

The Coalition Approach to Suicide Prevention

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Coalitions are an invaluable asset for any community dedicated to suicide prevention. They concentrate the community's focus on a particular problem, encourage alliances, and create consistency in the community's approach to the root causes of suicide. Together, members of a coalition can do more to reduce suicides, support grieving families, and inspire change in the world around them than if they work by themselves.

goal they can't achieve separately.¹ Coalitions often combine their human, social, political, and financial capital to take advantage of opportunities for advocacy and fill gaps in resources and services. Coalitions are collaborative by nature, and this collaboration moves organizations from competing to consensus-building.¹

one another's progress or duplicate efforts. On the other hand, if coalition members work together, create a unifying goal, and agree on similar ways to meet that goal, they're more likely to compliment and strengthen one another's work.²

When deciding whether to join or form a coalition, organizations should examine the advantages and potential challenges of membership. Advantages include³:

Coalition Membership

Coalition members represent diverse interests as well as a variety of community sectors including government agencies; nonprofit organizations; community members; and faith, civic or business groups.^{1,2} Members are often invited to join by coalition leadership such as a director, coordinator, or chairperson.^{1,2}

As mentioned above, coalitions encourage its members to approach the issue of suicide prevention in a collaborative way. Consistency is especially important if there are numerous organizations or individuals working on suicide prevention efforts in the community.² By supporting collaborative strategies, stakeholders are less likely to undo

- **Increased credibility.**
An organization can increase the perception of its credibility by associating with recognized leaders on a particular issue and by simply being a part of a group.
- **Maximized resources.**
Coalitions often share costs, workload, and resources. Working in a coalition can also help organizations new to advocacy engage in the public policy process.
- **Shared ideas.**
Coalition members gain exposure to innovative solutions and approaches and learn from fellow members.

THE MAKE-UP OF A COALITION¹



To develop and maintain an effective coalition, it's important to understand how coalitions create community-level change. A coalition brings together different interest groups in the pursuit of a

Coalition Success

Coalitions often form when an external event mobilizes community action.⁴ These events might include funding opportunities that require or encourage the formation of a new suicide prevention coalition; response to an event,⁵ such as a suicide contagion; or an agency with influence and capacity convenes stakeholders to address a community need.¹

During the development of the coalition and going forward, the coalition must prioritize the following^{4,5}:

- A clear mission and purpose.
- Committed stakeholders.
- Achievable objectives and activities.
- Formalized rules and procedures.
- Effective work and decision-making structures.
- Sufficient staffing.
- Frequent and ongoing training for members and staff.
- Ownership of the coalition by its members and the community itself.
- A high level of trust among the membership.
- Development and implementation of strategic and action plans.
- Continuous evaluation of the coalition and its activities.

Finally, each of these elements should advance the mission, have buy-in from the membership, and create opportunities for the membership to participate.

Additional Resources

- Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA): CADCA offers webinars, guides, and conference opportunities to its paying members, but it also has free resources on its website. Though originally focused on drug misuse prevention, CADCA has expanded to support suicide prevention within the last several years. <https://www.cadca.org/>
- The Community Tool Box: This website offers free resources, including step-by-step guides, to build skills around community mobilization. <https://ctb.ku.edu/en>
- Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE): SOPHE represents nearly 4,000 health education professionals and students and supports effective advocacy around public health issues. <https://elearn.sophe.org/coalition-building-resources>

Reference List

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