Building and Maintaining Coalitions

The public health approach has shown that the most effective way to address public health problems - including suicide - is a comprehensive strategy that seeks to reduce risks and increase resilience in all of the social spheres that influence those at-risk. In the community, such an approach should involve those agencies and organizations with influence over these social spheres - as well as the broad range of public and private agencies whose responsibility it is to prevent suicide or who are charged with responding to suicides and suicide attempts. These include mental health, law enforcement, and emergency medical service agencies; organizations representing suicide survivors; and groups representing communities whose members may be at risk for suicide (including youth, the elderly, or those with mental health or substance use disorders).

Collaborative prevention efforts also allow us to avoid duplication of services, provide the public with consistent messages on issues like suicide, and gain access to resources and expertise that an individual program might not be able to afford. Working together is not always easy, as coalition members often have different ideas, priorities, agendas, responsibilities, and financial and political constraints. These resources will help you create, maintain, and manage a coalition to help your suicide prevention project function more efficiently.

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA)

CADCA is a membership organization of more than 5,000 community coalitions whose purpose is to prevent substance abuse and violence. CADCA provides training, technical assistance and research. CADCA publications include Coalitions 101: Getting Started, which presents a seven step approach to organizing a coalition. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration is a CADCA Federal partner.

Community Toolbox

A website created and maintained by the Work Group on Health Promotion and Community Development at the University of Kansas, in collaboration with AHEC/Community Partners in Amherst, Massachusetts. The Create Coalitions and Partnerships section of the website includes:

- an outline of how to create a coalition
- case studies
- guidance on creating and maintaining coalitions
- tools for defining membership, diversity, and principles for success
The Partnership Self-Assessment Tool
A web-based resource from The Center for the Advancement of Collaborative Strategies in Health at The New York Academy of Medicine. The Tool assesses how well a collaborative process is working in three areas: leadership, efficiency administration and management, and sufficiency of resources.

Coalitions can use the Tool to:

- Assess how well the collaborative process is working
- Learn how to improve this process
- Demonstrate the strengths of the coalition to partners, funders, and the community
- Make the coalition more responsive to its partners and the community
- Involve partners in the leadership and management of the coalition

Participants fill out a web-based questionnaire anonymously; each person receives a unique partner ID that is not attached to her/his name. The Partnership Self-Assessment Tool analyzes the data from the questionnaires automatically, and generates a report that explains the strengths and weaknesses of the partnership.

The Tool can support evaluation, continuous improvement and reporting to funders and the broader community. Used repeatedly, the Tool allows a coalition to track changes in its process over time. It enables a coalition to get ongoing, systematic, and honest feedback from its partners. The Tool provides partners with a framework for talking about the collaborative process in ways that can strengthen the coalition.

Publications Available Online

The Center for the Advancement of Collaborative Strategies in Health
CACSH offers a number of publications on-line. These include:

- Broadening Participation in Community Problem Solving: A Multidisciplinary Model to Support Collaborative Practice and Research.
- Making the Most of Collaboration: Exploring the Relationship Between Partnership Synergy and Partnership Functioning.
- Partnership Synergy: A Practical Framework for Studying and Strengthening the Collaborative Advantage.

Coalition Sustainability: Long-Term Successes and Lessons Learned.
This article examined the sustainability and impact of a youth-at-risk coalition building project 10 years after the project began and 5 years after their original funding stopped. The authors drew lessons from the longevity of this project and its coalitions that can provide guidance for other programs and coalitions.
Developing Effective Coalitions: An Eight Step Guide
L. Cohen, N. Baer, and P. Satterwhite. Oakland: Prevention Institute, 2002 (PDF)
In addition to providing information on eight steps to developing and maintaining a successful coalition, this guide includes a glossary of terms related to coalitions and collaboration and a section on the advantages of working with a coalition.

The Tension of Turf: Making it Work for the Coalition
This publication addresses turf issues that often arise in coalition work and offers suggestions for how these issues can be used to strengthen, rather than disrupt, the work of a coalition.

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