

# Health & Well-Being

## An App That Aims To Save Lives

(NAPSA)—A new phone app gives doctors a new tool to save lives and provide helpful supports.

With nearly 9 million American adults who have serious thoughts of suicide every year, the app was created to help the more-than-half of them who seek help from mental health services, according to surveys conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). That's the agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that addresses substance abuse, mental health and related prevention efforts.

To that end, SAMHSA has come up with the Suicide Safe mobile app. This was created to help primary care and behavioral health providers integrate suicide prevention strategies into their practice and address suicide risk among their patients.

Key features include a Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator, patient education materials, interactive sample cases, and conversation starters for talking with patients about their suicidal ideations or behaviors.

The app is based on SAMHSA's Suicide Assessment Five-step Evaluation and Triage (SAFE-T), which assists clinicians in conducting a suicide assessment using an evaluation and triage plan to identify risk and protective factors, conduct a suicide inquiry, determine risk level and potential interactions, and document a treatment plan.

Providers can:

- Learn how to use the SAFE-T approach when working with patients.

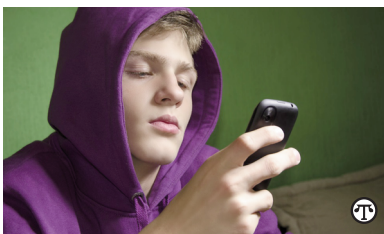
- Explore interactive sample case studies and see SAFE-T in action through case scenarios and tips.

- Quickly access and share information including crisis lines, fact sheets, educational opportunities, and treatment resources.

- Browse conversation starters that provide sample language and tips for talking with patients who may need suicide intervention.

- Locate treatment options, filter by type and distance, and share locations and resources to provide timely referrals for patients.

It's important to consider that each year, more than 40,000 people in the United States die by suicide—a figure that exceeds the rate



**Suicide is the tenth leading cause of death in the United States—but it can be prevented.**

of death from homicide and AIDS combined. Additionally, for each life lost to suicide, there are an estimated 32 other suicide attempts among adults.

### Warning Signs

Even if you're not a mental health provider, you should know what signs to watch for that may mean someone you know is at risk for suicide.

- Talking about wanting to die or end life by suicide.

- Looking for a way (e.g., searching online for or buying a gun) to die by suicide.

- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live.

- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain.

- Talking about being a burden to others.

- Increasing use of alcohol or drugs.

- Acting anxious or agitated.

- Withdrawing or feeling isolated.

- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge.

- Displaying extreme mood swings.

The risk is often greater if any of these behaviors is new, has increased, or is related to a painful event, loss or change.

### What's Being Done

SAMHSA strategies to promote protective measures and reduce risk factors include increasing connectedness to family and peers, increasing access to physical and behavioral health care, providing continuity of care upon release from emergency departments or psychiatric hospitalization and identifying best practices within workplaces, the criminal justice system and other settings.

According to Dr. Richard McKeon, chief of SAMHSA's Center for Mental Health Services Suicide Prevention Branch, all these efforts represent important steps forward in both

understanding the reasons suicide has been on the rise and how to reverse the trend.

"Twenty years ago, very little if anything was being done on the federal level. Today, much more is being done," Dr. McKeon says. "We've needed to play catch-up, but we are now on the right track in terms of where we're trying to go. Now, we have to take some of the encouraging research and bring it to scale so we can fill in the gaps."

### Looking Into Causes

Lisa Capoccia, MPH, assistant manager of provider initiatives for SAMHSA's Suicide Prevention Resource Center, says researchers are working to determine just how much the economic downturn that occurred during the last decade contributed to the increase in the suicide rate. Adults who are unemployed are substantially more likely than those who are employed full-time to have serious thoughts of suicide (7 percent compared to 3 percent) or attempt suicide (1.4 percent compared to .3 percent).

### How You Can Help

In addition, if you have any reason to believe someone may be thinking about suicide, consider these six steps:

1. Ask them if they are thinking about suicide. This will not put the idea in their head or increase the possibility that they might attempt suicide.

2. Listen without judging and show you care.

3. Stay with the person or make sure he or she is in a safe place with another caring person until additional support is in place.

4. Remove any objects that could be used to self-harm.

5. Call SAMHSA's National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at (800) 273-TALK (8255).

6. Seek emergency help if self-harm seems imminent—call 911.

Dr. McKeon explains, "There are significant numbers of people who are not getting the help they need, but SAMHSA and its public and private partners are working to change that."

### Learn More

You can get further information about suicide prevention and other vital facts and figures about mental health and substance abuse from SAMHSA News at <http://newsletter.samhsa.gov>.