



UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT  
Washington, DC 20415

The Director

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## Memorandum for Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies

From: Kiran A. Ahuja  
Director

Subject: Seasonal Affective Disorder Awareness

### The Importance of Seasonal Affective Disorder and Suicide Prevention

As the days become shorter and colder, it can be common for one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors to change. Seasonal Affective Disorder, or SAD, is a form of depression which is triggered by seasonal changes and most commonly begins in late fall and resolves in early spring. SAD impacts an estimated 10 million Americans annually, and is often accompanied by symptoms including, but not limited to, feelings of sadness or hopelessness, fatigue, and suicidal thoughts. In 2020, there were nearly 46,000 suicides in the United States, or one suicide every 11 minutes. The number of people who contemplated or attempted suicide was significantly higher.<sup>1</sup> OPM is highlighting the importance of SAD, as well as suicide awareness and prevention, with a focus on the mental health of the Federal workforce. In support of the Biden-Harris Administration's focus on addressing the mental health crisis within our nation, OPM is prioritizing worksite health and wellness programs that improve the quality of life for Federal employees. While there is no sole cause, people are more likely to contemplate suicide when unresolved life stressors, relationships, and health issues create overwhelming feelings of hopelessness and despair. Providing Federal employees information to be aware of potential signs of suicide, as well as the resources available to support and care for their well-being, is instrumental in safeguarding against this public health crisis and assisting affected employees through negative emotions that may arise as the seasons change.

### Resources and Benefits Available to Employees

OPM promotes work environments that foster healthy employees, reduce negative stigmas associated with mental health conditions and treatment, and further connectedness so no one needs to feel alone in fighting these battles. We encourage you to remind employees that the [988 Suicide and Crisis Hotline](#), which is accessible nationwide by dialing 988, provides 24/7 service to anyone in a suicidal crisis or severe emotional distress. Together, we can support one another in preventing suicide within our communities.

In addition, OPM would like to remind agencies to support employees in achieving a healthy work and home life balance. Historically, the month of October has been recognized as National

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<sup>1</sup> According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), in 2020, an estimated 12.2 million American adults seriously thought about suicide, 3.2 million planned a suicide attempt, and 1.2 million attempted suicide.

Work & Family Month (NWFM), a commemoration that seeks to foster healthy work cultures by promoting workplace flexibilities. These flexibilities can be integral in facilitating a well-balanced professional and family life for employees. In efforts to prioritize the mental and emotional health of Federal employees, OPM reminds agency leaders and managers to check in routinely with employees to gauge their well-being and share the various resources and flexibilities available to them:

- Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Each Federal agency offers an EAP, which provides mental health counseling and resources to assist employees with a wide range of problems that may adversely affect morale, performance, and well-being.
- FEHB Mental Health Benefits. FEHB plans offer options for mental health counseling and treatment. Many EAP counseling services can work in conjunction with FEHB plans to identify and provide appropriate care.
- Leave Options and Workplace Flexibilities. It is important to support Federal employees in taking time to attend to their mental health, as well as to care for family members undergoing mental health treatment. Leave options and flexibilities include:
  - [Sick Leave for Personal Medical Needs](#)
  - [Family and Medical Leave](#)
  - [Parental Bereavement Leave](#)
  - [Sick Leave for Family Care and Bereavement](#)
  - [Sick Leave to Care for a Family Member with a Serious Health Condition](#)
  - [Voluntary Leave Bank Program](#) or [Voluntary Leave Transfer Program](#)
  - [Annual Leave](#)
  - [Advanced Sick Leave](#)
  - [Advanced Annual Leave](#)
  - [Leave without Pay](#)
  - [Alternative Work Schedules](#)
  - [Credit Hours under Flexible Work Schedules](#)
  - [Compensatory Time off](#)
  - [Telework](#)
- OPM Resources with a Mental Health Focus:
  - *Tip Sheets for Employee Work-Life Support* – Tips for supervisors, agency leaders, and employees to assist other Federal employees in navigating new changes, properly attending to mental health, understanding potential signs of suicide, and learning about resources available to support their mental health needs.
  - *Pamphlets for Employees* – Information and tips to assist employees or family members who may need mental health assistance.

OPM's Work-Life staff is always available to assist. Visit us at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/worklife/>. If you have any questions, please contact [worklife@opm.gov](mailto:worklife@opm.gov).

cc: Chief Human Capital Officers (CHCOs)  
Deputy CHCOs  
Human Resources Directors

Attachments: Tip Sheet  
Pamphlet