

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada

Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON
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January 31, 2024

Re: A Canadian National Suicide Prevention Strategy

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

We are a group of suicide prevention experts and stakeholders from across Canada and around the world. We write this letter to you as members of the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) Partnerships for Life Global Initiative to Prevent Suicide. IASP, in official relations with the World Health Organization, has been a global leader in suicide prevention since 1960 and brings together professionals and volunteers from 77 countries. On September 21, 2023, IASP adopted a policy that every country in the world should have (or, in the case of low-resourced countries, be working towards) a national suicide prevention strategy. We appeal to Canada to develop and publish a national suicide prevention strategy within the next year.

Suicide is preventable. Yet more than 4,000 Canadians die by suicide every year. This cannot remain the status quo. A growing body of evidence and expert consensus has converged on the conclusion that coordinated, whole-of-government efforts and, in particular, national strategies, are the optimal population-level approach to suicide prevention in the 21st Century. Studies have examined the impact of national suicide prevention strategies on the incidence of suicide. The research indicates that countries with national strategies often have lower nation-wide suicide rates than countries like Canada that do not have national strategies.

It is important for us to highlight and share with you cause for optimism. We are heartened by existing efforts at the federal, provincial and municipal levels in Canada to address the urgent problem of suicide. We are specifically encouraged by the current Federal Framework for Suicide Prevention, the recent announcement that Canada will leverage that Framework to move towards a National Suicide Prevention Action Plan, and the recent change to a 3-digit (988) national crisis line number. The Government of Canada is undoubtedly giving suicide prevention substantial attention, for which we express our deepest appreciation.

However, regrettably, we must also highlight the stark fact that, at a federal policy level, Canada is far behind other similarly resourced and even many, more poorly resourced, countries. Canada is an outlier among G7 nations in not having a national suicide prevention strategy and trails more than 30 high income and more than 20 lower- and middle-income countries worldwide that already have national strategies. For example, the United States has had a national suicide prevention strategy for

more than 20 years and is currently working on its third iteration. Commissioned by the Biden administration in spring this year, the latest version of the strategy is on track to be released in early 2024. Canada is far behind - we must aim to progress at a much faster pace.

The current settled view in suicide prevention is that a national suicide prevention strategy must be led at the federal level and be well-coordinated, including comprehensive cross-sectoral efforts across a wide range of ministries whose remits are relevant to suicide and its prevention. National strategies should be evidence-informed, have clear deliverables and outcome targets that are regularly monitored, and be adequately resourced. We attach to this letter some literature outlining the necessary steps in greater detail.

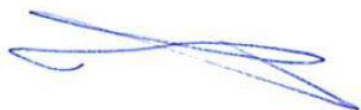
We recognize Canada's particular situation in which health care delivery is coordinated at the provincial level, and we are aware that several provincial suicide prevention strategies have had a significant impact in lowering suicide rates. Nevertheless, there is a clear role for a Canadian federal national strategy to develop policies and support programmes under federal jurisdiction that have been proven to decrease suicides. Such proven initiatives include policy changes to better control access to lethal doses of over-the-counter medications by limiting quantities in packages and the development of federal guidelines for effective care and follow-up procedures for persons seen in hospital for a suicide attempt.

Achieving a comprehensive national strategy will be a major challenge. However, Canada has one key advantage: lagging behind its peers, Canada nevertheless produces cutting-edge research on understanding suicide and best practices in suicide prevention. Several provincial initiatives have served as models for programmes around the world. There is no impediment to Canada becoming a world leader in national suicide prevention. The knowledge to create a robust national strategy is already available. Whether Canada chooses to take action to align its policy with international consensus recommendations is in the hands of your government.

Mr. Prime Minister, among the signatories on this letter you can find a local and international suicide prevention community that is willing and able to assist in expediting the development of a robust Canadian national suicide prevention strategy. Doing so will save lives and lower the burden of suicide across Canadian society. We look forward to your prompt action to address this urgent public health priority and to make progress, without delay, towards a national strategic approach to prevent suicide in Canada.

Yours sincerely,


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