

# News RELEASE

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## American Psychiatric Association Issues Its First Guideline on Suicide

The American Psychiatric Association recently issued its first guideline on the assessment and treatment of patients with suicidal behaviors. The guideline is intended to help reduce individual patient's suicide risk by giving psychiatrists tools to assess for risk and formulate treatment strategies. The new guideline provides recommendations for assessment and treatment interventions based on evidence from research literature and clinical consensus.

The expert work group responsible for developing the guideline was chaired by Douglas G. Jacobs, M.D., Executive Director of the nonprofit organization Screening for Mental Health (SMH), and an Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. "The goal of the document is to facilitate the reduction of suicide risk. Its importance lies in its systematic approach to reviewing the literature and its uniform message about suicide assessment," says Dr. Jacobs. "Rather than representing one psychiatrist's point of view, as many textbooks do, this document speaks for the profession as a whole."

According to James H. Scully, Jr., M.D., APA Medical Director, "As the Surgeon General's "National Strategy to Prevent Suicide" makes abundantly clear, suicide is a public health problem. The Strategy lays out a roadmap for addressing this problem with an integral component being professional education. Since psychiatrists are the main medical experts dealing with suicidal individuals, their training around this is essential. This new guideline is a major contribution to the field."

Dr. Jacobs adds, "The new guideline represents our current state of knowledge. It reinforces our understanding that suicide is related specifically to mental illness and that recognition of and treatment for mental illness is our nation's best opportunity toward reducing the suicide rate. At the end of the day, this guideline is designed to be an up-to-date reference for psychiatrists managing suicidal patients so that they can save lives. That, after all, is our shared goal."

The development process for the guideline required more than two years and included review of over 34,000 articles from the scientific literature published since the 1960s. With oversight from APA's Steering Committee on Practice Guidelines, early drafts of the guideline were reviewed by more than 100 experts and APA members, eight professional organizations, and numerous APA components. A final draft was reviewed and approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. The guideline has been published as a supplement to the November issue of the American Journal of Psychiatry and is available on the APA website at [http://www.psych.org/psych\\_pract/treatg/pg/prac\\_guide.cfm](http://www.psych.org/psych_pract/treatg/pg/prac_guide.cfm).

**The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society, founded in 1844, whose 35,000 physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. For more information, visit the APA Web site at [www.psych.org](http://www.psych.org)**

**Screening for Mental Health (SMH) is a national nonprofit organization based in Wellesley Hills, MA, whose mission is to promote mental health screening as an integral part of overall healthcare and contribute to professional training around issues of mental health assessment and treatment. Visit [www.mentalhealthscreening.org](http://www.mentalhealthscreening.org) for more information.**