

Collective Messaging— Changing the National Narrative about Suicide

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*Action Alliance Changing the
Conversation Member*



Disclaimer

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Presentation Goals:

- Understand the Action Alliance's Changing the Conversation efforts
- Learn best practices about how to successfully message to the public about suicide
- Identify collective messaging resources



Presentation Overview:

- About the Action Alliance
- Changing the Conversation About Suicide
- Public Messaging Tools and Resources
- VA and DoD Messaging Efforts
- Key Takeaways and Next Steps

➤ WHO WE ARE

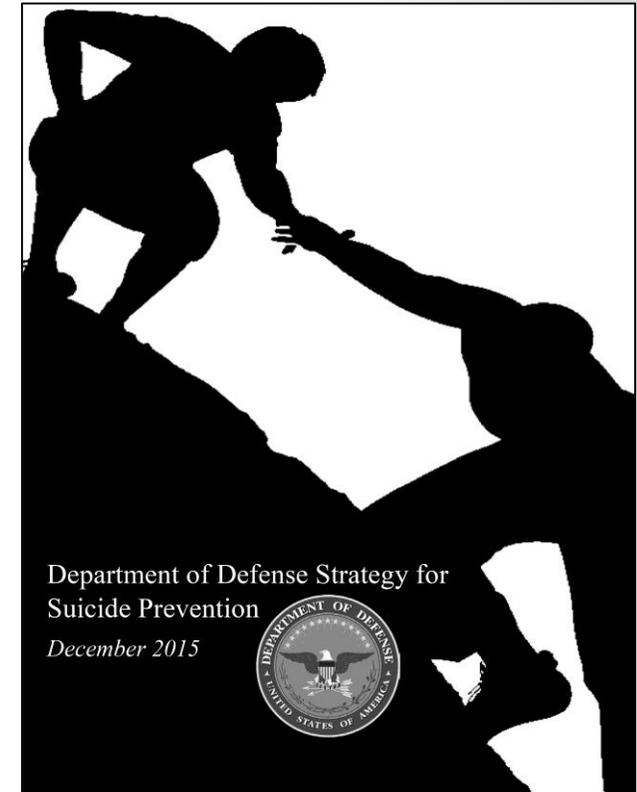
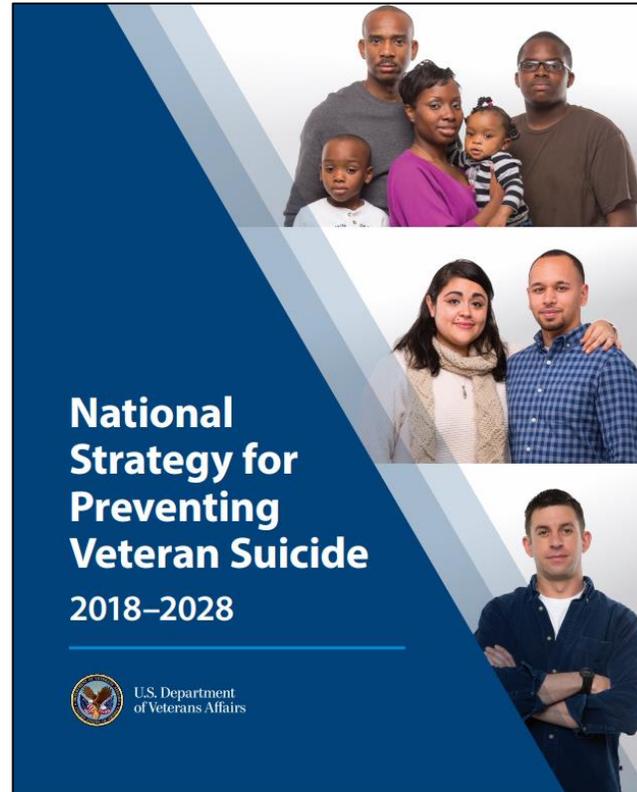
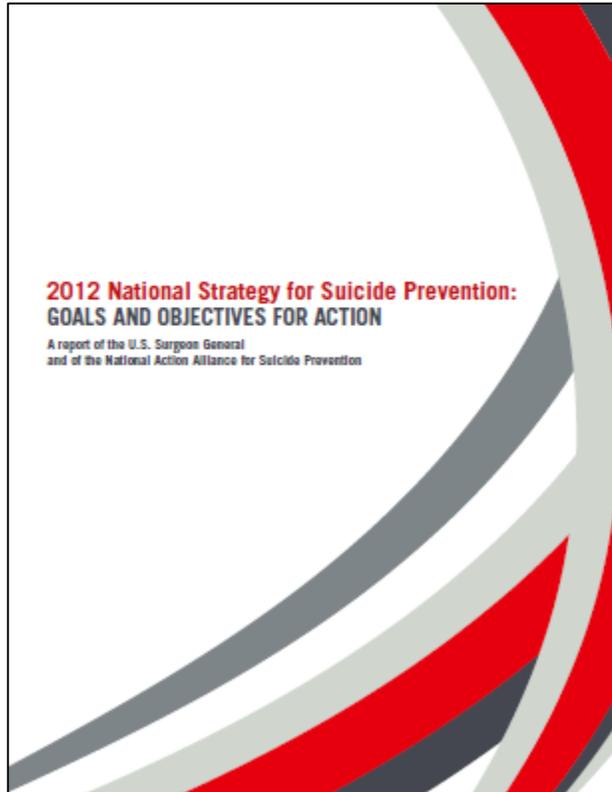


The Nation's Public-Private Partnership

Bringing together influential public and private sector leaders (representing automobile, construction, defense, education, entertainment, faith, forestry, health, insurance, justice, law enforcement, mental health, military, news media, sports, railroad, technology, and veteran services) **to advance the *National Strategy for Suicide Prevention*.**



Our Road Map





Action Alliance's Priorities



**Transforming
Health Systems**



**Transforming
Communities**



**Changing the
Conversation**



➤ **CHANGING THE
CONVERSATION**



Changing the Conversation



National Strategy Goal 4: Promote responsible media reporting of suicide, accurate portrayals of suicide and mental illnesses in the entertainment industry, and the safety of online content related to suicide.

We leverage news reporters, entertainment industry representatives, and suicide prevention messengers to change the national narratives around suicide and suicide prevention to ones that promote:

- Hope
- Connectedness
- Social support
- Resilience
- Treatment
- Recovery



Why Is Messaging Important?



It Can:

- Promote positive behaviors
- Support prevention goals

OR



It Can:

- Increase risk
- Undermine prevention



Messaging Influencers



News Media

- Responsible reporting
- Safety of online content



Entertainment Industry

- Accurate and responsible portrayals



Public Messengers

- Research-informed campaigns
- Organizational messaging
- Prevention- and action-focused



News Media

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REPORTING ON SUICIDE

Developed in collaboration with American Association of Suicidology, American Psychological Association, American Psychiatric Association, American Public Health Officers Association, American Psychological Association, Canadian Suicide Project, University of Chicago, Columbia University, New Zealand, Columbia University Department of Psychology, Connecticut Suicide Prevention, International Association for Suicide Prevention, Task Force on Media and Suicide, Medical University of Vienna, National Alliance on Mental Illness, National Institute of Mental Health, National Press Photographers Association, New York State Psychiatric Institute, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Suicide Awareness Voices of Education, Suicide Prevention Resource Center, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and UCLA School of Public Health, Community Health Sciences.

IMPORTANT POINTS FOR COVERING SUICIDE

- More than 50 research studies worldwide have found that certain types of news coverage can increase the likelihood of suicide in vulnerable individuals. The magnitude of the increase is related to the amount, duration and prominence of coverage.
- Risk of additional suicides increases when the story explicitly describes the suicide method, uses dramatic/graphic headlines or images, and repeated/extensive coverage sensationalizes or glamorizes a death.
- Covering suicide carefully, even briefly, can change public misperceptions and correct myths, which can encourage those who are vulnerable or at risk to seek help.

Suicide is a public health issue. Media and online coverage of suicide should be informed by using best practices. Some suicide deaths may be newsworthy. However, the way media cover suicide can influence behavior negatively by contributing to contagion or positively by encouraging help-seeking.

Suicide Contagion or "Copycat Suicide" occurs when one or more suicides are reported in a way that contributes to another suicide.

References and additional information can be found at: www.ReportingOnSuicide.org.

INSTEAD OF THIS: ❌	DO THIS: ✅
• Big or sensationalistic headlines, or prominent placement (e.g., "Kurt Cobain Used Shotgun to Commit Suicide").	• Inform the audience without sensationalizing the suicide and minimize prominence (e.g., "Kurt Cobain Dead at 27").
• Including photos/videos of the location or method of death, grieving family, friends, memorials or funerals.	• Use school/work or family photo, include hotline logo or local crisis phone numbers.
• Describing recent suicides as an "epidemic," "skyrocketing," or other strong terms.	• Carefully investigate the most recent CDC data and use non-sensational words like "rise" or "highs."
• Describing a suicide as inexplicable or "without warning."	• Most, but not all, people who die by suicide exhibit warning signs. Include the "Warning Signs" and "What to Do" sidebar (from p. 2) in your article if possible.
• "John Doe left a suicide note saying..."	• "A note from the deceased was found and is being reviewed by the medical examiner."
• Investigating and reporting on suicide similar to reporting on crimes.	• Report on suicide as a public health issue.
• Quoting/interviewing police or first responders about the causes of suicide.	• Seek advice from suicide prevention experts.
• Referring to suicide as "successful," "unsuccessful" or a "failed attempt."	• Describe as "died by suicide" or "completed" or "killed him/herself."

www.reportingonsuicide.org



News Media

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- Use school/work or family photo; include hotline logo or local crisis phone numbers.
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Entertainment Industry

Real Stories An initiative of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention

National Recommendations for Depicting Suicide

Guidance to help content creators craft stories about survival, hope, and healing—aimed at saving lives and restoring hope

Convey that suicide is complex and often caused by a range of factors, rather than by a single event.

Many factors beyond mental health conditions can contribute to suicide, such as relationship, physical health, financial, and legal issues. At the same time, most people experiencing one or even several of these factors will not die by suicide. People who attempt suicide are often acutely distressed or in crisis at that particular moment due to a confluence of factors.

Depiction Recommendations

Show that help is available.

Consider conveying a character choosing to seek help, such as calling or texting crisis hotlines (listed below), reaching out to a mental health professional or a social supports (e.g., family, friends, and acquaintances), or finding new or alternative coping strategies.

Portray characters with suicidal thoughts who do not go on to die by suicide.

It is important to not normalize suicide or make suicide seem more common than it actually is. Ninety percent of individuals who attempt suicide do not die by suicide; therefore, consider depicting a character who had suicidal thoughts but went on to live. Stories of survival and healing should be woven into scripts about suicide to provide hope and a balanced perspective.

Connect viewers to resources.

Highlight help-seeking resources available to viewers through your promotional activities (e.g., public service announcements, social media outreach, online resources):

- > National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-TALK (8255)
- > Military/Veterans Crisis Line: 800-273-TALK (8255) - Press 1
- > Crisis Text Line: 781741

Suicide prevention experts and entertainment content creators jointly contributed to these recommendations.

www.suicideinscripts.org



Entertainment Industry

Convey that suicide is complex and often caused by a range of factors, rather than by a single event.

Portray characters with suicidal thoughts who do not go on to die by suicide.

Avoid showing or describing the details about suicide methods.

Consult with suicide prevention messaging experts and people with personal experience.

Show that help is available.

Portray everyday characters who can be a lifeline.

Depict the grieving and healing process of people who lose someone to suicide.

Use nonjudgmental language.

Connect viewers to resources.



➤ PUBLIC
MESSAGING



What Is Public Messaging?

Public Messaging IS:

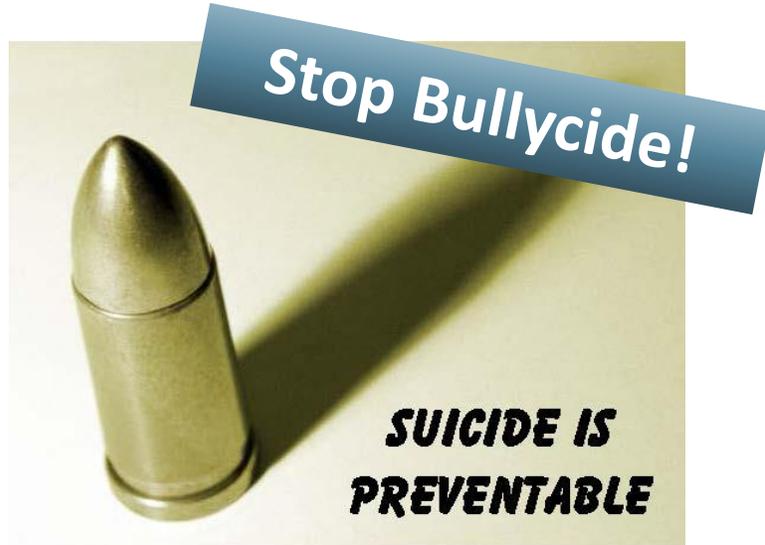
- Campaigns
- Social media
- Newsletters
- Event publicity
- Websites
- Public talks/speeches

Public Messaging IS NOT:

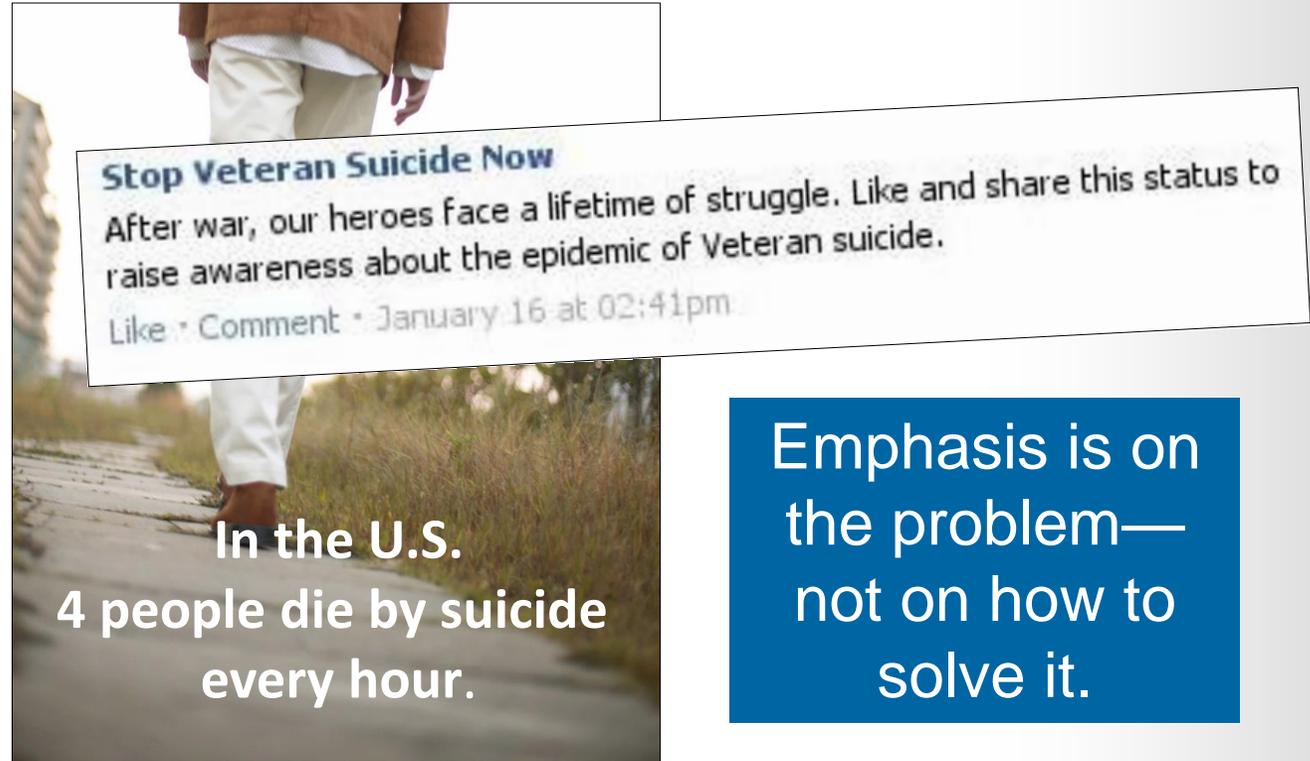
- Private conversations
- Sharing in support groups
- Clinical interactions



Common Messaging Problems



Violates safety guidelines or undermines prevention.

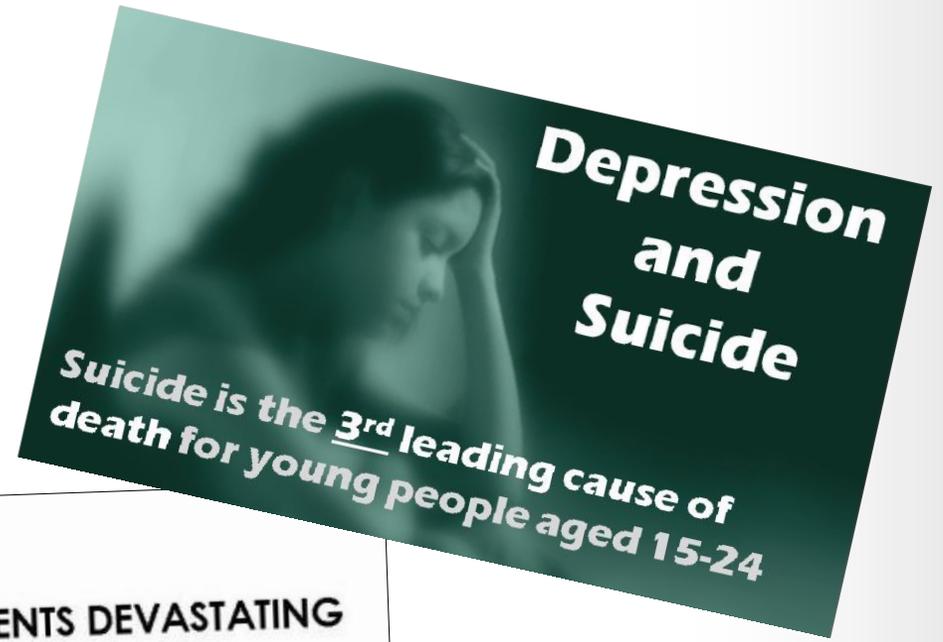


Emphasis is on the problem—not on how to solve it.

Yet . . . majority already agree suicide is a problem.



Collective message:
“It’s hopeless and there’s
nothing anyone can do.”



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LANDMARK MENTAL HEALTH REPORT DOCUMENTS DEVASTATING
EFFECTS, SIGNIFICANT STIGMA AGAINST SUFFERERS



**Public messages can
add to the negative
narrative.**



Unlikely To Be Effective

- Not thoughtfully planned
- Undefined goals & audiences

“Calls to action” are vague or absent.

Messaging is not tied to other programs or services.

“It’s time to shift from messaging for awareness to messaging for action.”



Research and Best Practices

- “Don’ts” for media also apply to public messaging
- Principles of effective health communications
- Various guidelines exist (channels, populations, goals, etc.)





National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention: *Framework for Successful Messaging*

Four considerations when developing messages:

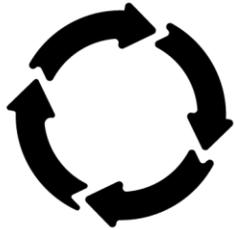
1. Strategy
2. Safety
3. Positive narrative
4. Guidelines

www.SuicidePreventionMessaging.org





Framework for Successful Messaging



Strategy

Plan and focus messages



Positive Narrative

Help the audience to envision prevention and action



Safety

Avoid unsafe and unhelpful messaging



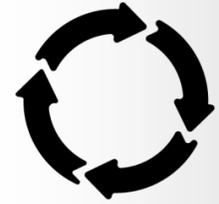
Guidelines

Use message-specific best practices



Start with Strategy

(Strategy shapes all other decisions)



Strategy



Should we use communications?

~~We need posters!~~

Decide “why” before “how.”



Principles of Effective Communications

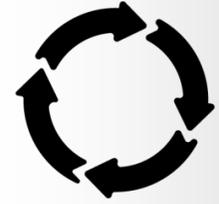


- Focus messages: Who are you messaging to and why?
 - Think “GAB” = **G**oals, **A**udience, **B**ehavior
 - “Call to action”
- Tie messaging to other programs or services
- Audience research & message testing
- Appropriate channels & sufficient exposure

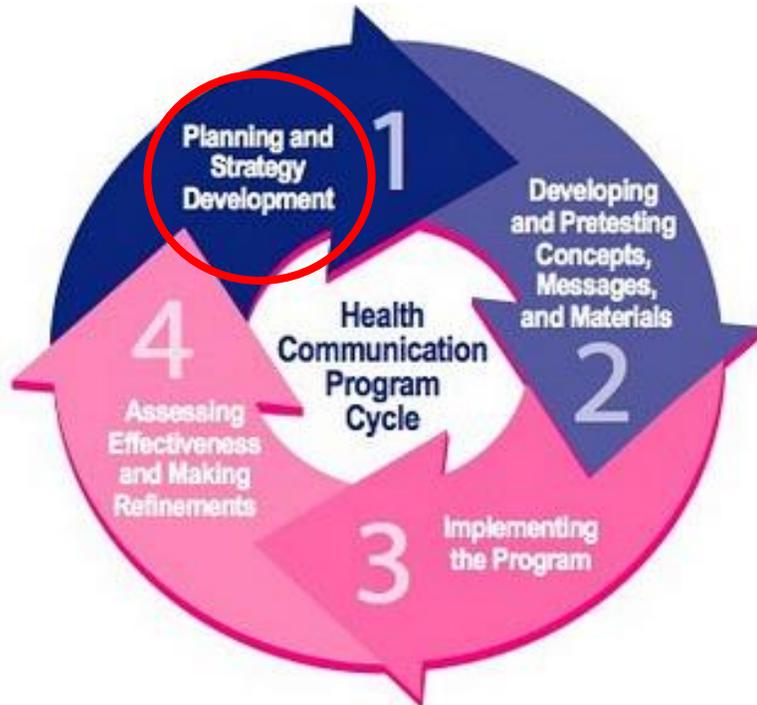




Systematic Planning Is Key



Strategy



Planning Steps

1.	Set the CONTEXT
2.	WHY Message?
3.	WHO to influence?
4.	To DO what?
5.	WHAT to say?
6.	HOW to reach them?
7.	SO WHAT?

← **“How”
decision
is here**



Convey a Positive Narrative



**Positive
Narrative**



- Balance the negative narrative.
- In every message: Help your audience to *envision* prevention, action, hope, or healing.



Many Ways to Promote the Positive!



**Positive
Narrative**

Ask: What fits with my strategy?

- Concrete actions your audience can take
- Stories of coping, resilience, & recovery
- Program successes
- Available resources
- What we know about successful prevention
- How people are making a difference



Safety



Safety



DON'T:

- ✗ Show or describe **methods or locations**
- ✗ **Normalize** by portraying suicide as common or acceptable
- ✗ Use data or language implying suicide is **inevitable or unsolvable**
- ✗ **Oversimplify** causes



Tips on Messaging Safely



- Use data thoughtfully:
 - Ask: What does it add? Does it fit with my strategy (GAB)?
 - Check: is the overall emphasis on prevention?
 - If appropriate, use positive statistics:
 - The VA saves about 70 lives each day via its crisis hotline.

- Convey the complex causality of suicide.

- Avoid problematic language and images
 - “Die by suicide” rather than “Commit”
 - No “headclutcher” photos



Use Applicable **Guidelines**



Guidelines



Messengers

**Best Practices for
Survivor/Attempt Stories**

Channels

**AAS Video
Guidelines**

**Working with
the Media**

**Social Media Guidelines
for MH & Suicide Prevention**

Goals

Stigma Reduction

Populations

**Talking about Suicide
& LGBT Populations**

And more!



Learn More about Messaging

- Example: Review the *Framework* website SuicidePreventionMessaging.com





Learn More about Messaging



Introduction to Strategic Communication Planning

SPRC Director of Grantee and State Initiatives Kerri Nickerson discusses the importance of strategic communication planning and walks through the key components of successful communication materials. Use the accompanying worksheet to [develop your communication plan](#).



Understanding and Reaching Your Audience: We R Native

Stephanie Craig Rushing, project director at the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board, discusses how We R Native engages its target audience to develop messaging that resonates with tribal youth. Use the accompanying worksheet to identify the best messaging and channels to [reach your audience](#)



Understanding and Reaching Your Audience: South Carolina

Suicide Prevention Trainer/Coordinator Robert Cottingham describes how the South Carolina Youth Suicide Prevention Initiative (SCYSPI) is working with youth to plan and implement their social media efforts. Use the accompanying worksheet to identify the best messaging and channels to [reach your audience](#).



Evaluating Your Communication Efforts

Rajeev Ramchand, senior behavioral scientist at RAND Corporation, presents key evaluation concepts and questions to consider when creating an evaluation plan for communication efforts. Use the accompanying worksheet to help [evaluate your communication efforts](#).

➤ Example:
Suicide Prevention
Resource Center Strategic
Communications
Training Series

<http://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/strategic-communication-planning>

➤ VA AND DOD
MESSAGING EFFORTS

Promoting Responsible Coverage of Veteran Suicide



SAFE MESSAGING BEST PRACTICES
A guide for anyone communicating and writing about Veteran suicide

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Office of Research, Health and Program Operations

This content has been adapted from reportingsuicide.org.

Suicide is a serious national public health problem that affects communities everywhere. At the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), preventing suicide among all Veterans is a top priority — including among those who do not, and may never, seek care within our system. We are working to reach Veterans where they live, work, and thrive.

Suicide is preventable, and we all have a role to play.

Just as suicide has no single cause, no one strategy can end Veteran suicide. VA is using a bundled public health approach that involves multiple sectors, including media and entertainment industries. Research has shown that the way media covers suicide can influence behavior — either positively, by encouraging help-seeking, or negatively, by increasing contagion or “copycat” suicide, which occurs when exposure to suicide or suicidal behaviors contributes to another suicide. The Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide (reportingsuicide.org) offers guidance to members of the media on covering suicide in a safe and ethical manner.

The following are recommendations for developing messages about Veteran suicide. When best practices are applied, messages can correct misconceptions, convey hope, and encourage help-seeking among those at risk for suicide.

Start Here:

1. Find the most recent VA National Suicide Data Report at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/data.asp.
2. Find the most recent CDC national suicide statistics at www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/pressrel/2014/suicide.htm.



Safe messaging best practices: the role we all play in preventing Veteran suicide

SAFE MESSAGING BEST PRACTICES
A guide for anyone communicating and writing about Veteran suicide

Friday, February 15, 2019 12:27 pm Health VAntage Point Contributor 674 views

Suicide is preventable, and we all have a role to play.

More than 50 research studies worldwide have shown the way we talk about suicide can influence behavior — either positively or negatively. Suicide is a national public health issue that affects people from all walks of life and how we communicate about it can either encourage help-seeking or increase “copycat” suicide, which occurs when exposure to suicide or suicidal behaviors contributes to another suicide.

Download at
https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention

Case Study – Media Roundtable

- VA and the Action Alliance recently hosted a “**Safe Messaging to Prevent Veteran Suicide Media Roundtable**” for reporters, VSOs, and other community partners to discuss the important role the media plays in influencing suicidal behavior.
- The roundtable featured speakers from VA, Education Development Center, Inc, Suicide Awareness Voices of Education, the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, the Military Times, and the Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention.
- Attendees were invited to ask questions about why safe reporting matters and were offered interviews with experts following the event.

You can watch the roundtable on the Action Alliance YouTube page or at:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKhIR-kAhLE&



Social Media Safety Toolkit

- As discussed in the [National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide](#), social media is an important intervention channel and a key piece of VA's comprehensive, community-based suicide prevention strategy.
- The Social Media Safety Toolkit for Veterans, Their Families, and Friends equips everyone with the knowledge needed to respond to social media posts that indicate a Veteran may be having thoughts of suicide.
- The toolkit includes best practices, resources, and sample responses.



#BeThere



Download at https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/docs/OMH-074-Suicide-Prevention-Social-Media-Toolkit-1-8_508.pdf



How the DoD uses messaging to promote suicide prevention

- Focus on :
 - Improving safe communication and reporting practices about suicide
 - Increasing help-seeking behaviors
 - Reducing perceived barriers to care.
- Incorporate “Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide” into policy and training for Public Affairs Officers
- Develop new communication materials:
 - Coping
 - Self Care
 - Safe Homes
- Design annual campaign theme in support of Suicide Prevention Month
 - Materials and resources
 - Outreach Channels
 - Outreach Recognition



How the DoD uses messaging to promote suicide prevention



SAFE HOMES SAVE LIVES

*Make it Your Mission to
#BeThere*



➤ **KEY TAKEAWAYS
AND NEXT STEPS**

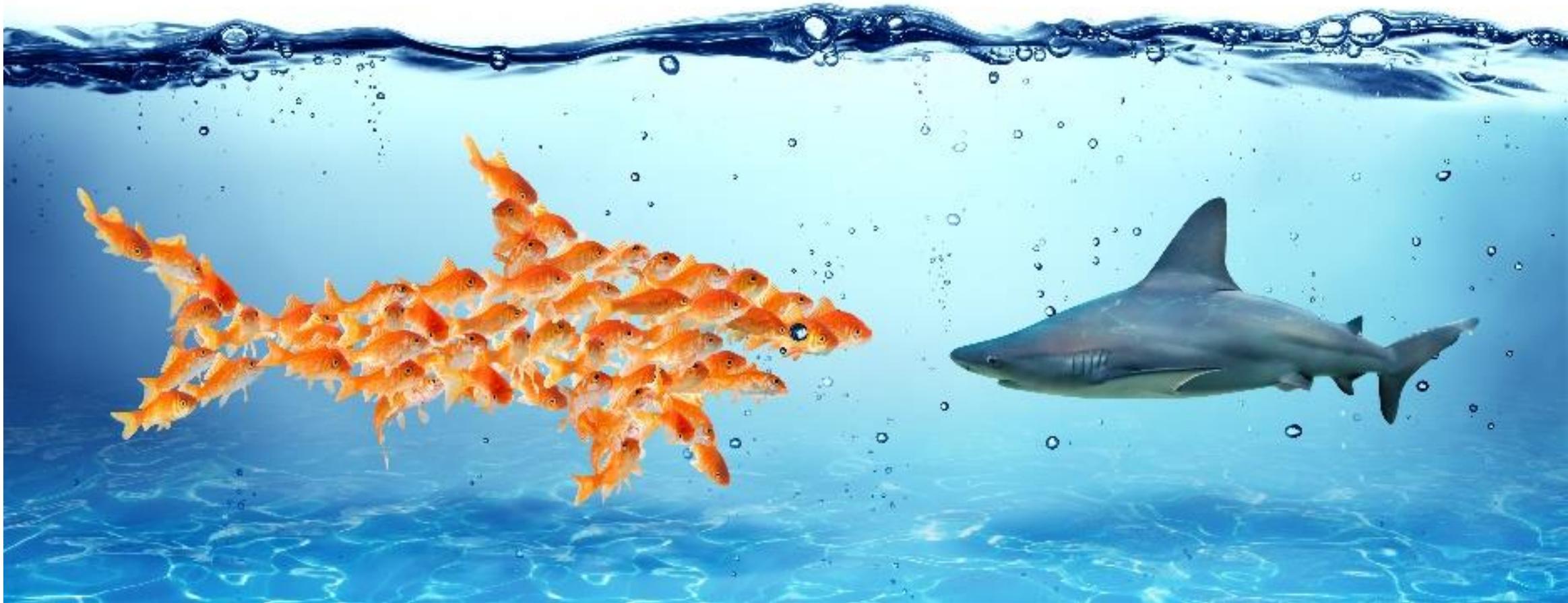


Key Takeaways

- Think about *all* public-facing messaging.
- Align talking points and messaging with suicide prevention goals.
- Be strategic and focused (goal, audience).
- Help balance the negative narratives.
- Promote positive actions and share resources.
- Be proactive.

Alone we can do so little.

TOGETHER we can do so much.





Selected References & Resources: Public Messaging

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www.theactionalliance.org

