

Pennsylvania's Suicide Prevention Guide



You Can Be A Light September 2023



Pennsylvania Network for
Student Assistance Services



Building Suicide Prevention Awareness: You Can Be a Light

Every year during the month of September, communities, organizations, and individuals around the world observe **World Suicide Prevention Day** on September 10th. In the United States, this day marks the beginning of **National Suicide Prevention Week** (September 10th-16th), with the entire month of September recognized as **Suicide Prevention Awareness Month**. This month provides an important opportunity for advocacy, education, and outreach in line with the recurring theme of World Suicide Prevention Day, **“Creating Hope through Action.”**

Suicide prevention efforts have been ongoing in the Commonwealth at the state level, as well as through local suicide prevention organizations and coalitions. State agencies continue to collaborate through Pennsylvania’s Suicide Prevention Task Force, while working to advance the goals and objectives of Pennsylvania’s [suicide prevention plan](#). Pennsylvania has continued efforts to support [statewide implementation of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) since its launch in July 2022. Current plans include supporting the state’s 13 call centers, expanding mobile crisis and stabilization services, and developing a statewide awareness campaign. Several state and local projects have been targeted to specific populations including youth, older adults, the agricultural community, suicide attempt and loss survivors, and service members, veterans, and their families (SMVF). In July 2023, Pennsylvania participated as one of eight states in the first-ever Black Youth Suicide Policy Institute, hosted by SAMHSA, identifying action steps to advance suicide prevention efforts for Black youth in the Commonwealth.

According to a national poll by the Action Alliance and their partners (2022), a majority of adults in the United States indicated that they would take action if someone close to them had thoughts of suicide. In line with the Action Alliance’s [#bethere messaging](#), individuals throughout Pennsylvania are helping to prevent suicide every day, whether it’s by reaching out to a friend or family member who may need support, talking openly about suicide, or sharing a helpful resource such as the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline’s message for Suicide Prevention Month, [#BeThe1To](#), also recognizes the role we all have in offering hope to one another through the power of conversation and connections.

Anyone can be a light for someone who may be experiencing thoughts of suicide. Suicide Prevention Awareness Month offers an opportunity to **create hope, reach out, and take action**. We encourage you to use this guide to identify suicide prevention resources and strategies for use during the month of September and throughout the year. You may also adapt the contents as needed for your community or those you serve.

Thank you for your dedication to suicide prevention awareness efforts in Pennsylvania.



Brief Statistics: Why Suicide Prevention Matters

We all want to live in healthy, happy communities that thrive in all aspects of wellness. Data such as the image below helps us demonstrate the severity of the problem of suicide and the lasting impact it has on a community. The data doesn't just represent a number, but someone's mother or father, brother or sister, neighbor, or loved one who has, for one reason or another, temporarily lost hope. When we promote resources like our hotlines and crisis centers, we frequently see increases in the number of people who reach out for help rather than struggling alone.

Suicide Data: Pennsylvania

This fact sheet reports data from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) unless noted otherwise. This is the most current verified data at time of creation (August 2023).

14 deaths per 100,000 people in 2021, ranking PA 38th in suicide mortality*

3rd leading cause of death for ages 10-24

3rd leading cause of death for ages 25-34

4th leading cause of death for ages 35-44

5th leading cause of death for ages 45-54

9th leading cause of death for ages 55-64

19th leading cause of death for ages 65+

The statistics regarding leading causes of death above report 2020 data from the CDC

4%

The rate at which suicides increased in the US from 2020 to 2021 after two years of decline in 2019 and 2020.**

11th

Leading cause of death in the US in 2021

Populations at increased risk of suicide:

While anyone can experience suicidal ideation, some groups experience increased risk factors such as discrimination that can contribute to suicide. Below is a non-exhaustive list of some of those groups:

LGBTQ Youth:

41% of LGBTQ youth considered suicide in 2022, including half of transgender and nonbinary youth. LGBTQ youth of color reported higher rates than their white peers.^

Veterans:

The suicide rate for veterans in 2020 was significantly higher than that of the national general population rate, although the Veteran suicide rate in PA did not significantly differ from the national rate for Veterans.**

BIPOC:

People who were American Indian or Alaska Native had a 26% increase in suicide rate between 2018 and 2021. Black individuals saw a 19% increase and the suicide rate among Hispanics increased by nearly 7%.^

People with disabilities:

A survey in 2021 found that people with disabilities were 3X more likely to report suicidal ideation in the prior month compared to people without disabilities.**

*<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/suicide-mortality/suicide.htm>
 **https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2022/20220930.htm
 ^<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2023/>
 ^^<https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2020/2020-State-Data-Sheet-Pennsylvania-508.pdf>
 ^^^<https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2023-02-09/suicide-rates-have-risen-among-people-of-color>
 ^^^^^<https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/disparities-in-suicide.html#disabilities>

- ### Additional Helpful Data Sources:
- [Center for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#)
 - [Pennsylvania Youth Survey \(PAYS\) - 2021 report](#)
 - [Department of Health Enterprise Data Dissemination Information Exchange \(EDDIE\)](#)
 - [SPRC \(2020\) racial/ethnic trends in suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and suicide deaths](#)
 - [The Trevor Project Survey on LGBTQ+ Youth \(2023\)](#)
 - [National Veterans Suicide Prevention Annual Report \(2021\)](#)

Download the Pennsylvania Suicide Data Graphic Here:

[suicide-prevention-guide-infographic-final.png \(1414x2000\) \(hespc.org\)](#)



Creating an Effective Message for Suicide Prevention Across the Lifespan

While focusing on prevention efforts can seem overwhelming at times, your words and actions can help save a life. Here are some overarching guidelines for the development of your messaging to prevent suicide.

Evoked shared values

*Who are you attempting to reach? Schools? Faith-based institutions? First Responders?
Identify the value you want them to work toward.*

Example: Everyone deserves to feel safe, supported, and heard.

Acknowledge negative feelings, like discomfort, fear, or lingering doubts

By acknowledging difficulty, doubt, and discomfort, you can help your audience manage their feelings and avoid using them as a reason to avoid the subject.

Example: I realize that talking about the issue of suicide can make some of us uncomfortable.

Model a journey toward change, it's starting point and pivotal moments

Provide the next steps on how you will make prevention possible. Engage with survivors of suicide loss and individuals with lived experiences to light the way of healing for others.

Example: Many people have shared that hearing personal stories from survivors of suicide loss helped them feel connected and sparked hope, even in their most difficult times.

State the problem precisely

Identify what piece of the problem you are wanting to address. Choose information or a fact to support it.

Example: Feelings of discomfort or shame make it hard for people to talk about suicide, and that silence makes it hard for people to reach out and find help.

Show Progress

Identify examples (big or small) of how prevention efforts have helped your community.

Example: Trainings, such as QPR Suicide Prevention for Gatekeepers and Mental Health First Aid, have helped people learn to speak about these issues and offer support and assistance to people who are struggling with feelings of helplessness or despair.

Name concrete solutions

Be realistic. Make it achievable.

Example: We will provide training to individuals throughout our community so they can learn how to recognize the signs, respond, and refer someone to safety.

Adapted with permission from *Moving Toward Prevention: A Guide for Reframing Sexual Violence*.

© 2018 National Sexual Violence Resource Center and Berkeley Media Studies Group.



Words Matter

It can feel uncomfortable, and sometimes even scary, to talk about mental health and suicide prevention. By finding the courage within ourselves to engage in open discussions, we can help save lives. Here are some tips that may help when engaging in courageous conversations.

- Practice using nonjudgmental language when discussing suicide.
- Present suicide as a preventable event.
- When talking about a suicide death, utilize language that is sensitive to the grieving family.
- Use objective terms for suicidal events, such as “death by suicide” or “non-fatal attempt.”
 - Avoid using the words “commit” or “complete” when discussing suicide. The phrase “committed suicide” is usually associated with a sin or a crime, which suicide is neither. Using the words “completed suicide” conveys success or accomplishing something good, which suicide is not. The proper term for someone who has taken their own life is “died by suicide.” Also acceptable is “killed him/her/theirself” or “took their own life.”
- When discussing the frequency of suicide, always emphasize the importance of every single life. This helps demonstrate that one loss is too many.
- Always provide information for assistance, such as the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (988). You can order free wallet cards and magnets from [SAMHSA store](#).



For additional information on safe messaging:

- [Safe and Effective Messaging for Suicide Prevention](#): Evidence-based recommendations from the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC).
- [Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide](#): This guide important points for covering suicide, “do’s and don’ts” for safe reporting, and suggestions for online media/message boards/bloggers. Additional information can be found at <http://reportingonsuicide.org/>.
- [Framework for Successful Messaging](#): The National Action Alliance has provided this framework for public messaging (e.g., posters, PSAs, social media, websites, etc.) to ensure that suicide-related messages are safe, strategic, positive, and in line with best practices. It includes updated information about [988](#).
- [Mental Health Media Guide](#): Developed by a groundbreaking coalition of mental health experts and entertainment industry leaders to help storytellers and content creators develop more authentic and accurate portrayals of mental health.

Mental Wellness Resources

Our mental and emotional health are just as important as our physical health, yet stigma and shame have often made these topics taboo to discuss. As we continue to see an increase in mental health needs across our communities, we must bring mental health and well-being to the forefront of conversations. We all can play a vital role in promoting connectedness and resiliency.

Self-care:

- [Mental Health Mobile Apps](#): a compiled list of mobile apps for mental health and wellness.
- [Virtual Calming Room](#): Jana Marie Foundation created a virtual calming room for students, teachers, and caring adults to find tools and strategies for managing emotions and building resiliency.
- [The Trevor Project Self-Care guide](#): includes ways to practice self-care at home, at school, and in public.
- [Pause-Reset-Nourish \(PRN\) to Promote Wellbeing](#): provides information about a specific self-care strategy by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network.
- [Stress First Aid](#): Manuals and resources for health care workers available through the U.S. Dept of Veterans Affairs.

Targeted Resources:

- [Mental Health America BIPOC and LGBTQ+ Mental Health Facts, Stats, and Resources](#)
- [Mental Health America 2023 BIPOC Mental Health Month Toolkit](#)
- [The Jed Foundation: The Benefits of a Therapist Who Understands Your Cultural Background](#)
- [Suicide Risk and Prevention for LGBTQ People](#)
- [Equity in Mental Health Framework](#)
- [National Action Alliance: Veteran and Military Suicide Prevention Resources](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Resource Center: Rural Suicide Prevention Resources](#)

Toolkits and Programs for School and Community Settings:

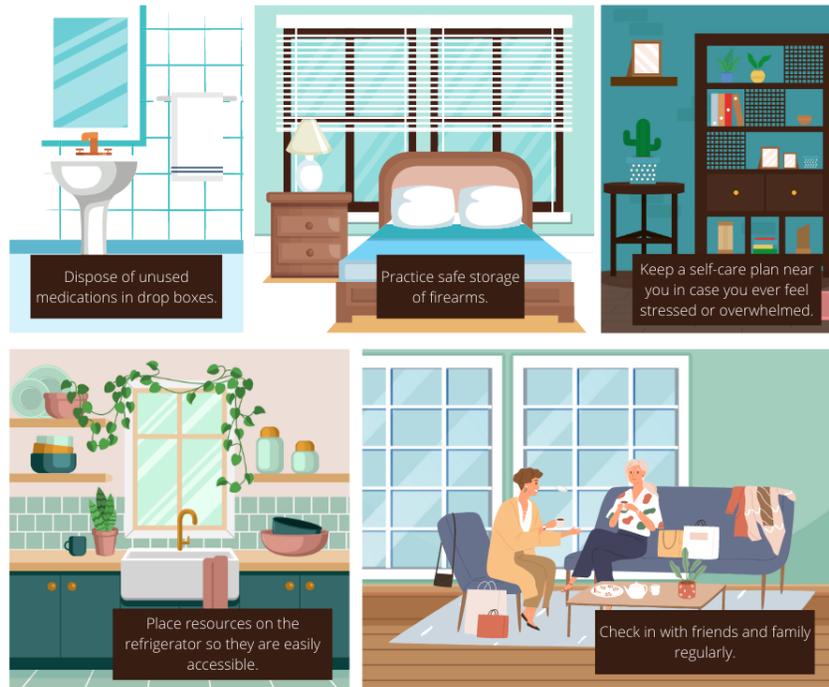
- [Mind Matters by Jana Marie Foundation](#)
- [Mental Health Curriculum by Aavidum](#)
- [Prevent Suicide PA Suicide Prevention Online Learning Center](#)
- [Compassionate Resilience Toolkit by Wisconsin Dept. of Public Instruction, Wise, and Rogers Behavior Health](#)
- [Seize the Awkward by Ad Council, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, and The Jed Foundation](#)
- [PA Parent and Family Alliance: Resources for Suicide Prevention and Awareness](#)



Keeping Environments Safe

We can all do our part of creating and maintaining safe environments. Research shows that putting time and distance between a lethal means—such as a firearm—and those who may be in crisis can prevent suicide and save lives. Below is a graphic portraying strategies to consider for keeping your home environment safe, particularly when a loved one is at risk of suicide.

Creating and Maintaining Safe Environments



Resources:

- National Action Alliance's [Lethal Means & Suicide Prevention: A Guide for Community & Industry Leaders](#)
- [Counseling on Access to Lethal Means \(CALM\)](#)
- Zero Suicide: [Lethal Means Safety Resources](#)
- Children's Safety Network's Firearm Safety: [Preventing Death by Suicide](#)
- Harvard School of Public Health: [Means Matter](#)
- [Hold My Guns](#)
- [Be SMART for Kids](#)
- [CeaseFirePA](#)



Suicide Prevention Awareness: Sample Action Steps



- Use a [virtual background](#) or [download social media graphics](#) to help raise awareness.
- Consider using new [988 virtual backgrounds, graphics, and sample social media posts](#).
- Host an educational training such as [Question, Persuade, Refer \(QPR\) Suicide Prevention for Gatekeepers Course](#), [Mental Health First Aid \(MHFA\)](#), or [Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training \(ASIST\)](#).
- Post signs with positive messages around your school, workplace, or town. Be sure to include the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (988) or Crisis Text Line (Text PA to 741741).
- Light a candle on September 10th to remember a loved one or to remind yourself that you matter.
- Work with your county commissioners to proclaim September as Suicide Prevention Month (see example at the end of packet).
- Attend “Suicide Prevention Awareness Day at the Capitol” in Harrisburg on September 18th from 8:30am—1pm.
- Check in with your [County Suicide Prevention Taskforce](#) to find ways to support local efforts.
- Share posters and videos from the [Prevent Suicide PA Annual PSA Contest](#) for high school students to help spread awareness. For more information about the 2024 PSA Contest, launching September 18, [click here](#).
- Visit [Suicide Prevention Online Learning Center](#) and take a free suicide prevention training.
- Participate in Drive Out Suicide by placing a [free suicide prevention magnet](#) on your car.
- Promote equity in mental health and suicide prevention awareness efforts by sharing [targeted resources](#) from diverse populations in your community.
- View selected presentations from a [past STAR-Center Conference](#), such as the 2023 Keynote on "Preventing Suicidality in Sexual and Gender Diverse Youth: The Role of Hope, Social Media and Affirmative Programs." Keynotes and workshops from the 2023 conference are available on the website.

The following national and international associations have developed resource guides containing additional lists of activities and ideas that can be implemented across settings:

- International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP): [Suggested activities](#)
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center: [Suicide Prevention Month Ideas for Action](#)
- Crisis & Suicide Lifeline: [National Suicide Prevention Month](#)
- [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: Learn how you can take action](#)



Crisis Resources

You are not alone. Many organizations are working each and every day to support you and your efforts with suicide prevention. Please consider using these crisis lines and resources in your messaging during Suicide Prevention Month.

National:

- [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#): call or text **988**; or to talk with someone over the computer visit 988lifeline.org/chat
 - [Veterans Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#): **988, press 1**
 - [Spanish Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#): **988, press 2**
 - [LGBTQI+ Affirming Counseling for Youth](#): Text **Q** to **988**, or call **988, press 3**
 - [Native and Strong Lifeline](#): **988, press 4**
- Crisis Text Line: **TEXT PA to 741741** or visit <http://www.crisistextline.org/>
- The Trevor Project: 1-866-488-7386 or visit <https://www.thetrevorproject.org>
- Trans Lifeline: 1-877-565-8860 <https://www.translifeline.org>

Pennsylvania:

- [List](#) of Crisis Intervention contact information by county.
- [County Task Force Resources](#): By county, available contact information is provided for crisis, the Suicide Prevention Task Force, local chapter of AFSP, and other local mental health/suicide prevention resources.
- [University of Pittsburgh STAR-Center Postvention Services](#): Consultation for school districts and agencies regarding postvention. Call 412-864-3346, available 24/7.
- [AgriStress Helpline for Pennsylvania farmers and their families](#), available 24/7. Call or text 1-833-897-AGRI (2474).

National and State Organizations

National:

- American Association of Suicidology (AAS): <http://www.suicidology.org/>
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP): <https://afsp.org/>
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC): <http://www.sprc.org/>

Pennsylvania:

- Jana Marie Foundation: <http://www.janamariefoundation.org/>
- Aavidum: <http://aavidum.com>
- Prevent Suicide PA: <http://preventsuicidepa.org/>
- Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services (PNSAS): <http://pnsas.org/>
- Services for Teens at Risk (STAR) Center: www.starcenter.pitt.edu
- PA Department of Human Services: [988 implementation](#)
- PA Department of Agriculture: [Mental Wellness Resources for the Agricultural Community](#)
- PA Department of Military and Veterans Affairs: [PA VETConnect](#)



Social Media

Sample Social Media Posts (to be copied or adapted):

Today is World Suicide Prevention Day. Reach out to a friend and let them know you care. #JanaMarieFoundation #PreventSuicidePA #Aavidum

We all want our kids to grow up to be healthy, happy, and successful adults. If you know a young person who is experiencing a mental health concern or crisis, help is available. Text PA to 741741. #JanaMarieFoundation #PreventSuicidePA #Aavidum

It can feel scary and overwhelming when someone you love is experiencing a mental health crisis. Offering a listening ear and consistent support can be great ways you can show you care. Learn more at janamariefoundation.org. #JanaMarieFoundation #PreventSuicidePA #Aavidum

You can play an important role in preventing suicide. Knowing the warning signs and how to ask the question can help save lives. Learn more at <https://janamariefoundation.org/candid-conversations/>. #JanaMarieFoundation #PreventSuicidePA #Aavidum

This year's World Suicide Prevention Day theme is "Creating Hope Through Action." We want you to know that there are resources available and people who want are here for you. If you or a loved one is in need of crisis support call 988 (or you can insert local crisis number). #JanaMarieFoundation #PreventSuicidePA #Aavidum

Today is World Suicide Prevention Day – Creating Hope Through Action. There is always help available. Visit <https://janamariefoundation.org> to learn more. #JanaMarieFoundation #PreventSuicidePA #Aavidum

Did you know Facebook has a way to reach out to a friend who may be in crisis? If you are concerned about a post you can contact your friend directly, or have Facebook send them a message that help is available. Learn more here:

<https://www.facebook.com/fbsafety/photos/a.197686146935898.42079.125459124158601/1041262189244952/?type=3&theater> [specific to Facebook] #JanaMarieFoundation #PreventSuicidePA #Aavidum



Sample Proclamation

An official signing of a proclamation by your county commissioners is a great way to publicize the kick-off for Suicide Prevention Month and the activities that will be taking place throughout the month. Below is sample proclamation verbiage:

Suicide Prevention Month 2023

Suicide Prevention Day, September 10, 2023

WHEREAS, suicide is a public health concern; and

WHEREAS, in the state of Pennsylvania, one person dies by suicide nearly every five hours, making it the third leading cause of death for ages 15-34 and the 4th leading cause of death for ages 35-54 (AFSP, 2021); and

WHEREAS, over 5.4 million people in the United States have lost a loved one to suicide (CDC, 2019); and

WHEREAS, each member of our community is valued and irreplaceable; and

WHEREAS, talking openly about stress and psychological health builds trust, reduces barriers to care, and enables early intervention; and

WHEREAS, local and statewide suicide prevention efforts should be developed and encouraged to the maximum extent possible, and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED the [COUNTY] Board of Commissioners does hereby proclaim September 2023 as “Suicide Awareness and Prevention Month” and September 10, 2023 as “Suicide Awareness and Prevention Day” in [COUNTY].

Proclaimed this _____ day of _____, 2023.

[COUNTY] Board of Commissioners,

Name, Title



Working Together.



Organizations across the state of Pennsylvania continue to work together to provide mental health and suicide prevention education and awareness events. Jana Marie Foundation, Garrett Lee Smith Youth Suicide Prevention Grant, Prevent Suicide PA, Aavidum, and the Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistant Services are proud to provide this informational packet to help you build awareness and take action to prevent suicide within your community.

About Jana Marie Foundation

Jana Marie Foundation harnesses the power of creative expression and dialogue to spark conversations, build connections, and promote mental wellness among young people and their communities. The organization envisions communities working together to knock down walls and transform emotional distress into resilience and hope. Jana Marie Foundation is located in Centre County, Pennsylvania.

<https://janamariefoundation.org>

About Garrett Lee Smith Youth Suicide Prevention Grant

The Garrett Lee Smith Youth Suicide Prevention Grant is a five-year federal SAMHSA grant awarded to the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) at the Department of Human Services. Using a two-tiered model, this project targets youth ages 10-24. Tier 1 is statewide and provides awareness, training, and screening activities to increase identification and improve continuity of care for youth at risk of suicide. Tier 2 works with target counties around continuity of care between youth serving systems for those at risk of suicide.

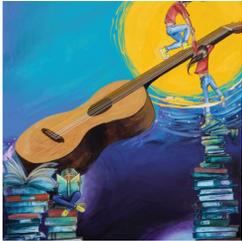
About Prevent Suicide PA

Prevent Suicide PA supports those who are affected by suicide, provides education, awareness, and understanding by collaborating with the community to prevent suicide, and reduces the stigma associated with suicide. The organization envisions having a Commonwealth where every life is valued, that everyone has the support necessary to get help when needed, and that hope and healing abounds in every person.

<http://preventsuicidepa.org/>



Working Together, Continued



About Aavidum

Aavidum is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that empowers youth to shatter the silence surrounding depression, suicide, and other issues facing teens. The word Aavidum, which means “I’ve got your back,” was created by students after a classmate died by suicide. Aavidum uses free student-driven clubs, curricula, and other programming to inspire schools and communities to adopt cultures of care and advocacy, encouraging all members to have their friends’ backs. Aavidum exists in nearly 300 elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and colleges.

<http://aavidum.org/>

About Services for Teens At Risk (STAR) Center

Services for Teens At Risk (STAR-Center is a suicide prevention program for teens and young children within the Division of Child and Adolescent Services at Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic and the Department of Psychiatry, University of Pittsburgh. From its inception in 1986, the program has been primarily funded through an appropriation from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to the University of Pittsburgh. The program combines clinical and outreach services designed to combat the problem of child and adolescent suicide. We provide outpatient assessment and treatment for depressed and anxious children and teens. We also offer acute treatment to depressed and suicidal teens via our Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP). STAR-Center Outreach adapts and disseminates what we have learned about best practice clinical care into practical guidelines for educational and community settings and offers trainings and consultations.

www.starcenter.pitt.edu

About Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services (PNSAS)

The mission of the Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services is to provide leadership for developing a safe and drug-free environment and mental health wellness in schools and communities across the commonwealth. Barriers to learning will be removed and student academic achievement will be enhanced through collaborative prevention, intervention, and postvention services. The Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services provides technical support to counties and Student Assistance Programs (SAP) teams in schools districts, charter, cyber, and nonpublic schools across Pennsylvania. Contact your local school to find out how their SAP teams can help provide support to children/adolescents and their families.

<http://pnsas.org/>



Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services

