

**WHAT**

National Physician Suicide Awareness Day

**WHEN**

September 17

**WHO**

Physicians, their colleagues and their loved ones

**WHERE**

Online and in person

**WHY**

Taking action on NPSA Day may save a life

**VISIT**

[NPSAday.org](https://NPSAday.org)



## Background

Physician suicide was a crisis long before COVID-19. More than half of physicians know a physician who has either considered, attempted or died by suicide in their career. Now physicians have been in a non-stop crisis for more than a year, with COVID-19 inflicting serious psychological wounds upon them.

Left untreated, burnout could cause more cases of depression, anxiety, PTSD, substance use and suicidal thoughts in physicians. It's these physicians who are more likely to leave medicine, or worse, die by a preventable suicide death.

## National Physician Suicide Awareness Day

National Physician Suicide Awareness Day (#NPSADay) is here to help everyone prevent physician suicide – including health systems, hospitals, medical societies and practices. We need to come together and break down the culture of silence around physician mental health. It's a time to talk – and to act – so physicians' struggles don't become mental health emergencies.

Together, we can shift the paradigm from a system where physicians think that burnout, depression or suicidal thoughts are something they must overcome by themselves to one where they see the support system around them willing to help them seek mental health care. This can start today. All health care organizations can take action to help prevent physician suicide on #NPSADay and beyond.



## How to Engage Others



### Communicate about #NPSADay throughout Your Organization

Make sure that everyone in your organization knows about #NPSADay and knows that your organization is a committed supporter of preventing physician suicide.

- Showcase the importance of physician mental health and wellbeing by having it come from the top. Get your leadership involved – have them share their own stories, talk about #NPSADay and highlight the organization's ongoing and upcoming efforts to create a culture of wellbeing, such as joining the [ALL IN: WellBeing First for Healthcare campaign](#) or addressing underlying, structural barriers to seeking mental health care services.
- Health organizations can serve as a safe space for storytelling and others to share their experiences. Create a weekly or monthly group meeting where physicians in your community can come share their stories and struggles with others in similar situations.
- Utilize the [NPSADay.org Toolkit](#) to spread the word about #NPSADay in your newsletter, by hanging posters or sending postcards to remind leadership and your organization about the importance of preventing physician suicide.



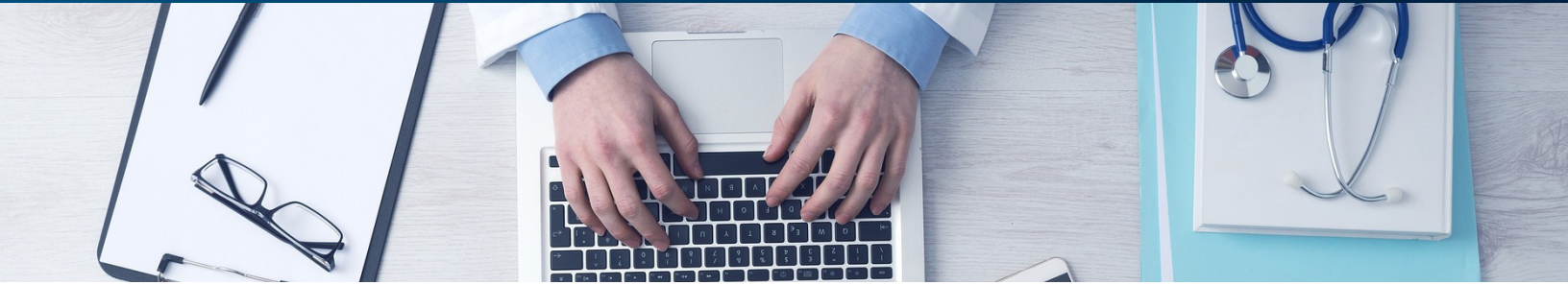
### Encourage Physicians to Consider their Own Mental Health

It can be hard for physicians to reach out for support when they are struggling, whether it's with stress, feelings of burnout or another challenge. On #NPSADay, encourage them to block some time in their day to take action to support their own mental health. Share the [resources](#) available at [NPSADay.org](#) to arm them with the information and tools they may need to access mental health care services, or even host a wellbeing event with an engaging speaker to help them understand the mental health resources they have at their disposal working at your organization.



### Educate your Community about #NPSADay

Tap your organization's platforms and expertise to reach your broader communities with messages about preventing physician suicide and #NPSADay. Examples may include running digital ads on your website, posting across your social media channels and distributing handouts to your community partners to distribute at their locations or events.



## What You Can Do

Because suicide is a complex health outcome with many drivers of risk, preventing suicide requires a strategic, multipronged, longitudinal, evidence-based plan. The following are evidence-based actions<sup>2</sup> different health organizations can do to help prevent suicide.



### Regulatory Agencies, Licensing Boards and Hospital Privileging Boards

- **Follow the recommendations** of the Federation of State Medical Boards, American Medical Association, American Psychiatric Association, American College of Emergency Physicians and others to refrain from asking questions about physicians' mental health. This practice of asking intrusive questions about diagnoses and treatment history has been shown to be an ineffective way to detect impairment and protect public safety; it is also at odds with the Americans with Disabilities Act in many instances. Moreover, it has driven physicians to hide their treatable mental health issues and prevented scores of physicians from accessing effective treatment that can protect both patient safety and their own health and careers.
- **Launch communication strategies** so physicians in each organization's jurisdiction are aware of the protections afforded to them should they seek therapy, psychiatric treatment and addiction recovery. Policies and procedures related to matters of health must be transparent and effectively communicated.
- **Develop initiatives** that help physicians safely address their own suicide risk factors and health concerns (e.g., the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's Interactive Screening Program, which many academic institutions, health systems and state associations have already implemented).
- **Contact your member of the House of Representatives** and ask them to co-sponsor the Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act (DLBHCPPA) HR1667.



### Specialty Boards, Professional Associations and Continuing Education Organizations

- Within each discipline, **identify and address specific barriers** to seeking treatment. Workgroups with members at all levels of seniority and from all settings can optimally accomplish this goal.
- **Incorporate questions related to self-care** into board certification and continuing education to emphasize that, alongside medical knowledge, technical skills and empathy for others, the ability to optimize one's own mental health, including availing oneself of mental health care, is an essential component of professional responsibility.



## What You Can Do *(continued)*



### Medical Educators

- **Ensure policies at the undergraduate and graduate medical education levels provide trainees with the greatest access to mentors, support and mental health care without punitive consequences** (e.g., build in debriefs following critical incidents, encourage therapy to optimize resilience, allow for access to treatment within and outside the institution when feasible).
- **Be transparent.** Communicate clearly about how trainees' mental health challenges are handled by the institution.
- **Prioritize and promote a growth mindset** (e.g., "Every physician struggles at times. It's a sign of strength to address challenges. It's commendable not to wait until the point of crisis to get help.").
- **Continuously provide information about how trainees can access support, guidance and mental health treatment.** List resources on the back of I.D. cards, on program websites, etc.
- **Introduce self-care early in the curriculum** as a practice linked to professionalism that can be cultivated throughout one's career.
- **Model mental health self-care** by disclosing personal struggles when appropriate and explaining that everyone needs to lean on others for support or treatment.
- **Provide opportunities for storytelling** to set new norms with hopeful narratives for addressing struggles.
- **Enhance peer support** by teaching trainees how to reach out and respond to distressed peers, cultivate active listening skills and use available resources for support.

<sup>2</sup> Moutier, Christine Yu MD; Myers, Michael F. MD; Feist, Jennifer Breen JD; Feist, J. Corey JD, MBA; Zisook, Sidney MD Preventing Clinician Suicide: A Call to Action During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond, Academic Medicine: May 2021 - Volume 96 - Issue 5 - p 624-628. Accessed at [https://journals.lww.com/academicmedicine/Fulltext/2021/05000/Preventing\\_Clinician\\_Suicide\\_A\\_Call\\_to\\_Action.24.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/academicmedicine/Fulltext/2021/05000/Preventing_Clinician_Suicide_A_Call_to_Action.24.aspx).

## Become a Supporting Organization

#NPSADay supporting organizations are committed to raising awareness around physician suicide and creating a culture of wellbeing that prioritizes reducing the burnout that can lead to it. [Complete the form](#) to be a supporting organization on September 17, and beyond.

Brought to you by:



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.