Public Health's Role in
Mental Health Promotion
and Suicide Prevention

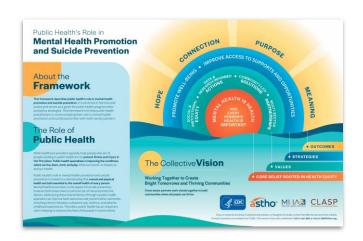# Framework for Public Health: A Closer Look

Framework for Public Health

This document is a companion piece to the "Public Health's Role in Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention Framework". **This framework describes public health's role in mental health promotion and suicide prevention.** It is centered in fairness and justice and serves as a guide for public health programmatic and policy strategies.

This framework is to help public health practitioners communicate their role in mental health promotion and suicide prevention with multi-sector partners. These strategies focus on improving mental health, and preventing suicide for all people, in every community, in the settings where they live, learn, work, and play.

The Collective Vision

Working Together to Create Bright Tomorrows and Thriving Communities

Cross-sector partners work closely together to build communities where residents can thrive. Public health is one of many partners that play a clear role in helping to maintain partnerships, ensure lived experience voices are at the forefront, and promote safe and supportive communities.

The Role of Public Health

While healthcare providers typically treat people who are ill, people working in public health aim to **prevent illness and injury in the first place. Public health specializes in improving the conditions where we live, learn, work and play.** What surrounds us shapes us and our health.

Public health's role in mental health promotion and suicide prevention is rooted in understanding that **mental and physical health are both essential to the overall health of every person.** Mental health promotion is one aspect of suicide prevention, however, both areas share a common set of risk and protective factors. Addressing these shared factors through a public health approach can improve both outcomes and prevent other outcomes, including chronic diseases, substance use, violence, and adverse childhood experiences. Therefore, public health has an important role in helping to improve the lives of all people in communities.

CORE BELIEF ROOTED IN HEALTH EQUITY

Mental health is health and every person's health is important.
Public health holds a core belief that mental health and well-being are central to overall health and every person's health is important. This core belief is rooted in health equity. To support thriving communities where all people have a sense of hope, connection, purpose and meaning, we must understand that mental health is health and that every person's health is important. People's bodies, brains, and experiences are intertwined. Thus, access to communities that are safe and healthy places to live is essential.

VALUES

Social and institutional equity

Public health works to ensure that everyone has a fair and full opportunity to be as healthy as possible. This requires valuing every person's health. It requires acknowledging the historical, unfair and unjust practices and policies that harmed, and continue to harm, the health of specific groups of people. Current health disparities are rooted in these unfair social and institutional policies and practices that routinely advantage majority groups. Public health values working with groups of people in specific, sensitive ways to address unfair social and institutional policies and practices that affect their health.

Community-led solutions

Public health values the strengths and unique contributions of communities and understands that effective solutions come from the expertise and lived experience of people in communities. Those with lived experience are the best prepared to create culturally responsive, tailored, and enduring solutions for their community. Public health must build trust and support communities to identify and implement solutions.

Date and research-informed actions

Public health values collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and sharing data to inform decisions about programmatic and policy strategies. Public health also values contributing to research on mental health promotion and suicide prevention through evaluation and telling stories of success in communities. To build trusting relationships with community members, data should include lived experience and tradition, and community members should be involved in decision making, the collection, interpretation, and sharing of the data. Data should be communicated in a way that is culturally responsive and linguistically inclusive.

Multi-sector partnerships

The goal of promoting mental well-being and preventing suicide is complex. Multisector approaches and partnerships are crucial to preventing harm and achieving positive outcomes. Public health recognizes the value in these partnerships and in shared accountability and success. These sectors include, but are not limited to, behavioral health and healthcare systems, other government entities, community-based organizations, urban planners, schools, faith-based and spiritual organizations, employers, military, and human services.

STRATEGIES

The following strategies common to mental health promotion and suicide prevention build upon the foundational capabilities of public health, which include assessment and surveillance, community partnership development, policy development and support, accountability and performance management, equity, and communications.

Promote well-being

Public health implements strategies designed to create and support environments and relationships that build individual and community resilience and connection. These strategies may include:
- Promoting protective environments and social connections.
- Improving the essential conditions for health and well-being (i.e., economic stability, civic engagement, and addressing unfair policies and practices that can harm the health of specific groups in society).
- Enhancing data systems to better reflect lived experience and mental health disparities and evaluate related outcomes in communities.
- Using effective and culturally responsive communication approaches.
- Reducing stigma around mental health and help-seeking.

Additional examples include:
- Embracing the concept of health in all policies. Develop a policy agenda and plan of action related to public policies that address the social determinants of health that underlie mental health and suicide prevention, such as housing, education, economic conditions, discrimination, or stigma.
- Improving social cohesion or community connectedness, including civic engagement, connection to schools and between young people and trusted adults. Connectedness refers to a sense of belonging or feeling of being linked to someone or something socially, emotionally, spiritually or based on shared interests.
- Increasing awareness that the social conditions that impact mental health concerns can be improved and mental health conditions are treatable. This is also true for suicide and substance use.

STRATEGIES

Promote well-being (continued)
Additional examples include (continued):
- Fostering multi-sector coalitions or networks that bring together practitioners, people with lived experience, and agencies and organizations that can collectively promote mental health and prevent suicide.
- Promoting and/or implementing communication and education programs to raise awareness about risk factors and increase action or change.
- Strengthening skills and knowledge related to help seeking, resilience, problem solving and coping through training and emotional development programs.
- Improving organizational or employer practices and policies to support and sustain employees and their families, such as paid family leave or flexible schedules.

Improve access to supports and opportunities
Public health improves policies and systems that impact the entire population of a community. These policies and systems can either increase access or create barriers to the help individuals may need. Removing barriers to access is not a one-size fits-all solution. Some communities may require additional resources to help individuals access support. Public health increases access to and availability of:
- Supportive relationships.
- Trainings to recognize people at risk of suicide and to intervene in mental health crises.
- Resources that support individuals, loved ones, and communities after suicide risk, attempt, death, or other mental health crisis.
- Harm reduction supports.
- Healthcare and healing systems, including Western medicine, spiritual, and cultural care.

Additional examples include:
- Increasing universal screening and early identification for mental health conditions or harmful substance use in a variety of settings (e.g., primary care, schools, workplaces).
- Supporting integration of behavioral healthcare into primary care and additional settings.
- Expanding care coordination/patient navigation into more provider and community support settings.
- Reducing access to lethal means among people at risk for suicide.
- Supporting expansion and retention of a quality behavioral health workforce that is representative of the communities they serve. This may include supporting changes to payment and reimbursement through state policies.
- Increasing quality referrals to, and engagement in, culturally relevant services.

OUTCOMES

Public health is one of many key partners with a role in supporting communities where all people experience a sense of hope, connection, purpose, and meaning. Building these experiences into the social fabric of a community creates a sense of well-being and care within communities, which contributes to lower rates of mental health conditions, suicides, and other health outcomes.

Hope
Communities have hope for the future that is grounded in a sense of identity and unique values.

Connection
Communities are designed to support a tight knit network of resources and connections between people and to their culture. People feel safe within and connected to their community.

Purpose
Communities create opportunities for individuals to have a sense of purpose in their daily lives.

Meaning
Communities support everyone in having a sense of how they, their families and cultures are a part of something bigger, however that is defined for them.

Inspired by First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework (Canada), Frameworks Institute, and Colorado's Tri-County Health Department Mental Health Framework

If you or someone you know is experiencing distress or thoughts of suicide, contact the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Trained counselors are available 24/7/365. This service is free and confidential. **Call or text 988 or chat at 988lifeline.org.**