

## Problem

- National Physician Suicide Awareness Day (#NPSADay) is here to help break down the culture of silence around physician mental health and suicide.
- In the year and a half since COVID-19 upended daily life, mental health challenges among physicians have skyrocketed, accelerating an already dire health crisis that has been increasing for years. Ongoing stigma surrounding accessing mental health support and care services impact physicians who fear of being judged or believing they will lose their ability to practice medicine.
- Physicians have one of the highest suicide rates of any profession. More than half of physicians know a physician who has either considered, attempted or died by suicide in their career. It's estimated that one million Americans lose their physician to suicide each year.
- It is vital that we make a conscious and forward effort to break down stigma and encourage physicians to talk about their mental health and seek support when they need it, especially in the wake of the most significant health event in recent history.

## Solution

- Now is the time to take steps to prevent physician suicide. On National Physician Suicide Awareness Day, we are committed to raising awareness of the physician suicide epidemic and galvanizing physicians, their colleagues and their loved ones to create a culture of wellbeing that prioritizes reducing burnout, safeguarding job satisfaction and viewing seeking mental health services as a sign of strength.
- Together, we can shift the paradigm from a system where physicians think that burnout, depression or suicidal thoughts are something they can, or must, overcome by themselves, to one where they see the support system around them willing to help them seek mental health care.

## Action

- National Physician Suicide Awareness Day (#NPSADay) is a reminder and call to action. It's a time to talk – and to act – so physicians' struggles don't become mental health emergencies.
- We can all help prevent physician suicide by learning the signs, starting the conversations, understanding the underlying barriers and sharing the resources that can help those in distress seek mental health care.
- There are SIX ways physicians, their loved ones, their colleagues, health organizations and others can take action:
  - Learn the Vital Signs
  - Share suicide prevention resources
  - Prepare before a moment of crisis
  - Check in with a physician
  - Understand structural barriers
  - Create a culture of wellbeing
- Visit [NPSADay.org](https://NPSADay.org) to learn more about how to take action and help prevent physician suicide.

- Supporting organizations' activation can take many forms -- from hosting an event or group conversation on the importance of breaking down stigma surrounding physician mental health support to hanging posters, sending postcards and capturing your #NPSADay in action.
- Individual action looks different for everyone, National Physician Suicide Awareness Day encourages physician, their loved ones, their colleagues and others to learn about the physician suicide epidemic and support physicians in their lives.
- If you are in crisis or experiencing difficult or suicidal thoughts, call the National Suicide Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) for free 24/7 support.

## Q&A

### Q: What is National Physician Suicide Awareness Day?

**A:** National Physician Suicide Awareness Day is a reminder and call to action to understand the underlying barriers to mental health care for physicians and create open dialogue that can help those in distress seek mental health care. We can all help prevent physician suicide by learning the signs, starting the conversations, understanding the underlying barriers and sharing information that can help those in distress seek the mental health care they need.

### Q: When is National Physician Suicide Awareness Day?

**A:** National Physician Suicide Awareness Day will take place on September 17, 2021.

### Q: What is happening on National Physician Suicide Awareness Day?

**A:** Physicians have one of the highest suicide rates of any profession, and more than half of physicians know a physician who has either considered, attempted or died by suicide in their career. It's estimated that one million Americans lose their physician to suicide each year. By creating safe and accessible spaces where physicians feel comfortable talking about their mental health, we will reinforce that physicians can have struggles with mental health – just like everyone else – and engaging in open dialogue is the first step to getting the attention they need to seek care.

### Q: What are some of the barriers that exist for physicians receiving mental health care?

**A:** Ongoing stigma surrounding accessing mental health care directly impacts physicians who fear of being judged or believing they will lose their ability to practice medicine. There are **6 key structural barriers** that prevent physicians from seeking the mental health care services they may need:

1. State medical licensure and renewal applications
2. Hospital and health system privileging and credentialing applications
3. Commercial insurance credentialing
4. Malpractice insurance applications
5. Legal discovery process during lawsuits
6. Mental health insurance requiring treatment where the physician works

Health organizations can help address these underlying, structural barriers physicians face when accessing the mental health care they may need. Every health and hospital systems should circulate their institution's and state's facts on each of these 6 structural barriers to mental health. Knowledge is power, and in this case has lifesaving potential. This action is a transparent and measurable way that every health and hospital system can support its most valuable resource—its physician workforce.

## **Q: What are some of the burdens that impact physician burnout, mental health and suicide rates?**

**A:** While there are many things that can lead to burnout among physicians, the COVID-19 pandemic has shined a light on many of them. Difficult working conditions – such as a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) and caring for patients who may be seriously ill for weeks – along with burdensome administrative tasks, long hours, and grief over losing patients have become the norm for physicians. Some physicians have dealt with more trauma and patient deaths in that time than they had previously seen over the course of their entire career. If left untreated, burnout can cause more cases of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance use and lead to suicidal thoughts for physicians, directly impacting physician suicide rates.

## **Q: Is National Physician Suicide Awareness Day an annual event or is this a one-off situation?**

**A:** National Physician Suicide Awareness Day happens every year on September 17.

## **Q: Where can I learn more about National Physician Suicide Awareness Day?**

**A:** You can access further information and a comprehensive toolkit at [NPSADay.org](https://NPSADay.org).

## **Q: I'm already practicing improving my mental health. How can I help others?**

**A:** You can help others by sharing your own story to help end the stigma and encourage other physicians to share their experience and determine what mental health care works for them. When sharing your story, remember to share:

- The full continuum of your mental health experience from thriving to coping to struggling and the range of factors that contribute to your mental health journey.
- The type of mental health care support and services that worked for you that may work for others.
- The coping skills and self-care that support you day-to-day of practicing medicine.

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This document is intended for awareness-building and informational purposes only. If you need further guidance or are in a crisis, call the National Suicide Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) for free 24/7 support.