

# SPAN-California

Suicide Prevention Advocacy Network - California

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## SPAN-California Aims to Build Grassroots Support

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**Rancho Palos Verdes, August 27 --** Answering the Surgeon General's recent *Call to Action to Prevent Suicide*, SPAN-California (Suicide Prevention Advocacy Network) calls for all interested parties, including state public health agencies, administrators, legislators, mental health professionals, school districts, private foundations and suicide survivor support groups to join in its growing statewide partnership.

"California is setting the pace for grassroots support and advocacy groups such as ours," stated SPAN-California's newly elected President Sam Bloom. "We have a good cross section of people and organizations represented, but need to continue to build the network to truly implement change in California."

On average, ten Californians complete suicide each day and 11% of all suicides in the nation take place in California. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth aged 15-24, according to the Surgeon General, and the eighth leading cause of death among the general population. Although suicide has long been recognized as a major, national public health problem, federal and state agencies are just beginning to take action to prevent these tragic, unnecessary deaths.

"We are looking for participation from African American, American Indian, Gay and Lesbian and other high risk groups who want to join the California partnership," stated Bloom. "Our next meeting is October 16-17 in Santa Barbara."

SPAN-California is working for legislative change, and served as advisors to Senator Deborah Ortiz in the authoring of SB405, the Comprehensive Suicide Prevention Act of 1999. SPAN-California also supports the currently pending mental health parity bills, which would make mental health services as accessible and affordable as other health services. The group also plans to undertake a public awareness campaign and target youth, elderly and high risk minority groups.

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*A California partnership for suicide prevention and survivor support*



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SPAN-California is composed of suicide survivors, providers of suicide prevention services, individuals from resource centers, referral networks and hotline services, state agencies, prevention educators, researchers, survivor support groups and others volunteering their time and energy to form a unified partnership for change.

It is estimated that each suicide leaves behind at least six family members and friends who are emotionally devastated and permanently scarred by the death. A major objective of the group is to reach out to these thousands of survivors, as well as those who have attempted or are contemplating suicide and their families, to provide information about support groups and to increase public awareness that suicide can be prevented. Most suicide results from untreated or undiagnosed clinical depression, and treatment is available in California. The group believes that California can significantly lower its suicide rate if suicide is addressed openly and aggressively, without shame or stigma.

To find the Surgeon General's *Call to Action to Prevent Suicide* on-line, go to [www.surgeongeneral.gov/osg/calltoaction.htm](http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/osg/calltoaction.htm)

For more information on SPAN-California and its upcoming meeting, contact Sam Bloom at (310) 377-8857.