has different experiences with their own mental health, and their own preferred methods of care and support. It's important that we all remain open and ready to listen to others' points of view and perspectives, especially during this challenging time.