



For Immediate Release

**FIRST CONFERENCE ON SUICIDE RISK IN THE LESBIAN GAY
BISEXUAL TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY TO BE HELD**

Chicago, IL -- November 5, 2007-- A conference examining suicide risk in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community will take place in Chicago on November 8-9, 2007. This first-of-its kind event will bring together 25 experts and is cosponsored by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association (GLMA), and the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC).

The conference is designed to assess the current state of knowledge about suicidal behavior in LGBT persons and to develop a consensus statement to guide future research, prevention, and treatment initiatives.

The experts participating in the conference will examine prevalence and risk factors for suicide attempts in LGBT individuals across all ages, including the role that complex issues like substance abuse may play in suicidal behavior. They will also discuss needed prevention and public policy initiatives to counter the stigma against LGBT persons that may contribute to depression, isolation and suicide.

“Clear data on the extent of suicide in the LGBT population is lacking, although there is increasing evidence that gay, lesbian and bisexual youth, in particular, have disproportionately high rates of depression and suicide attempts. But until now, little national attention has been directed to understanding the specific factors that may contribute to or protect against suicide in this population,” said Ann Haas, research director for AFSP.

Official statistics on completed suicide do not include information on sexual orientation and therefore it is not clear whether suicide deaths are indeed higher in the LGBT community than the general population. Despite this lack of clear evidence, sexual orientation is often cited as a risk factor for suicide.

According to Rob Garofalo, MD, MPH, past president of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association and a faculty member in adolescent medicine at Northwestern University School of Medicine, gaps in research have contributed to misconceptions and misinformation regarding suicide risk for LGBT persons, with findings about suicidal thoughts or behaviors frequently interpreted as indicative of actual suicide deaths.

“Some scientific reports have suggested that as many as 30 percent of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth attempt suicide, yet clinical work with these populations do not seem to bear that out,” said Dr. Garofalo. “We need to better understand the continuum of suicide risk among LGBTQ people – from suicidal ideation to attempts to completions -- so that we can design effective interventions to reduce these risks.”

“This first-ever discussion among these leading researchers will advance our work of preventing suicide in the LGBT population,” said David Litts, associate director for SPRC. “We appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with AFSP and GLMA on this project.” SPRC is supported by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

The consensus conference is modeled after AFSP’s 2002 workshop on physician depression and suicide risk. That program led to AFSP’s Physician Suicide Prevention Project, a published consensus statement in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, and the development of several multi-media educational campaigns designed to educate physicians about suicide risk and depression.

About the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention:

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention is the only national not-for-profit organization exclusively dedicated to understanding and preventing suicide through research and education, and to reaching out to people with mood disorders and those affected by suicide. Visit www.afsp.org for more information.

About the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association:

The mission of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association is to ensure equality in healthcare for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals and healthcare professionals. More information is available at www.glma.org.

About the Suicide Prevention Resource Center:

The Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) provides prevention support, training, and informational resources to assist organizations and individuals to develop suicide prevention programs, interventions and policies, and to advance the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention. SPRC is supported by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and is housed at Education Development Center, Inc. SPRC serves the SAMHSA-funded youth suicide prevention grantees across the country and collaborates closely with other national organizations and suicide prevention initiatives. Visit www.sprc.org for more information.

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Media Contacts:

Wylie Tene
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
Public Relations Manager
888-333-AFSP ext. 24
wtene@afsp.org

Joel Ginsberg
Gay and Lesbian Medical Association
415-255-4547 ext. 314
jginsberg@glma.org

Anara Guard
Associate Director
Suicide Prevention Resource Center
617-618-2572
aguard@edc.org