



# Youth Participation in Policy- making for Suicide Prevention



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This guide draws on insights from the Youth Action For Suicide Prevention (YASP) fellowship (an intervention of Outlive—a youth suicide prevention program) and includes data currently under review for academic publication. The content or data contained herein may be copied, redistributed, and adapted for non-commercial purposes, provided the work is appropriately cited, as indicated below.

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If you are a young person aged 18–24 years and you or someone you know is feeling emotionally distressed or having thoughts of suicide, you are not alone.

You can reach out to *Outlive Chat*, where trained peer supporters offer free, confidential support via chat: [chat.outlive.in](https://chat.outlive.in)



# India's Youth Suicide Crisis

Suicide is the first leading cause of death among young people aged 15 to 29 years in India. In other words, more young people die by suicide, than any other reason in India. There are various factors which contribute to youth suicides. Youth is a phase in life when young people experience a range of challenges and emotions with respect to their identity, relationships, careers, and well-being.

However, young people facing challenging situations also experience various barriers in seeking support such as stigma, financial issues, low awareness or lack of youth-centric services which can contribute to youth suicides. Currently, there are very few suicide prevention programs in India which address the problems and lives of youth belonging to diverse communities.

## Why is youth suicide a complex and systemic problem?

Suicide is a complex problem and does not have a single cause. In fact, there are multiple problems in a person's life and social environment which may compel them to consider suicide. When such problems interact with each other, they can lead to intense distress and feelings such as extreme hopelessness and despair.

Without timely and appropriate support, a person may find it difficult to cope with their situation and consider suicide as the only option to end their emotional pain.

### **At an individual level,**

a young person might be dealing with mental health problems, find it difficult to cope with challenges, or have financial problems or a family history of suicide.

### **At a relationship level,**

problems such as family conflicts, loss of a loved one or abuse in their intimate relationships can affect a young person.

### **In their community,**

a young person might experience issues such as lack of social support, stigma, bullying, or discrimination based on their identity.

### **At a societal level,**

factors such as poverty, unemployment, lack of access to healthcare, or climate change might lead to distress in a young person's life.

# How is youth suicide a policy & governance issue?

Most problems contributing to suicides cannot be resolved by the individual alone. Such problems require systemic solutions which directly address the issues affecting young people. For example, if unemployment leads to youth suicides, a potential solution is to create enough livelihood opportunities for young people.

However, no one strategy or 'one-size-fits-all' solution can solve the problem of youth suicides. Multiple strategies are required depending on which problems lead to youth suicides, what kind of support young people prefer and what their life experiences are. Many of these systemic problems can be addressed by governments and policymakers through laws, policies and government schemes.

## The World Health Organization

recommends countries to develop suicide prevention strategies across different governance areas such as health, education, law enforcement, media, social justice, youth affairs, agriculture, labour, etc. For example, if policymakers make policies for life skills training in schools, adolescents can early on, learn skills to cope with challenging situations and not consider suicide as a solution to their problems.

## How can young people engage in policymaking for youth suicide prevention?

Young people don't have enough opportunities to participate in policymaking activities for mental health and suicide prevention. It is important to involve young people in the development of youth suicide prevention policies to ensure that such programs address the needs of youth living in different contexts.

Young people can push for unique policy solutions for suicide prevention by acting as a bridge between their communities and policymakers.

# How can one engage with policymakers for suicide prevention?

The thought of engaging with a policymaker can make one feel overwhelmed and nervous, right? However, you can follow a few steps to make the process easier. Here are some tips from Outlive's Youth Action for Suicide Prevention (YASP) Fellowship program which trains and mentors youth leaders to engage with policymakers for youth suicide prevention.

Remember, at the end of the day, youth action is all about making a strong case for what you (and your community) believe are the best policy solutions to prevent youth suicides.

## 1. Understand Your Community's Needs

You can begin by first identifying and understanding the needs or gaps related to youth suicide prevention in your community according to the following steps:

### Step 1

Identify the youth suicide issue and youth group you want to address in your community. For instance, domestic violence impacting suicides among young women in one's local community is an example of a youth suicide issue.

### Step 2

Identify a small group of stakeholders (youth, parents, local organisations, youth groups or relevant individuals) in your community to collect information about the issue such as how are young people impacted by the problem, what are some barriers in accessing support, and young people's preferences for suicide prevention support.

### Step 3

Continue engaging with stakeholders to identify existing gaps in government policies and programs and potential solutions which can address the issue and prevent suicides.

You may have to speak with community members to identify existing laws, policies and government programs relevant to the youth suicide issue you have identified. This will help you:

- A. Understand how such policies can prevent youth suicides through different strategies.
- B. Identify government authorities and policymakers who can make policy decisions to implement your solutions.

There are many policies and government programs that are relevant for youth suicide prevention. These are some key examples.



## National Mental Health Policy, 2014 (NMHP)

The NMHP is a policy document which lays down a comprehensive vision for mental health in India's context. The NMHP recommends approaches for young people such as life skills programs for school children and young adults, training teachers to support students, including mental health in curricula, addressing stigma, discrimination and exclusion and improving access to affordable and quality mental health support. The NMHP also notes the importance of community members participating to improve mental health of communities.

## Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 (MHCA)

The MHCA is a law which provides for and regulates mental health care and treatment in India. It recognizes that every person has the right to access mental health and care treatment. This means that the government has the duty to provide a range of mental health services which are affordable cost, accessible and available for all across the country. For more information, see the [MHCA visual summary here.](#)



## National Suicide Prevention Strategy, 2022 (NSPS)

The NSPS is the government's strategy and action plan to prevent suicides in India. Its aim is to reduce suicides by 10% by the year 2030 through strategies such as encouraging partnerships between government bodies and NGOs, improving health services and community support for suicide prevention, and collecting quality data on suicides. The NSPS recommends some strategies for young people such as introducing life skills training in schools, including mental well-being in curriculum, ensuring physical activities and sports, involving youth in social service initiatives and training community members to provide support.

## 2. Develop Strategy to Engage with Policymakers

Once you have identified an issue related to youth suicides in your community, you can develop a strategy to engage policymakers. Here are some steps to help you think through this:

### 1. Problem Statement

In your own words, describe the problem you want to address and how it is connected to youth suicides.

### 2. Policy Connection

Identify the government policy, program or law which is relevant for the youth suicide issue you are working on. If there's no existing policy, you can also think about how a new government program or policy can address the issue.

### 3. Identify Gaps

What are some policy gaps or limitations in addressing the problem within your community's context? Does a relevant government program exist to address the issue? Is the policy or government program being implemented properly?

### 4. Think Solutions

Is there a new solution which policymakers can implement to address the problem or gaps? Or do you have suggestions to improve the implementation of existing policies or programs to support youth in distress?

### 5. Identify Policymakers

Which policymaker is empowered to address the issue in your community? For example, depending on the issue, policy/program and solution, you can identify an appropriate policymaker such as senior officials in state departments, municipal representatives or other government authorities.

### 3.

## Identify Tools to Engage with Community Members & Policymakers

Next, you can identify an appropriate tool to represent your community's voice and needs to the policymaker. You can engage with your youth community to identify solutions, collect stories of lived experience and gather data to present to policymakers.

### Examples of Tools for Community Engagement

#### Surveys

are forms which can help you gather information and data about the issue that you need to present to policymakers.

#### Stories of Lived Experience

can be in the form of interviews, testimonials, videos, etc. capturing young people sharing their stories and experiences of distress & support.

#### Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

are guided discussions with a group of 8–10 youth or community members based on questions & themes related to the issue.

#### Signature Campaigns

can be in the form of a letter signed by community members requesting support from a policymaker.

Once you have gathered your data, information or solutions, you can identify a tool for engaging with the policymaker to share your issue and policy solution.

### Examples of Tools for Policymaker Engagement

#### Short Reports or Presentations

are written reports or PowerPoint presentations to present data or the results of your community engagement with the policy solutions.

#### Youth Charter

is a document with a list of needs and preferences that young people have identified for preventing youth suicides in their community.

#### Organizing a Community Event

can include panel discussions, meetings or other activities on youth suicide prevention where policymakers can be invited to engage with youth and community members.

#### Submitting an Application/Letter

This is a written letter or application mentioning the support required from the policymaker to address the youth suicide related issue.

To know more about youth  
participation in policymaking  
for suicide prevention, visit

[www.outlive.in](http://www.outlive.in)



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