

Key Points

What is it?

Suicide attempt survivors have first-person experience and insight into what it takes to find hope and stay alive when hovering on the edge of despair. The [National Strategy for Suicide Prevention](#) (Objective 10.3) urges us to solicit and listen to the voice of suicide attempt survivors and to engage them in prevention planning, treatment, and community education.

"When we engage suicide attempt survivors and suicide prevention practitioners, we can transform the care and the responses that our systems give to save lives."

Barb Gay, Member, Action Alliance's
Suicide Attempt Survivors Task Force

Why is this issue important?

Giving suicide attempt survivors a seat at the table is important for many reasons. Since people who have attempted suicide are more likely to die by suicide, engaging them in their own care can help reduce their risk.

Survivors can also serve as models of hope for others at risk of suicide. Tapping their lived experience (i.e., living through a suicidal crisis) to inform prevention planning, treatment, and education can help improve care, enhance safety, and reduce suicide attempts and deaths. Their involvement can also reduce the discomfort and discrimination related to suicide and mental illness.

What are the challenges to implementation?

- Suicide prevention efforts have historically relied on research and clinical observation, not first-person experience.
- Too few attempt survivors are willing to disclose their experience due to stigma, discrimination, and personal shame.
- Attempt survivors may experience negative consequences, personally and/or professionally, if they reveal that they have lived through a suicidal crisis.
- The stigma of suicide (and of mental illness) deters providers and business leaders from soliciting the involvement of attempt survivors.
- Often people fear that talking about suicide with someone who has attempted a suicide could activate their past trauma and provoke another crisis.

How can we overcome those challenges?

- Embrace the core values of [The Way Forward](#), prepared by the Suicide Attempt Survivors Task Force of the [National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention](#), and implement the recommendations.
- Hire suicide attempt survivors as part of your team at suicide prevention and behavioral health organizations; do not invite them just as guests.
- Involve attempt survivors in suicide prevention efforts and decisions about treatment and care.
- Engage attempt survivors as peer support for those at risk of suicide.
- Partner with peer support services and organizations operated by people with lived experience, especially if you provide crisis and emergency services.