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Fact Sheet on Initiating Suicide Prevention Programs: The SBHA Role¹

Individuals with serious behavioral health illness conditions – 8 percent of the U.S. population – account for several times that proportion of the 33,000 suicides that occur each year in the U.S. For people with virtually every behavioral health category of, suicide is a leading cause of death, with lifetime risks ranging from 4-8 percent. Inadequate assessment of suicide risk and insufficient access to effective treatments are major contributing factors. Still, a large majority of those with serious behavioral conditions neither attempt nor die by suicide and predicting those who will presents a daunting clinical challenge. Suicide attempts and deaths by suicide send ripples through the U.S. economy, costing up to \$25 billion per year. However, the cost cannot be measured solely in dollars. One must also factor in the emotional toll extracted from attempt survivors and the family members and friends who are so deeply affected by both attempted and completed suicides.

To reduce the toll from suicidal behaviors among persons with behavioral health conditions (and many in the general population will benefit) SBHAs ensure suicide prevention programs and practices are in place, and by working closely with other principals on state suicide prevention advisory councils.

SBHAs support and collaborate with crisis hotlines to ensure individuals at risk for suicide, including those who have made a suicide attempt, can readily access high quality crisis support services.

SBHAs lead efforts to improve collaboration and information sharing and surveillance between and among systems of care for all persons, but especially for persons with SMI.

SBHAs, in collaboration with other agencies, initiate policies and practices that promote improved continuity of care for individuals at heightened risk for suicide following discharge from emergency departments for suicide attempts and inpatient psychiatric hospitalization.

The SBHA strengthens psycho-education programs in communities and for at-risk populations. SBHAs, in collaboration with state agencies, develop and promote new models for providing evidence-based services over the life span for those who have attempted suicide, particularly for those who have made multiple or medically serious attempts.

¹ SBHAs are state substance abuse and mental health authorities, and the term *behavioral health* refers to substance abuse and mental health.