

Incorporating Suicide Prevention Where We Live, Work, and Play

Our essential needs and the places we live, work, and play have a significant role in shaping suicide prevention efforts.¹ Research shows that there are many interrelated factors that can reduce the likelihood of a person experiencing suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts.²

Factors That Can Affect Suicidal Thoughts and Suicide Attempts

- Safe and stable housing
- Access to education
- Economic stability and meaningful work
- Reliable transportation
- Access to health care services
- Family, friends, and community connections
- Supportive social and public environments

Essential Needs Impact Suicide Risk

Effective suicide prevention includes addressing issues such as **access to housing, livable wages, and social connection**—factors that can be the foundation of a sense of stability and well-being. When essential needs are unmet or when individuals experience persistent loss of opportunities or barriers to care, suicide risk can increase.

How Meeting Essential Needs Can Moderate Suicide Risk

- **Safe and stable housing** improves stability for individuals and families. When people have a place to live, they are less likely to experience the chronic stress and anxiety associated with housing instability or homelessness.
- **Reliable employment and transportation** can reduce financial stress and psychological distress. When people have consistent employment, they are often better able to meet their basic needs for housing, food, and health care. Employment reduces the financial insecurity that can lead to chronic stress and anxiety and can also contribute to mental well-being by fostering a sense of identity, purpose, and accomplishment, while providing social connections and routine.

- **Access to education and educational resources**, like programs that help people earn General Education Degrees (GEDs), can foster individuals' ability to adapt and thrive in the face of challenges or changing circumstances. Education offers more than academic achievement—it fosters cognitive and emotional growth, builds confidence, and opens doors to more employment opportunities and social mobility. It can also help individuals develop problem-solving abilities and adaptive thinking, which are essential for coping with adversity.
- **Access to job training and apprenticeship** programs can promote a feeling of purpose and social connection. These programs often take place in community settings, encouraging collaboration, support, and mentorship, which can help reduce feelings of isolation and strengthen connections with others—factors that are critical in supporting an individual's mental health and well-being.
- Having **health insurance coverage** can support access to health, mental health, and substance use treatment services. With insurance, individuals are more likely to seek care, receive timely diagnoses, and follow through with recommended treatments—reducing the risk of worsening physical or mental health conditions.
- **Community hubs** like libraries; recreational, cultural, community, and senior centers; places of worship; and other gathering places can play a vital role in fostering healthy relationships, connections, and a greater sense of belonging. Community and cultural hubs can also serve as bridges to services, resources, and opportunities for civic or cultural engagement.
- **Peer support programs** can provide individuals with a sense of validation, empathy, and hope, helping them feel seen, understood, and less alone. Community-based recovery organizations can provide a pathway to recovery services and access to certified peer support specialists. Peer support can offer lifelines to individuals who feel isolated and alone.

Did You Know?

Improving Access to Health Care Lowers Suicide Rates

National data indicate that the suicide rate is 26% lower in counties with higher rates of health insurance coverage.¹ Investments in improving access to health care, including mental health and substance use services, can play a crucial role in preventing suicide.³

Strengthening Community Connections Enhances Resilience

Fostering healthy relationships by strengthening community connections can improve mental health and resilience, thereby reducing suicide risk. Programs that foster community networks and support can contribute to effective suicide prevention strategies.⁴

The Bigger Picture

Preventing suicide and self-harm in our communities can benefit everyone.

- **Life-Saving Approaches:** Building efforts and programs that proactively support people's ability to meet their essential needs can help reduce suicide risk long before a crisis arises.⁴
- **Cost-Effective and Outcome-Driven Strategies:** Directly addressing issues that have been shown to be associated with increased feelings of suicidality can significantly reduce costs in health care, emergency response, and other public systems.⁵

What You Can Do

State and Territorial Suicide Prevention Professionals

- Support and actively develop partnerships that work to integrate housing, health care, and community-building initiatives to create comprehensive, person-centered systems of care. Guidance related to these activities is available in the [National Strategy for Suicide Prevention](#).
- Require suicide prevention efforts to include strategies that address essential needs.
- Expand data systems to measure and respond to the impact of social supports on mental health, substance use, and well-being.
- Address the intersection between substance use, suicide, and overdose by implementing public health approaches that focus on prevention and risk mitigation strategies.
- Collaborate with people with suicide-centered lived experience to co-design programs, campaigns, and protocols and compensate them appropriately.

Community and Organizational Leaders

- Foster stronger partnerships among community groups, such as mental health providers, faith communities, treatment and recovery centers, health care organizations, nonprofits, and other social service organizations.
- Use trauma-informed and evidence-based approaches designed to fit your community.
- Embrace community-based public health strategies that address the intersections between substance use, suicide, and overdose, including both prevention and risk mitigation strategies.
- Collaborate with people with suicide-centered lived experience to co-design programs, campaigns, and protocols.

References

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