

REACH Toolkit

Faith-Based Communities

Background

- On March 05, 2019 the President signed Executive Order 13861, known as The President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide (or PREVENTS) calling for the development of a comprehensive plan to empower Veterans and end suicide through coordinated suicide prevention efforts, prioritized research activities, and strengthened collaboration across the public and private sectors.
- On June 17, 2020 the PREVENTS national plan was released and is available at <https://www.va.gov/PREVENTS/EO-13861.asp>. On July 7, the PREVENTS Office launched a national public health campaign called REACH that is a critical component of the Roadmap. The campaign empowers Veterans and all Americans to play a critical role in preventing suicide. The campaign website is www.wearewithinreach.net.
- Faith-based communities play a particularly important role in preventing suicide, and they are important partners in the PREVENTS initiative. Clergy are often the main source of support for those experiencing psychological distress. This underscores the important role that faith leaders can have in preventing suicide. Many faith leaders are eager to receive suicide prevention education so that they are equipped to provide proper support and referrals for those in need.

Talking Points

- Suicide is preventable, but our nation is facing an epidemic in deaths. In the general population, on average 132 Americans die by suicide each day accounting for 47,173 suicide deaths in 2017 and an estimated 1.4 million attempted suicides in the same year. For Veterans, the overall suicide rate is 1.5 times higher and the female Veteran suicide rate is 2.2 times higher than the general population after adjusting for age and/or gender.
- Research shows that for every suicide, 135 people are personally affected — families, friends, co-workers, and community members — which means in one year, up to 6.3 million people are directly affected by suicide.
- Everyone has risk factors for suicide, including financial stress, chronic illness or pain, isolation, and mental illness in themselves and in their loved ones. We also have protective factors — like a sense of purpose, family, friends, and faith-based communities — to support us, particularly in a time of need.
- The goal of the national REACH campaign is to change the conversation about suicide. We must encourage people to feel comfortable reaching out to loved ones, friends, and others who may be vulnerable, and we must urge those who may be struggling to reach out to others. No one should be afraid to reach out.
- The REACH campaign is for everyone because anyone can be at risk for suicide. When we REACH to those in need, we will provide hope. When we REACH because we are hurting, we will find help. When we REACH, we will prevent suicide.

How can faith-based communities REACH to prevent suicide?

- Take the PREVENTS Pledge to REACH to prevent suicide and be part of the solution, available at <https://www.wearewithinreach.net/pledge/>.
 - Encourage members of your community to take the pledge. Download the PREVENTS Pledge to REACH badge and display on your signature block.
- Below is a sample post that you can use to share your involvement:
 - [Name of faith-based community] has taken the @WeArePREVENTS Pledge to REACH to play a role in preventing suicide for all Americans. Together we can #PreventSuicide. Join us and pledge your support today:
<https://www.wearewithinreach.net/> #REACHNow
- Post the REACH widget with a link to wearewithinreach.net on your websites.
 - Include information about suicide prevention, REACH, and the PREVENTS Pledge to REACH in your community bulletin, on your website, and in your messages/exhortations to your congregations.

If you or someone you know are experiencing thoughts of suicide or are in crisis, please contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline for confidential support 24 hours a day at 800-273-8255. Veterans and Service members, including National Guard and Reserve, who need immediate help should call the 1800 number and press 1 or text 838255
