

# Suicide Prevention Policies Resource Guide

Suicide is a leading cause of death in the United States, claiming nearly 50,000 lives in 2022. Over the last decade, rates of suicide have increased steadily, underscoring the need for a coordinated, multidisciplinary, and comprehensive approach. Policy changes are vital to address public health issues like suicide. **This document highlights key focus areas and example policies for suicide prevention.**



## UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

For effective suicide prevention, **quality data is essential to identify at-risk populations and understand the contexts of deaths.** Federal funding supports the collection of this data.

### National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS)

The **NVDRS** compiles data on violent deaths, including suicides, from various sources into an anonymous database. [See how states have used NVDRS data to develop suicide prevention programs.](#)

## ACCESS TO LETHAL MEANS

Putting time and distance between a person experiencing a suicidal crisis and lethal means (e.g., medications, firearms) is critical. Research has shown that periods of crisis are often brief, and whether someone dies in a suicide attempt is greatly influenced by the lethality of the means used. 90% of those who attempt suicide and survive do not attempt suicide again. [Learn more about why lethal means access matters.](#)



### Architectural Barriers

Physical barriers, such as fencing or nets on bridges and public areas of significant height, reduce suicides by delaying or deterring attempts. Funding for architectural barriers can come from federal, state, and local sources and can be advocated for on multiple levels. [Learn about one example in California here.](#)

### Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPO)

ERPOs, or Red Flag laws, allow for the temporary removal of firearms and prevent future gun purchases for individuals who pose a danger to themselves or others. As of September 2024, 21 states and the District of Columbia have enacted ERPO laws. [Learn more here.](#)

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## HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS

Healthcare systems must be equipped to support individuals before, during, and after a crisis. Identifying at-risk individuals and connecting them to timely and accessible care is crucial.

### 988 Lifeline

The [2020 National Suicide Hotline Designation Act](#) established the federally funded [988 Lifeline](#) for crisis support, connecting callers to local resources.

### Crisis Services

The [STOP Suicide Act](#), introduced in September 2024, aims to enhance crisis stabilization services by providing grants through SAMHSA that would expand access to effective and timely outpatient and virtual stabilization care.

### Mental Health Parity

[Mental health parity](#) requires insurance companies to treat mental health and substance use disorders equally with other medical conditions. A federal law was enacted in 2008, received implementation rules in 2013, and [further clarifications](#) in 2024. [Massachusetts](#) further strengthened mental health parity laws at the state level.

### Zero Suicide Framework

Many individuals who die by suicide have seen a healthcare provider in the year before their death, highlighting a critical intervention opportunity. The [Zero Suicide](#) initiative aims to transform suicide care within health systems through evidence-based policies.

## Support for Healthcare Workers

Creating a healthcare system that can effectively support individuals at risk of suicide also means supporting the individuals providing care. **Healthcare providers face increased suicide risks and barriers to care, such as [intrusive mental health questions during licensure](#).**

Policies like the [Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act](#) help address drivers of suicide among healthcare workers and fund critical work in this space.

## Additional Resources

- [2023-2024 Public Policy Priorities](#) (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention)
- [Preventing Injuries & Violence Locally: Policy Recommendations for Local Impact](#) (Safe States Alliance)
- [A Comprehensive Approach to Suicide Prevention](#) (Suicide Prevention Resource Center)
- [2024 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention](#) (Department of Health and Human Services)
- [Community-Led Suicide Prevention](#) (Education Development Center)
- [Stepping Strong Suicide Prevention Lunch and Learn](#)