

## Monthly Well-Being Theme Resources Guide For September 2022

The well-being theme for the September 2022 Resources Guide is Suicide Awareness and Prevention. September is national Suicide Prevention & Awareness Month—a time to share resources about how to take action to help prevent suicide in our communities. We've placed crisis resources up front for easy access. Following that, you'll find more information to use individually, in teams, or in your organization-wide education initiatives. IWIL also is offering a **free live webinar** on September 27 focused on how to talk about suicide. Thanks to this month's contributors to the Guide: Tara Antonipillai and Anne Brafford.

### CRISIS RESOURCES

- ➡ Call 911. If you or someone you know is in an emergency, call 911 immediately.
- ➡ The National Mental Health Hotline # 988 (launched July 16, 2022).
- ➡ National Suicide Hotline at 1-800-273 TALK (8255). If you are in crisis or are experiencing difficult or suicidal thoughts, call the National Suicide Hotline at 1-800-273 TALK (8255)
- ➡ NAMI Crisis Text Line. If you're uncomfortable talking on the phone, you can text NAMI at 741-741 to be connected to a free, trained crisis counselor.

### WATCH FOR CRISIS WARNING SIGNS

Lawyers Concerned For Lawyers of Minnesota offers a list of crisis warning signs of suicide:

- Hopelessness
- Withdrawal
- Desperation
- Increased use of alcohol and other controlled substances
- Impulsiveness or high-risk behavior
- Loss of engagement or sense of humor
- Deterioration in functioning

**Remember ALGEE:** MentalHealthFirstAid.org recommends the acronym 'ALGEE' to help us remember important action steps:

- Assess for risk
- Listen non judgmentally
- Give reassurance and information
- Encourage appropriate professional help
- Encourage self-help and other support.

### ACTIVITY: BE PREPARED

Create a list of resources in your community or your organization so that they're easily available when needed. You can use this template to add to the national crisis resources above:

- What local suicide prevention and mental health crisis services are available in your community?
- What local organizations may serve specific populations, more susceptible to suicide?
- Does your organization have specific services available to employees, such as online mental health counseling?
- Does your local lawyer assistance program provide counseling and referral services for lawyers who may be at risk? See a Directory of Lawyer Assistance Programs [here](#).

## JOIN OUR LIVE WEBINAR

**Tuesday, September 27, 2022, 1:00-2:15 pm ET**

*Talking About Suicide: How to Give & Get Help*

IWIL-Sponsored Webinar: Free to All

**Webinar Description:** Mood disorders, such as major depression, are not uncommon in lawyers and increase their risk of suicide. Tragically, lawyers are nearly five times more likely than the general population to die by suicide. Despite how many lawyers are suffering, most of us are still not comfortable discussing suicide risk or speaking up when we are concerned. Suicide is a danger we cannot ignore-- as a profession, or as colleagues, friends, and family members.

**Register Now:** We invite you to register and also submit your questions in advance. >> [Link to register for the webinar.](#)

**Speaker:** Niki L. Irish, LICSW has over 15 years of experience in the mental health field, with a focus on well-being and addiction. For over ten years she served as the Senior Counselor for the D.C. Bar Lawyer Assistance Program (LAP), providing lawyers and law students with addiction and mental health assessments, counseling, consultation and psychoeducation. Niki currently serves as the Outreach and Education Coordinator for the LAP providing a variety of trainings and educational seminars to law schools, legal employers, voluntary bar associations, and other legal organizations. Niki has a B.S. in Psychology and Family Studies and an MSW from the University of Maryland School of Social Work, with a concentration in Employee Assistance Programs. She is licensed to practice clinical social work in the District of Columbia.

## MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMMING: ADDRESS SUICIDE DIRECTLY

**The content below is an excerpt from the *Workplace Well-Being Handbook for Law Firms* by Anne Brafford, IWIL's Vice President.**

Mental health programming should directly address suicide risk in the legal profession. A [2020 study](#) by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) analyzed 2016 suicide rates by sex (because men die by suicide about four times more frequently than women) and 22 occupational groups in 32 states. Thankfully, the law profession did not top the list—men in the legal profession ranked 17th (16.2 deaths by suicide per 100,000) and women ranked ninth (7.9 per 100,000; Peterson et al., 2020).

But the CDC cautions not to allow relative rankings to overshadow rising suicide rates: Because the suicide rate in the overall working-age population has increased by 40 percent in less than two decades (2000-2017), all occupations are advised to make efforts to reduce suicide risk (Peterson et al., 2020).

The fact is that too many suicides occur in the legal profession. Data reported in [2018](#) and [2020](#) by the CDC reflect that about 65-100 members within the law occupation (mostly lawyers) died by suicide each year between 2012 and 2016 (Peterson et al., 2018, 2020). Because suicidal thoughts usually are invisible, it can be easy for organizations to believe “that won’t happen here.”

Suicide risk is greater for people with other health conditions. Depression is the most common mental health condition associated with suicide, and it is often undiagnosed, untreated, or undertreated (Mortali & Moutier, 2019).

Many other mental health conditions like mood and anxiety disorders, PTSD, and substance use disorders (especially when unaddressed) increase the risk of suicide. Because these conditions are interrelated, they should all be addressed as part of workplace mental health programs.

Adults ages 45 to 54 have the highest rate of suicide (Taubman et al., 2019). While males are four times more likely to die by suicide, females are three times more likely to attempt suicide.

## Continually Refresh Learning

The effects of mental health education typically wane significantly over time. So organizations will want to find ways to continually refresh members mental health competencies through booster trainings, materials, and electronic communications. They also can use national well-being campaigns as an opportunity to refresh members' learning—such as Dry January, International Day of Happiness (March), World Health Day (April), National Alcohol Awareness Month (April), Mental Health Awareness Month (May), Well-Being Week in Law (first week of May), National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month (September), World Gratitude Day (September), World Mental Health Day (October), and National Depression Screening Day (October).

## Carefully Craft Mental Health Promotion Messages

Organizations' mental health promotion messages will be read and individually interpreted by everyone in the firm—including members with depressive symptoms. These messages should be carefully crafted, keeping in mind that people with depression process information differently than others. Even well-intended efforts can backfire and reduce the likelihood that people with depression will seek help (Siegel et al., 2017, 2019). Some examples are:

- After reading the message, “You are not to blame for the cause of your depression. Depression is treatable if you are willing to seek help,” people with heightened depressive symptoms were more likely to say that seeking professional help would make them feel badly about themselves and to have lower intentions to seek professional help.
- People with heightened depressive symptoms may interpret a message that says, “Call this number for confidential information to get help” as suggesting that they have something to be embarrassed about.

- On the other hand, messages that indirectly encourage people with depression to seek help by suggesting that the help is “for friends” (e.g., “Do you know someone who is feeling depressed?”) rather than for themselves (“Are you feeling depressed?”) may avoid backfire effects (Siegel et al., 2015).

The potential for backfire is so concerning that depression researchers have cautioned: “Anyone who creates a [depression-related public service announcement] targeting people with depression without considering how the mind of a person with depression operates is engaging in behavior akin to reckless endangerment” (Lienemann et al., 2013).

Because this is a complicated area, organizational messages that encourage help-seeking should be carefully crafted. Organizations may want to consult with their EAPs or others with expertise in mental health messaging or use materials and messages that already have been tested by professional organizations.

- ✦ The Action Alliance provides [detailed guidance](#) on crafting suicide prevention messages.
- ✦ It also has created a 2022 guide of [Suicide Prevention Month Ideas for Action](#).

## MORE RESOURCES

Below is a list of resources to use to support your Suicide Prevention & Awareness activities.

- ✦ **Guidelines.** [The National Guidelines for Workplace Suicide Prevention](#) support employers' suicide prevention efforts. They offer guidance for implementing a comprehensive and sustained strategy for suicide prevention, including workplace systems and culture change.
- ✦ **FAQs.** The National Institute of Mental Health provides answers to a list of Frequently Asked Questions about suicide. It includes a checklist

of warning signs for suicide to distribute. >> [Link to website](#).

✦ NAMI's "Navigating a Mental Health Crisis: Suicide Warning Signs" [Poster](#).

✦ NAMI's "It's OK To Talk About Suicide" [Infographic](#)

✦ SAMSA (Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration) [Online Store](#) for workplace materials on suicide prevention and awareness.

✦ **Website. R U OK.** The [R U OK](#) website is an excellent resource for guidance on what to do in the event of concern about suicide. >> [Link to website](#).

✦ **Website.** The **American Foundation for Suicide Prevention** raises awareness, funds scientific research, and provides resources and aid to those affected by suicide. >> [Link to website](#).

✦ **Website. Light, Hope, Life** is a suicide prevention non-profit founded by a lawyer. It offers suicide prevention resources, including warning signs, risk factors, and what to say. >> [Link to website](#).

✦ **Website.** The **Dave Nee Foundation** provides research and resources on mental health and suicide prevention, with a specific focus on lawyers and law students. >> [Link to website](#).

✦ **Video.** Just Ask: How We Must Stop Minding Our Own Business in the Legal World. >> [Link to video](#).

✦ **Presentation.** I've Got Your Back; You've Got My Ear: Suicide Prevention in the Legal Profession. >> [Link to pdf](#).

✦ **Article.** Suicide Prevention, Every Lawyer's Opportunity. Lawyers Helping Lawyers, MN. >> [Link to article](#).

✦ **Article.** "Attorney suicide: What every lawyer needs to know," Jeena Cho, ABA Journal, January 2019. >> [Link to article](#).

✦ **Book.** *Suicide is Not a Four Letter Word: Straight Talk About Suicide When It Matters Most*, Cynthia Waldt, 2021. >> [Link to book](#).

✦ **Book.** *Night Falls Fast: Understanding Suicide*, Kay Redfield Jamison. Internationally acknowledged authority on depressive disorders, Dr. Jamison explores the historical and scientific aspects of suicide to help readers understand the suicidal mind, identify and help those at risk, and look at the profound effects on those left behind. >> [Link to book](#).

✦ **Book.** *Aftermath: Picking Up the Pieces After a Suicide*, Gary Roe Counselor Gary Roe discusses how to connect with those around you and how to find self-compassion when dealing with the death of a loved one by suicide. >> [Link to book](#).

✦ **Book.** *The Recovery Letters: Addressed to People Experiencing Depression*, Olivia Sagan and James Withey. Originally a series of online posts, this book sets forth letters written by people living with depression to show those who are struggling currently that they are not alone and provide a sense of optimism to them. >> [Link to book](#).

✦ **Book.** *If You Feel Too Much: Thoughts on Things Found and Lost and Hoped For*, Jamie Tworowski and Donald Miller. A compilation of essays that range from personal accounts of struggling to words of strength and encouragement as an invitation for readers to recognize that it's okay both to acknowledge pain and to ask for help. >> [Link to book](#).

## USE OF THIS RESOURCE GUIDE

**This Resource Guide should not be considered legal or mental health advice or as an endorsement of any of the listed resources by the Institute for Well-Being in Law. It is provided for information purposes only, and you should personally evaluate all resources for fit and effectiveness for the purpose for which you plan to use them.**