



History of the Alabama Suicide Prevention Task Force

1998-2002

Dr. David Satcher, a native of Anniston, Alabama, was appointed as the 16th United States Surgeon General (1998-2002) as well as serving as Assistant Secretary of Health (1998-2001). He served in both the Clinton and the George H. Bush administrations. Among his prodigious works, he established suicide prevention as a national imperative and promoted a “call to action” (1999) to reduce deaths and injury resulting from suicide attempts.

- [David Satcher's Biography on The New Georgia Encyclopedia](#)
- [David Satcher on Wikipedia](#)

2001

Dollie Hambrick, Director of Social Work with the Alabama Department of Public Health, attended a SPAN conference in Atlanta. Toolkits were secured on state plan development. Dr. Williamson and former Department of Mental Health Commissioner, Kathy Sawyer, agreed to co-sign a letter inviting community agency members to take part in plan development Alabama.

2002

The first Suicide Prevention Planning Meeting was held at the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH). Twenty-seven people, from both public and private agencies as well as survivors and the faith-based community were invited. The group was asked to commit six months to develop a plan for Alabama. The group agreed to the request and worked in three subgroups to develop the plan. At the end of the time period, a plan was ready to be edited and sent to the printers. They voted to continue to meet monthly to develop items noted in the Plan.

A visit was made to the Atmore Poarch Creek Indian Reservation to discuss the Plan and see their support. The Nation then asked to be included on the email list and provided support and was included in meetings. The members of the task force recruited support (funding, materials, copies etc.) from their agencies and organizations including development of a webpage at the ADPH website, www.adph.org.

2003

A program was held at the State Capitol to share the State Plan. Dr. David Satcher was on hand, along with a large group of task force members, survivors and other friends of the task force gathered to support the event.

At the regional meeting in New Orleans, 10 people from Alabama along with people from Region 4 and 6 gathered with the Association of State and Territorial Health Officer's staff, SAMSHA and other groups to encourage growth and support state and local initiatives for suicide prevention.

2004

The Governor's Proclamation Ceremony commemorating National Suicide Prevention Awareness Week, the first full week after Labor Day week, was held.

In 2004, the ASPTF received \$25,000 for a statewide billboard campaign. I believe each of the major cities in Alabama had 3-4 billboards of two different sizes. This included Birmingham (I am sure) and possibly Huntsville, Mobile, and Montgomery areas.

The \$25,000 was provided by the Alabama Dept of Youth Services. The billboards were designed by the ADPH graphics dept. They also worked with the Dept of MH&MR for the best deal and locations. The billboards were located in rural and urban areas across the state. Additionally, our Task Force developed a logo and three sets of a three sided exhibit board on the task force and suicide prevalence in Alabama that many persons used around the three regions of the state.

2005

Garrett Lee Smith Application Committee was developed to apply for a prevention grant under the Garrett Lee Smith suicide prevention program funded through SAMSHA. Task Force developments, the Alabama Suicide Prevention Call Centers, and the State Plan were presented to the Alabama Council for Community Mental Health Boards.

2006

ADPH provided funds to Alabama Crisis Call Centers to develop advertisements to recruit volunteers and describe services.

We used \$15,000 of ADPH funds for this project. The 3 (certified) Crisis Call Centers (Mobile, Birmingham and Huntsville) received the money to recruit and train volunteers for their call lines. It was also used for some suicide prevention program public relations. Technical assistance was received from the National Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) through consultation with April Naturale.

The task force partnered with the Alabama Department of Mental Health (DMH-MR) to bring Dr. Paul Quinnett of the Question-Persuade-Refer (QPR) Suicide Prevention Model to Alabama. Satellite training was provided across the country and in Canada

targeting suicide prevention in adults and youth. Dr. Quinnett also presented training on suicide risk assessment to staff of Greil Psychiatric Hospital.

2007

The task force partnered with the Crisis Center of Birmingham to hire a part-time, one-year Task Force Suicide Prevention Coordinator through local grant funding from The Community Foundation of Birmingham.

Task force chairmanship was split shared between ADPH (Alabama Department of Health) and Health DMH-MR (AL Department of Mental Health Services).

End of year efforts were focused on developing a grant application to the Garrett Lee Smith (SAMHSA) program. A \$1.5 million grant was submitted by the Task Force in 2008.

2008

The task force recommended language for the Teen Suicide and Violence Prevention Act in the state legislature and was presented by its sponsors to both the Alabama House of Representatives and the Senate for enactment.

In 2008 national, state and local resources were used to develop: Radio and TV spots; Billboards; Speaker's Bureau. We also have an informal speaker's bureau. Many members of the Task Force receive calls and go out into schools, conferences, community agencies (sometimes when a suicide has occurred) and sometimes in a more preventative way. We have all become more expert as the years go on, and so we designed a general curriculum for the speakers to use, but now there is greater confidence and customized response to each request.

The Suicide Prevention Action Network USA (SPAN USA) came to Alabama and, in July, facilitated a two-day coalition building curriculum (Strategic Planning for Suicide Prevention) to maximum enrollment allowance representing agencies, task force members, university counselors and professors, employees, hospital / psychiatry representatives, high school counselors, veterans administration, child death review professionals, survivors, and more.

A Pilot Grant application was submitted to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) train counselors as Bereavement Resource Representative in all counties of the state, while monitoring the well-being of suicide survivors for research. It was not funded.

The Task Force attracted thirteen more members as participants including a SPAN USA Field Representative, other survivors, counselor educator and therapist, social workers from public health, and more.

The Task Force continued to lend support to the AFSP-sponsored third annual Out of the Darkness Walk with staffing, materials, publicity, and collaboration. This support

was echoed with National Survivors Day in November.

During National Suicide Prevention Awareness Week, Governor Bob Riley signed a Proclamation in support of all efforts to reduce the suicide rate in Alabama. The newly revised state suicide prevention plan was unveiled during this week. Friends and allies of suicide prevention gathered to witness this proclamation.

2009

The Task Force applied for \$1.53 million in grants through SAMSHA for a comprehensive, pilot prevention program in Jefferson County. The SAMHSA grant primarily focused on gatekeeper training, bereavement services, development of rapid response teams to assist persons identified as suicidal, programs for survivors (relatives and friends of suicide victims), and public awareness. Funding was also requested to develop a state Resource Directory specifically designed for suicide prevention. The application was not funded but the overall reaction to the proposal was positive and a revised application will be prepared for submission in 2010.

The Task Force moved towards a more evolved organizational status with the development of by-laws and officers, thus moving from “task force” status upon which it was initiated to a council status to be determined in future meetings. Accordingly, the ASPTF name was changed to the Alabama Suicide Prevention and Resource Center (ASPARC).

The meetings of the Task Force included many guest speakers and visitors, including Dr. Donald Marks on his research into medication effects and suicide, Dr. Connie Kohler and her grant funded “Body Love Project” which is a continuing radio drama featuring a suicide story line and call in questions with experts, representatives from Equality Alabama, and a legal consultant on starting 501(c)3 non-profit organizations.

2010

Early in 2010 ASPARC members are focusing on fulfilling paperwork requirements to request 501(c)3 status for ASPARC. This will enable ASPARC to elicit donations and solicit grants independently. In May, attending member of the ASPTF elected the following officers and board members.

Acquanetta Knight President*
Judith Harrington, Vice President
Martha Bosworth, Secretary
David Coombs, Treasurer
Dollie Hambrick
Sue Matthews
Richard Burleson
Marilyn Lewis
Beverly Benson
Marion Johnson
Chandra Brown

* Ms. Knight needed to resign in September due to the Gulf Oil Crisis and the bylaws provided for Judith Harrington to assume the duties as president. Sue Matthews was voted by the board to become Vice President. A search for a nominee and replacement for one available board member began.

In addition, ASPARC team members are updating the state prevention plan and are revising the 2009 Garrett Lee Smith grant application in anticipation of a request for new proposals.

2011

All preparations for the 501(c)3 application were completed and the document was submitted for final approval. We learned that we were approved as an officially recognized 501(c)3 in late August!

An application for Garrett Lee Smith funding was submitted in February, 2011, in the hopes that funding would create opportunities for a large public awareness campaign about suicide prevention, developing stronger protective factors by working with faith-oriented organizations, developing and providing an extensive “Red Folder Project” resource directory, and more. The grant was developed collaboratively between the Department of Public Health and ASPARC. In September, we learned that we were not among the recipients, with most of the funding awarded to tribal nations and renewing states.

Our Annual Meeting was a success with 65 persons in attendance. In addition to a short business meeting, a young survivor of suicidal depression gave her story, along with two dynamic panels of people who addressed the role of the church as a protective factor and the myriad of mental health systems who collaborate in service of prevention efforts ranging from emergency rooms, law enforcement, probate court, school systems, etc. The mood was energetic and stimulating. Over a third of the attendees joined or renewed membership in ASPARC.

2012-2014

Since 2012 ASPARC has focused on sponsoring suicide prevention conferences, increasing membership, and new suicide prevention outreach efforts. On September 30, 2014 ASPARC is sponsoring a suicide prevention conference in Montgomery, AL at the Montgomery County Health Department. Registration information can be found on the ASPARC website.

In 2012 ASPARC was awarded the suicide prevention grant that had been turned down in 2011. The grant is from the Garret Lee Smith (GLS) program and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health administration (SAMHSA) under the auspices of the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH). The 3 year grant funds the training of individuals and group members as first responders using the QPR Institute’s basic gatekeeper model. The grant is entering the third year and ASPARC has trained about 1000 first

responders in Birmingham and central Alabama. In addition the GLS grant has funded numerous ASPARC-led suicide awareness programs throughout Central Alabama. ASPARC will increase the numbers of QPR first responders or gatekeeper trained in year 3 as well as awareness programs with a special focus on faith-based organizations.

Other Highlights: Task Force Key Points

Meetings are currently held every month, with each third meeting (quarterly) being an “all- member” meeting. Any ASPARC members are welcome to attend any or all meetings, and while the board currently meets every month to attend to business, quarterly meetings will be designed for all members to participate in committees and initiatives.

Using national, state and local resources the following have been developed:

Radio and TV spots
Billboards
Speaker’s Bureau
Manual is under development.

The Coalition continues to attract new members and decisions are processed in a voting/consensus style according to bylaws.