



NOPCAS

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR PEOPLE OF COLOR AGAINST SUICIDE

Summary Report of *Call to Action*

(held February 11, 2009 at the University of Massachusetts in collaboration with HELP, Inc)

Since the rates of suicide among African Americans and other people of color have increased throughout the years, there are sources of preventable measures that need to be identified. If there are hundreds of thousands of suicide attempts that occur among people of color each year and each attempt is associated with its own risk factors, what is being done to decrease the numbers? What measures take place that are specifically drawn to people of color? The burden of suicide and suicide attempts is amplified when one considers those close to the victims who are devastated and sometimes traumatized. The broad purpose for the *Call to Action* was to develop working groups. The workgroups were assigned to better define the risks and to develop efforts to prevent suicide and attempted suicide among people of color specifically and identify the barriers to prevention. Each workgroup proposed approaches to prevention efforts from their unique perspective as well as suggest topics to be covered at our next national conference – *Affirming Life*.

The *Call to Action* working committee developed three primary goals after deciding which categories and topics within communities of color needed to be addressed in reference to suicide prevention:

- (1) Develop a group consensus among key community leaders and government agencies on how best to prevent suicide in communities of color and what are the barriers.
- (2) What communication materials are needed for distribution throughout the communities?
- (3) What needs to be addressed at the next conference on suicide prevention and intervention in an effort to develop a readiness to save a life?

General Consensus/Commentary. It is apparent that participants were aware that suicide prevention and intervention begin with local action in communities. For local action to occur – there needs to be knowledge. **Knowledge** was the primary focus in the group discussions. There is a need for educational awareness on those pathways that lead to suicide – mainly mental disorders such as PTSD and addictions. **Training** for non clinicians on how to recognize the signs when someone is in a suicidal/homicidal crisis; and mental health providers need to be trained on how to manage a patient in crisis.

Support for families who lost someone to suicide and/or homicide. Finally there was a consensus to create **anti-stigma campaigns** in the communities so that more and more individuals will seek help when needed and not feel stigmatized when in search of help from a mental health provider.

Materials that need to be distributed within the communities ranged from **training materials** to better **media materials** developed through the internet that speak directly to communities of color.

Finally, for the annual NOPCAS conference being held in collaboration with HELP, Inc in Boston, Massachusetts, February 26 and 27, 2010 - the working groups requested the following:

- (1) Training on how to recognize the signs when someone is in a suicidal crisis
- (2) A session addressing the church as a first responder and techniques needed by the church on how to manage a suicidal crisis and at what point should an individual be referred out to a mental health provider in the community.
- (3) Learning about the basics of suicide; evidenced base practices; and models for collaborating prevention efforts in communities of color.
- (4) Issues surrounding mental health in the criminal justice system and what are the best practices in managing mental health among those in the system.
- (5) Personal stories from those who have lost someone to suicide or experienced a suicidal crisis. Stories that generate a better understanding of this epidemic.
- (6) Presentation on suicide and bullying (bullicide).
- (7) Identify behavior that can be viewed as suicidal gestures and the prevention techniques to be applied to this type behavior; emphasis on how we can change these broadly defined behaviors that lead to premature death.
- (8) How to assist soldiers returning from war who are engaging in suicidal behavior and gestures.

A central element of any future national prevention effort, according to the *Call to Action* consensus, is educational awareness. We cannot prevent what we know nothing about. We cannot intervene what we do not recognize. We cannot heal from the death of love ones if there is no means of social or community support. When suicide lacks meaning and understanding, no course of prevention and intervention are present within a community. We need to continue to educate, train and support.