Comprehensive Suicide Prevention for College Campuses

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This “Perspectives” piece offers a comprehensive framework for preventing suicide on college campuses that the authors contrast with the “standard” framework “which relies on referral to, and treatment by, mental health services.” The authors acknowledge that this framework is similar to that being used by campus grantees of the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act.

The framework put forward by these researchers describes five types of “preventive actions” across three “zones of intervention.” The first of these is the “prevention zone,” which includes: (1) ecological prevention, which uses policy, procedures, and system changes to transform the physical and social environment in which students live; and (2) proactive prevention, which uses psychological interventions to counter individual risks (such as financial strain and academic problems).

The second zone is the “clinical intervention zone.” This zone includes: (1) early interventions, such as screening programs, thematic groups, leaderless self-help programs, individual counseling, and stress management techniques and (2) treatment and crisis intervention, which includes crisis counseling, pharmacological intervention, individual and group treatment, and inpatient treatment.

The final zone of intervention is the “recovery zone,” which supports high-risk individuals through peer-support systems, recovery-community building, access to individual and group sessions, and psychoeducational interventions.


SPRC Resource Note

David Drum and Adryon Denmark point out that a college’s resources may be better spent on population-based prevention strategies that reduce the number of students who become distressed, rather than only relying on reactive approaches such as crisis intervention and clinical treatment. They also highlight the need to broaden ownership of campus suicide prevention efforts to improve and sustain success.

The multifaceted approach to campus suicide prevention described by Drum and Denmark is similar to the Comprehensive Approach to Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Promotion [2] developed by SPRC and the Jed Foundation.

Education Development Center, Inc. and the Jed Foundation recently created Campus MHAP: A Guide to Campus Mental Health Action Planning [3], which can help colleges and universities develop a comprehensive plan to promote mental health and prevent suicide in their campus communities.