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**Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN USA)
Applauds Introduction of Stop Senior Suicide Act**

***Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid Introduces Measure following
SPAN USA's National Suicide Prevention Awareness and Training Event***

WASHINGTON, D.C., July 23, 2007 ô The Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN USA) today applauded U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., for introducing the Stop Senior Suicide Act (S. 1854), which would help prevent suicide among older adults ô an age group that is particularly vulnerable to this preventable public health problem.

SPAN USA Executive Director Jerry Reed said the bill is an important step forward in addressing some of the challenges facing older adults, including depression, mental illness, loneliness, and isolation. The bill would also address the inequitable coverage for outpatient mental health services under Medicare.

öEach year, people over 65 years experience the highest suicide rates in the nation ô with the risk going up as people age. We know that about three out of four seniors who complete suicide have visited their primary care physician in the past month,ö Reed said. öThis startling statistic is evidence of the important preventative steps we can take, like making sure primary care physicians are addressing mental, as well as physical, health issues with their older patients.ö

Many older adults can be reached through service providers delivering senior services in settings like senior centers, meals on wheels, and other older adult service settings, Reed added. This bill will allow groups to develop innovative programs that reach older adults at risk.

The rate of suicide among older adults is higher than that for any other age group and among those 85 years and older, is the highest rate of all. Nearly 7,000 older adults died by suicide in 2004, the most recent statistics available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Sen. Reid, who lost his own father to suicide in 1972, said the vulnerability of older adults to suicide is not well known and that the unacceptably high suicide rates among the elderly must be addressed.

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“These findings do not just constitute a serious public health problem,” Reid said from the Senate floor. “They also conflict with America’s belief in living our golden years in dignity. The bankruptcy of hope and resources affecting those at risk ultimately affect us all as a nation.”

Specifically, the Stop Senior Suicide Act is a comprehensive effort to reduce suicide among seniors through several strategies, including:

- **Improving the geriatric mental health delivery system.** The bill would form an Interagency Geriatric Mental Health Planning Council to make recommendations on the integration of mental health, suicide prevention, health and aging services.
- **Funding senior suicide prevention and early intervention programs.** The measure would provide grants for public or private organizations to plan and implement elderly suicide early intervention and prevention strategies.
- **Providing technical assistance to suicide prevention and intervention grantees.** The bill would ensure that the Suicide Prevention Resource Center provides guidance, training and technical assistance to grantees working on elderly suicide prevention.
- **Improving Medicare coverage of mental health.** The measure would adjust the coinsurance percentage rate for outpatient mental health services so that it is equal to the rate for other outpatient services.

NOTE: To interview Jerry Reed about the Stop Senior Suicide Act, please contact Melanie Fonder at (202) 715-1568 or melanie.fonder@dittus.com.

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SPAN USA is the nation’s only suicide prevention organization dedicated to leveraging grassroots support among suicide survivors and others to advance public policies that prevent suicide. Since its founding nine years ago, SPAN USA has led the drive to make suicide a public health priority by building political will and calling for the development and implementation of a national strategy for suicide prevention. Using its extensive grassroots network of survivors and advocates, SPAN USA has actively promoted the cause on Capitol Hill and in state legislatures. For more information, please visit www.spanusa.org.

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