



International Association for Suicide Prevention

IASP Policy Position on National Suicide Prevention Strategies

Key Message

The International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) recommends that every country should adopt, or make progress towards the adoption of, a national suicide prevention strategy aimed at reducing rates of suicidal behaviour.

Suicide prevention remains suboptimal in every country worldwide. Some high-income countries and many low and middle-income countries, which currently do not have strategies, would benefit from developing and implementing them. The IASP recognises and acknowledges that, for some countries, creation of a national strategy may be an unrealistic goal in the near term. Nevertheless, we believe that all countries should aim for incremental gains over time in the area of suicide prevention and that a national strategy should be an aspirational goal for all nations.

All countries should invest in strengthening and enhancing their strategic approach to suicide prevention, with an emphasis on evidence-based interventions that are effectively implemented and evaluated.

Suicide prevention strategies should have full support from national governments, including a cross-party commitment to provide adequate human and financial resources over the long term. Strategies should be underpinned by a sustained, coordinated, multi-sectoral approach, involving a range of governmental and non-governmental agencies working in collaboration, both nationally and locally. Monitoring and evaluation of implementation and outcomes should be undertaken on an ongoing basis, with a view to identifying successes as well as challenges and gaps that would benefit from strategic changes.

This policy is a natural complement and extension of the IASP's Partnerships for Life initiative, which is aimed at promoting the development, implementation and evaluation of national suicide prevention strategies globally. It also aligns with the policies of other major organisations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), and specifically with the WHO policy supporting countries of all income levels in developing national suicide prevention strategies that follow a public health model to address population- and individual-level risk factors.



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IASP Policy Position	<p>The IASP encourages all countries to plan, implement and evaluate a comprehensive, nation-wide strategic approach to suicide prevention.</p> <p>This effort will continue to further the IASP's central mission and strategic goals, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bringing together available knowledge and expertise for effective action to address the issues of suicidal behaviour worldwide.• Promoting evidence-based action to reduce the incidence of suicidal behaviour.• Guiding policy in the development of suicide prevention strategies and activities.
Research Evidence	<p>IASP's National Strategies Background Document outlines the relevant research literature that underpins this policy position and highlights gaps in the evidence base relating to national suicide prevention strategies.</p>
Responsibility	<p>IASP Special Interest Group: Development of effective national suicide prevention strategy and practice</p>
Date Adopted	<p>Sept 21, 2023</p>
Contact Information	<p>Dr. Mark Sinyor, University of Toronto, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, Toronto, Canada.</p>



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Definitions

This policy position statement adopts the following definitions:

<p>Intervention</p>	<p>Any programme or activity that seeks to contribute to a long-term goal/aim/outcome (i.e., prevention of suicide). Interventions typically found in a national suicide prevention strategy include: restrictions on access to commonly used methods of suicide; awareness-raising about suicidal behaviour in the general public; media reporting guidelines; settings-based programmes (e.g., schools, armed forces); and education and training (e.g., of gatekeepers, primary care physicians).</p>
<p>National Suicide Prevention Strategy</p>	<p>A “complex intervention”, comprising multiple interacting components (programmes, activities and interventions) which themselves interact with the (geographical (physical), epidemiological, socio-cultural, socio-economic, ethical, legal, political) context in which the strategy is implemented. National suicide prevention strategies adopt a sustained, coordinated, multisectoral approach to the prevention of suicide, involving a range of governmental and non-governmental agencies working in collaboration, both nationally and locally.</p>
<p>Programme</p>	<p>An inter-related set of interventions undertaken in order to achieve a long-term goal/aim/outcome (i.e., prevention of suicide). A suicide prevention strategy is often referred to as a (suicide prevention) programme. A strategy includes programme(s), but programmes are only one component of a strategy. Use of the term programme should be restricted to a set of interventions within a national strategy/plan.</p>
<p>Strategy</p>	<p>A unified, structured and integrated blueprint that is designed to achieve specific organisational goal/aim/outcome (i.e., prevention of suicide). The term strategy is also used to refer to the document in which the strategy is described.</p>
<p>Suicide</p>	<p>The act of deliberately killing oneself (WHO, 2014).</p>
<p>Suicide attempt</p>	<p>A self-inflicted, potentially injurious behaviour with a nonfatal outcome for which there is evidence (either explicit or implicit) of intent to die (Silverman, Berman, Sanddal, O’Carroll P, & Joiner, 2007).</p>
<p>Suicidal behaviour</p>	<p>A broad term that includes suicide planning, suicide attempt and suicide (WHO, 2014).</p>



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The IASP and National Suicide Prevention strategies

Summary of the situation

Suicide prevention experts, including members of the IASP, have identified national suicide prevention strategies as an important means of reducing suicidal behaviour (the number of suicide deaths and suicide attempts) in every nation. A recent overview of findings in the international literature concluded that there is some evidence supporting the effectiveness of national suicide prevention strategies in achieving this goal. Nevertheless, the existing evidence base remains incomplete and requires strengthening. Furthermore, many countries still currently lack the political will and/or infrastructure to build a national suicide prevention strategy.

Many countries that do not currently have national strategies and encounter many barriers to planning and implementation can nevertheless make important progress by taking actions such as utilising components of a strategy, developing programmes and interventions and building infrastructure for robust suicide data collection. This will better equip a country to move toward a national strategy in the future.

Although many countries have adopted a national strategy, all countries continue to experience barriers to implementation. These barriers may be particularly large in many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Existing strategies will need to be responsive and adaptable as further evidence emerges about how best to optimise their impact. Governments and stakeholders must therefore expect strategic planning and implementation to be an iterative process. Research challenges and goals include standardising outcomes and research methodology for measuring the effectiveness of strategies across countries (accounting for potential confounding factors), identifying the independent and synergistic impacts of specific components of strategies and measuring the cost-effectiveness of different components of national strategies. The findings from two systematic reviews being undertaken as part of the IASP Partnerships for Life programme (Interlinked systematic umbrella reviews of the effectiveness of interventions to prevent suicide [focused on interventions and programmes within national strategies] and Assessing the implementation, outcomes and impact of national suicide prevention strategies [focused on national strategies as a whole]), will strengthen the evidence base for the adoption and implementation of more effective national suicide prevention strategies worldwide.

IASP resolves to:

- Advocate for national suicide prevention strategies worldwide (or, where appropriate, efforts to lay the groundwork for future strategies, especially in LMICs where suicide prevention efforts and resources are limited).
- Support the implementation of national suicide prevention strategies in countries where they already exist.
- Encourage comprehensive data collection and evaluation of the effectiveness of national strategies.
- Support outreach efforts, including the Partnerships of Life initiative aimed at uniting research experts, clinicians, policy makers and people with lived experience in promoting, implementing and evaluating national suicide prevention strategies.



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Conclusion

Expert consensus and existing evidence support the need for a comprehensive, strategic approach to suicide prevention at a national level worldwide. The IASP supports every country to plan, implement and evaluate a national suicide prevention strategy, at a speed and intensity that are consistent with the country's needs and resources.