

LIFELINE INTERNATIONAL AND ITS AFRICAN MEMBERS MARK WORLD SUICIDE PREVENTION DAY

10 September 2023, Zaria, Nigeria: Suicide remains a significant issue across the African continent, which is home to six of the ten countries with the highest suicide rates in the world. Yet, with access to timely and available crisis support services, lives can be saved.

As we mark World Suicide Prevention Day in 2023, under the theme “Creating hope through action”, we believe that by talking about suicide, and by providing better access to evidence-based interventions, we have the power to change the misconceptions and beliefs about suicide, and prevent this tragic loss of life across Africa.

This day of commemoration and action marks an important opportunity to recognise the lifesaving work of LifeLine International’s six Members in Africa who are committed to ensuring more suicide prevention and crisis support resources are available, with greater access and reduced barriers to help-seeking.

The crisis lines operated on the continent by our Members are often among the few support services available to individuals in distress. Across Africa, insufficient public spending on mental health and suicide prevention is a major barrier to providing assistance to those in need. In these environments, the role of frontline organisations such as LifeLine International’s Members is doubly important.

Mental health, including the risk of suicide, affects millions of people across Africa. Stigma and cultural misconceptions often compound these issues. But the tide is gradually turning as more and more countries recognise the urgent need to address these challenges and promote a more supportive, compassionate and evidence-based environment. Last year, Kenya published its Suicide Prevention Strategy – a landmark achievement. Encouragingly, countries across the continent – including Ghana, Malawi and Nigeria – are set to follow this path.

Effective suicide prevention can only take place through a whole-of-society approach that involves the government, civil society organisations, and community leaders. Tackling suicide and creating environments where individuals feel supported – and comfortable enough to seek help – requires reshaping attitudes.

LifeLine International and its Members remain committed to advocating for and supporting policy change, including in the most challenging environments where suicide remains a crime. Criminalisation is counterproductive, reinforcing stigma and creating barriers for individuals seeking help. It is an unnecessary measure that does not deter suicide.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to this challenge. As noted by LifeLine International Continental Representative Professor Taiwo Lateef Sheikh, “In Africa, attitudes towards suicide are deeply intertwined with cultural, traditional, and religious beliefs. We need to change these perceptions, address myths, and provide support to those in need. Our approach must align with our cultural values to create lasting impact.”

About LifeLine International in Africa

LifeLine International is a global civil society organisation whose Members work to prevent suicidal deaths by reducing the stigma of suicide and increasing awareness and support for people in crisis worldwide through the delivery of crisis helplines.

We support the establishment of frameworks for suicide prevention and evidence-based suicide prevention interventions within communities in partnership with local players, and campaign to change the law in countries where suicide remains a crime, and wherever other laws restrict access to life-saving help.

Six of our 25 members – Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, and Zambia – are based in Africa. Lifeline International African Coordinator Professor Taiwo Lateef Sheikh is our representative to develop a continental view and footprint on suicide prevention and decriminalisation where required.

Media contacts

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