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Program Evaluation and Research Unit

Tier 3: Upstream Suicide Prevention

*Northwest Pennsylvania Veteran Suicide
Prevention Program*

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Introduction to Upstream Prevention



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What is Upstream Prevention?

- Policies promoting mental health awareness and advocacy
- Mental Health Parity- equal treatment of mental health conditions and substance use disorders in insurance plans



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Why is Upstream Prevention Important?

- **Prevention:** Approximately 90% of people who died by suicide had a diagnosable mental health condition at the time of death.
- **Cost:** Mental health treatment costs the US upwards of \$200 billion per year, yet as few as half of patients who are diagnosed receive treatment.
- **Impact of COVID-19:** High demand for mental health care during a time when there is a shortage of mental health care professionals.



Upstream Connections with Healthcare and Community





Mental Health Parity Law

- Federal Mental Health Parity and Addition Equity Act (2008)
- Affordable Care Act (2010) extended coverage to more insurance plans
- Federal Parity Law does not apply to Medicare or the VA
- Systematic barriers to mental health care still exist



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Pennsylvania on Mental Health Parity Law

- PA has not adopted the federal parity law in its entirety
 - Does not mandate insurance plans to offer MH/SUD benefits
 - Under ACA, small group plans must offer MH/SUD benefits
- Act 106
 - Requires minimum coverage for alcohol and substance abuse treatment whether you have a large or small group health insurance plan
 - If your current plan offers more coverage, you are entitled to the greater coverage due to the Federal Parity Law



Milliman Report (2019)

MILLIMAN RESEARCH REPORT

Addiction and mental health vs. physical health: Widening disparities in network use and provider reimbursement

A deeper analytical dive and updated results through 2017 for 37 million employees and dependents

Commissioned by Mental Health Treatment and Research Institute LLC, a not-for-profit subsidiary of

The Bowman Family Foundation

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National Organizations on Mental Health Parity



American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)

- Supports the passage of comprehensive state-level parity reporting legislation with the goal of implementing federal and state parity laws nation-wide
- Provides educational resources (e.g., how to file a parity appeal)
- AFSP Public Policy Team in D.C.
 - Maintains connections with policy makers and stakeholders in states that have adopted parity reporting laws



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National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

- Supports policies that ensure mental health parity
- Supports comprehensive coverage without limits on treatment
- Provides educational resources through infographics, videos, and news about mental health parity
- Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Parity Task Force



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The Kennedy Forum

- Partners with healthcare providers, mental health advocates, policymakers, and business leaders to eliminate issues of stigma, guarantee equal access to care, and help consumers understand their rights



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Medical-Legal Partnerships (MLPs)

- Attorneys partnered with medical teams (i.e., VA)
- Lawyers train VA health care teams to screen Veterans for unmet legal and social needs
- Medical teams refer Veterans to on-site legal clinics



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Medical-Legal Partnerships (MLPs) Cont'd

- Lawyers provide pro bono services for noncriminal cases
 - Counseling on insurance, Veterans benefits, financial debt/crisis, income support, etc.
 - Address legal issues that directly affect Veterans' mental health (i.e., stress)



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Veterans Treatment Courts

- Assist Veterans with substance use disorder and mental health conditions who encounter the justice system
 - Courts in NW PA include Erie, Butler, Beaver, Mercer, and Armstrong counties
- Veterans come before judges who are familiar with their cases and are connected to programs, benefits, and services



How Stakeholders Can Implement Upstream Prevention



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Campus Outreach in Implementation Region

- Researched college campuses across the 15 counties in NW PA for existing organizations focused on Veterans or Mental Health Advocacy
- Identified 19 colleges throughout the 15 counties
- Next Steps: identifying student Veterans' representatives who can identify further connections to Veterans



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Discussion

1. Can the Program adopt some of these practices?
 - What works?
 - What is not feasible?
2. Can implementing upstream interventions begin with engaging lawyers before policy makers?
3. How can we engage judges in suicide prevention in Veterans Treatment Courts?



Pennsylvania Resources

- [Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts \(AOPC\)](#)
 - [Problem Solving Courts](#)
 - [Common Pleas President Judges](#)
- [Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association](#)
- [Special Court Judges Association of Pennsylvania](#)
- [County Criminal Justice Advisory Boards \(CJABs\)](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Lifeline 988 Launch](#)



National Resources

- [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention \(AFSP\)](#)
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#)
 - [988: Reimagining Crisis Response](#)
- [The Kennedy Forum](#)



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