

# MONTHLY REPORT

## Northwest Pennsylvania Veteran Suicide Prevention Program

*Funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Comprehensive Suicide Prevention Program*

**October 2022**

### Program Overview

The Northwest Pennsylvania Veteran Suicide Prevention Program (NWPASVPP) is a five-year collaborative effort between federal and state-level entities, community-level service providers, and organizational experts in suicide prevention to create significant and lasting change in the 15-county region by August 2025. Funding is through the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Comprehensive Suicide Prevention Program. This report outlines key findings and recommendations based on data collected for the NWPASVPP as of October 31, 2022.

The program aims to reduce Veteran suicide attempts and death by an average of 10% over five years (2020-2025) using a three-tiered approach of community, healthcare, and upstreaming. Goals include increasing awareness of suicide risk, promoting community connection and resilience, and improving the delivery of suicide care. Each tier has its own reporting section within this document.

TIERS	PROGRAM ACTIVITIES
COMMUNITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offering suicide awareness and interventional trainings</li> <li>Promoting connection within communities</li> </ul>
HEALTHCARE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing healthcare provider military cultural competency</li> <li>Streamlining procedures for screening, intervention, and referrals</li> <li>Emphasizing treatment options to prevent reattempts</li> </ul>
UPSTREAM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing awareness of existing mental health parity laws</li> <li>Improving coordination of physical, behavioral, and mental health care</li> </ul>

To review the methodology for this report, including data collection and analysis details, please contact the NWPASVPP Program Manager, [Katie Krancevich](#). Additional information can be found on the [NWPASVPP website](#), the Resilient Veteran.

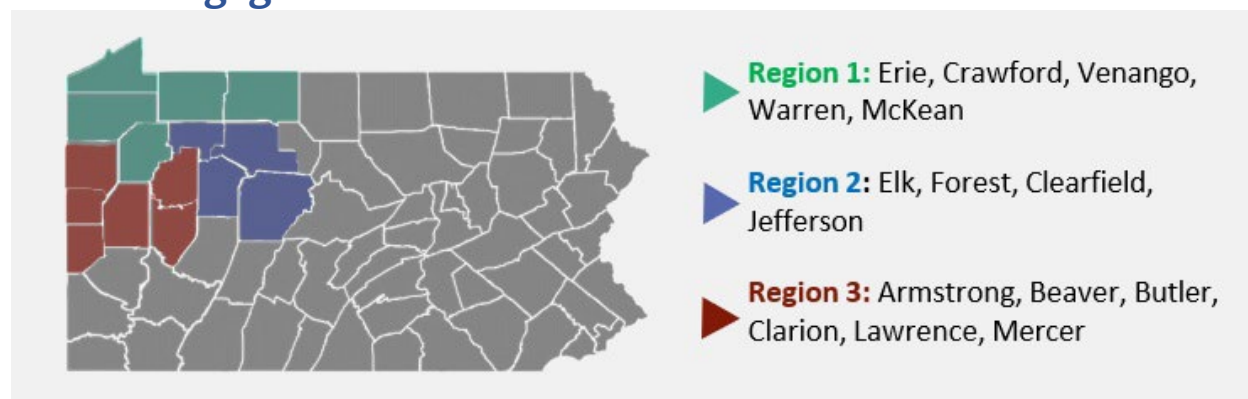
## October 2022 Highlights

- **Engagement:**
  - **16** partner meetings were held
  - **15/32 (47%)** Advisory Group members attended the October meeting
  - **15/15 (100%)** Advisory Group members completed meeting evaluations, with unanimous agreement that the meeting moved the project forward and they were glad they attended
  - **3** stakeholders attended the October Journal Club
- **Tier 1:**
  - **358** gun locks were distributed (Annual goal: 360 locks distributed)
  - **146** people attended gatekeeper training sessions (Annual goal: 600 gatekeepers trained)
  - **1** community greening scheduled for January 2023 (Annual goal: 2 community greening events held)
- **Tier 2:**
  - **1** healthcare site submitted suicide risk screening electronic health record (EHR) data (Annual goal: 5 healthcare sites submit EHR data)
  - **281** suicide risk screens conducted by the participating healthcare site in Erie County
- **Tier 3:**
  - **1** draft educational material created about VA benefits eligibility for Military Sexual Trauma (Annual goal: 3 educational campaigns completed)
- **Data Collection:**
  - **1** additional county coroner agreed to begin providing data to PERU in November 2022
- **Evaluation:**
  - **26** community members completed the Suicide Awareness and Perceptions Survey

## Next Steps

- **Engagement:**
  - Identify a new meeting time for the monthly journal club that will allow for more stakeholder participation in 2023
- **Tier 1:**
  - Distribute 30 gun locks in November
  - Schedule a Region 2 training series on military culture and/or suicide prevention to occur in early 2023
- **Tier 2:**
  - Finalize a referral protocol template for healthcare sites by the end of 2022
  - Recruit an additional healthcare site to participate by the end of 2022
- **Tier 3:**
  - Finalize an educational material about VA benefits eligibility for Military Sexual Trauma by the end of 2022
- **Data Collection:**
  - Finalize agreements with VA VISN4 MIRECC by the end of 2022
  - Recruit an additional county coroner to participate by the end of 2022
- **Evaluation:**
  - Complete Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) in November and December 2022

## Partner Engagement



PERU is working to enhance local suicide prevention, intervention, and response efforts and work to address gaps in efforts or services. Implementation is being phased across three geographic regions selected based on resource availability and existing healthcare and community partnerships. Currently, implementation efforts are focused on Regions 1 and 2. The program's outreach and engagement strategy aims to build and maintain positive relationships with community partners in each county to support implementation efforts. The *Partner Meetings Table* below represents the number and types of meetings held in October.

### Region 1 Summary

- In September, the implementation team engaged with local law enforcement, the Veterans Treatment Court, and justice officials within Erie County. This outreach aimed to schedule a military culture and/or suicide prevention gatekeeper training with these stakeholders. In October, the implementation team scheduled a training symposium with Erie County justice and safety stakeholders for February 2023.

### Region 2 Summary

- Outreach efforts in October focused on engagement with county coalitions and justice officials to discuss scheduling a local training series on military culture and/or suicide prevention in early 2023.

### Region 3 Summary

- Due to the program's phased implementation approach, engagement in Region 3 will begin in September 2023.

### Partner Meetings in October 2022

Entity Type & Meeting Purpose	Meeting (#)
Advisory Group Partners: Project Planning	3
Community Stakeholders: Continued Engagement	3
County Coalitions/Task Forces: Continued Engagement	2
Healthcare Partners: Recruitment/Engagement	1
Safe Storage Partners: Continued Engagement	1
State-Level Agencies: Continued Engagement	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>

### Meeting Outcomes

- The October Advisory Group meeting included updates on implementation and evaluation activities, syndromic surveillance and psychological autopsy activities, VA collaboration, and discussions of local stakeholder engagement and healthcare partner recruitment strategies.
- A total of 15 out of 32 members external to the PERU team (47%) attended the October Advisory Group meeting.

- The October Journal Club discussion focused on recidivism among justice-involved Veterans.
- A total of 3 attendees external to the PERU team attended the October Journal Club meeting. PERU will identify a new meeting date and time to increase participation beginning in January 2023.

## Tier 1: Community Activities

Tier 1 activities target three community-based interventions:

1. Creating protective environments by reducing access to lethal means among Veterans.
2. Identifying and supporting people at risk through implementing gatekeeper training for community members and Veterans.
3. Promoting connectedness through community greening and engagement activities.

### Tier 1 Highlight: Community Engagement Event

On October 29, 2022, the program team joined the Erie County chapter of Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing, Inc. (PHWFF) at an annual fly-tying competition called the *Steelhead Slam Iron Fly*. PHWFF is dedicated to the physical and emotional rehabilitation of disabled active service personnel and disabled Veterans through fly fishing and associated activities, including education and outings. To learn more about the event, [read the article](#) on the Program's website.

### Safe Storage Update

Distributing gun locks at events and trainings began in August 2022. The following table provides monthly and year-to-date (YTD) distribution amounts.

Aug	Sept	Oct	YTD
50	32	358	440

### Gatekeeper Training Update

The program team began offering gatekeeper training in March 2022. In October, 118 individuals attended a QPR (Question. Persuade. Refer) training, 12 individuals attended a QPR Instructor Certification training, and 16 individuals attended a Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM) training.

The following table provides monthly and YTD amounts for the total number of gatekeepers trained.

Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Total
40	113	179	89	19	91	34	146	711

### Community Greening Update

Although Region 3 engagement is officially scheduled to begin next year, the program team is constantly seeking opportunities to create new partnerships throughout NW PA. In October, the team visited the Storm Harbor Equestrian Center in Butler County and scheduled a day of Equine Assisted Activities (EAA) for Veterans in January 2023. Storm Harbor's center includes a heated indoor riding arena and accessible equipment, allowing all Veterans to participate in this program. The program team is working with the Butler VA Medical Center to coordinate transportation for local Veterans to attend this event.

## Tier 2: Healthcare Activities

Tier 2 activities target healthcare-based interventions:

1. Strengthening access and delivery of suicide care through implementing system change initiatives in healthcare systems.
2. Identifying and supporting people at risk through implementing gatekeeper training for providers and treatment to prevent reattempts.

## Healthcare Engagement Highlight

- The program team presented an overview of the NWPASPP at the Rehabilitation & Community Providers Association (RCPA) Conference in Hershey, PA. The conference featured more than 60 workshops and networking opportunities with healthcare providers across the state. The following qualitative feedback was received about the presentation:
  - *"Will be taking some of the principles discussed back to the counties for further discussion on training possibilities."*
  - *"Excellent program for suicide prevention for Veterans, applicable to my agency."*
  - *"Great amount of clear and useful information."*

## Healthcare Recruitment – Next Steps:

- The implementation team will meet with potential UPMC primary care practices in collaboration with the Primary Care Medical Director and Quality Nurse Coordinator by the end of 2022.
- By the end of 2022, the implementation team will also re-engage Adagio Health, Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine (LECOM) Health, Allegheny Health Network (AHN), and Bradford Regional Medical Center through existing relationships with staff and stakeholders to discuss program participation.
- The implementation team will schedule a staff-wide training with Community Health Net staff in early 2023.

## Healthcare Implementation Updates

- Active Sites: A Data Use Agreement (DUA) between PERU and Primary Health Network (PHN) was approved in early October to allow for sharing of deidentified electronic health record (EHR) data specific to suicide risk screening, intervention, and follow-up. In late October, the program team met with PHN Wayne Primary Care (Erie County) representatives to review the baseline data export.
  - At the time of this report, 281 Patient Health Questionnaires (PHQ) were known to be conducted at PHN Wayne to screen patients for suicide risk.
  - By the end of 2022, the program team and PHN will finalize the reporting processes and data export specifications to guide ongoing implementation and quality improvement efforts.
- During October, the implementation team, in collaboration with VA Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISN) 4, created a template referral protocol to assist primary care sites with referrals to outpatient mental/behavioral health services for Veteran patients. This resource is under internal review and will be shared with external partners by the end of 2022.

## Tier 3: Upstream Activities

Tier 3 activities target upstream (policy) interventions: Strengthening access and delivery of care through improving coverage for mental health conditions, access to mental health care, and coordination and collaboration of key policymakers and healthcare networks.

The Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act is a federal law that requires the same health insurance coverage for mental health and/or substance use disorder conditions as patients would receive for coverage of medical/surgical services. This law was adopted into Pennsylvania law in 2010. Mental health parity means insurance benefits for mental health and substance use conditions equal coverage for other types of health care.

## Upstream Implementation Updates

PERU is working to raise awareness and educate healthcare providers and community members about upstream suicide prevention strategies and mental health parity.

Our team has collaborated with the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and the Pennsylvania Department of Insurance to create educational materials for healthcare providers and consumers to understand better how mental health parity applies to them (linked below).

## Next Steps

The new educational material about VA benefits eligibility for Military Sexual Trauma is under internal review and will be shared with external partners by the end of 2022. To learn more, visit the Program's website for information about [Pennsylvania's mental health parity laws](#).

## Data Collection Updates

PERU collaborates with county coroners to collect and analyze county- and municipality-level suicide mortality data among adults. This surveillance data will be used to identify in as close to real-time as possible the factors associated with regional suicide deaths, study the impact of the project interventions on community suicide rates, and apply a psychological autopsy methodology for Veteran decedents from which potential suicide risk and protective factors will be identified.

- 2 coroners, Erie and Venango Counties, have committed to partnership and submit quarterly data related to the suicide deaths in their respective counties.
- No known Veteran suicide deaths have occurred in either Erie (34 suicide deaths to date) or Venango (4 suicide deaths to date) Counties.
- The implementation team secured an additional partnership with the Mercer County coroner in October. Data sharing is expected to begin in November 2022.
- During November and December, the implementation team will continue engaging with the 10 county coroners to solidify  $\geq 1$  additional partnership by early 2023.

PERU and the Veterans Affairs VISN4 Mental Illness Research Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC), under the direction of Dr. Gretchen Haas, are working together to share deidentified electronic health record information for Veterans who screen positive for suicide risk. PERU will use this information to understand better healthcare utilization preceding and following a positive suicide risk screen. Additionally, VISN4 MIRECC will help to certify the Veteran status of suicide decedents involved in the psychological autopsy protocol.

- The budget plans to support these efforts are nearing completion. VISN4 MIRECC plans to submit its requested budget amounts to PERU by the end of October 2022.
- Once these agreements are in place, this report will include progress updates on data transfer planning and facilitation.

## Program Evaluation

### Meeting Evaluations

- Real-time meeting evaluation polls gather feedback from Advisory Group members following the monthly meeting.
- The poll asks members to rate agreement (Yes/No) on two questions (below) about the content and relevance of the meeting. An open-ended comment space was also included.
  - "Today's meeting moved the project forward."
  - "I'm glad I attended this meeting."
- A total of 15 attendees out of 15 responded to the evaluation (100%).
- This month, there was unanimous agreement with both statements for the Advisory Group meeting.

- One qualitative comment was collected and positively remarked on the progress of the project and the focus of the meeting.

### **Key Informant Interviews**

- Key informant interviews (KIIs) are conducted quarterly to gather stakeholder feedback on PERU's project management and leadership, quality and strength of partnerships, and communication and data reporting.
- The next round of KIIs will occur in November and December 2022.

### **Training Evaluations**

- Training evaluations are administered to stakeholders following every training. They are used to inform continuous quality improvement efforts and assist the program implementation team in identifying improvement areas for training delivery.
- A full analysis of training evaluation data is conducted twice per year. Please contact the Program Manager to view the October 2022 Gatekeeper Training Evaluation Report, which includes training evaluation data conducted from May 1, 2022, through October 24, 2022. Based on the analysis of the October 2022 report, the program team will do the following:
  - Continue to support new QPR instructors to increase training capacity in their communities.
  - Review comments about additional training topics of interest and follow up with participants as needed.

### **Suicide Awareness and Perceptions Survey**

- The Suicide Awareness and Perceptions Survey is used to track community attitudes and perceptions concerning suicide to provide evidence of increased awareness of suicide over time.
- In October, 26 community members from Mercer County completed the survey.
- A full analysis of survey data is conducted twice per year. Please contact the Program Manager to view the October 2022 Suicide Awareness and Perceptions Survey Report, which includes evaluation data from surveys conducted in September 2022.