

Outside the Box: Rethinking National Suicide Prevention Strategies to Actually Prevent Suicides

Invited lecture · Lanny Berman

Dr. Lanny Berman is affiliated with the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. Between 1995 and 2014 he served as Executive Director of the American Association of Suicidology (AAS). In addition to various distinguished roles, he also served as President of the American Association of Suicidology (AAS) from 1984 to 1985 and President of the International Association for Suicide Prevention from 2009 to 2013. An accomplished scholar, Dr. Berman has published over 175 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters and edited or authored eight books.

Abstract. Roughly 40 countries now have adopted national suicide prevention plans/strategies and action programmes. There is considerable consistency among these in proposed strategies, both those that are evidence-based and those that are best practices. In spite of this general agreement across countries, evidence of effectiveness remains lacking. If these results were to occur in the world of corporate business, heads would roll. Instead, the usual outcome has been a revision and reissuance of a national strategy, often not based on a either a macro or evaluative perspective. To take but one example, the U.S. is now issuing its 3rd edition (over a 23 year period) during which its suicide rate has not declined, but, rather, has risen 34%. The solution does not lie in yet another or revised set of strategies; rather it rests on understanding what drives success, be it in business or public health, and, notably in attention to implementation science. In the world of suicide prevention, this is out-of-the box thinking and lives are depending on just that.