

# MONTHLY REPORT

## Northwest Pennsylvania Veteran Suicide Prevention Program

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

**January 2023**

### 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 January 31, 2023.

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.

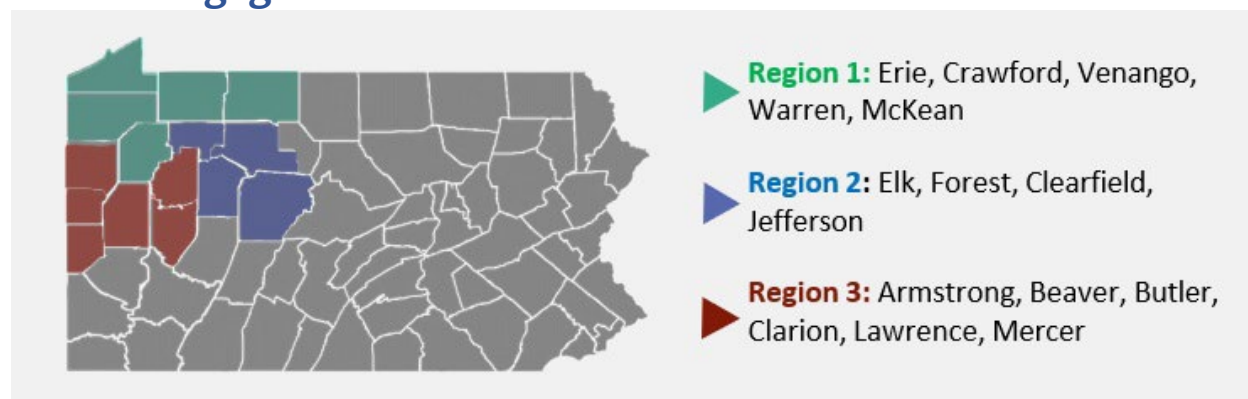
## January 2023 Highlights

- **Engagement:**
  - **22** partner meetings were held
  - **11/24 (46%)** Advisory Group members attended the January meeting
  - **11/11 (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 January Journal Club
- **Tier 1:**
  - **139** gun locks were distributed (Annual goal: 360 locks distributed)
  - **60** people attended gatekeeper training sessions (Annual goal: 600 gatekeepers trained)
  - **47** individuals attended an equine community greening event (Annual goal: 2 community greening events held)
- **Tier 2:**
  - Produced one data report for PHN Wayne Primary Care, where 134 mental health and suicide screens were completed
  - Engaged 9 health systems in partner recruitment efforts
- **Tier 3:**
  - **1** educational material about VA benefits eligibility for Military Sexual Trauma under internal review (Annual goal: 3 educational campaigns completed)
- **Data Collection/Evaluation:**
  - Continued engagement with county coroners to encourage reporting of suicide death data
  - Began review of Key Informant Interview data from KIIs completed in November and December 2022

## Next Steps

- **Engagement:**
  - Identify a county coroner to join the Advisory Group in February
  - 2023 Journal Club meetings will occur every other month, with the next meeting in March
- **Tier 1:**
  - Distribute 30 gun locks in February
  - Train 50 gatekeepers in February
  - Hold a military culture and/or suicide prevention training in a Region 2 county in February
  - Begin planning for the 2<sup>nd</sup> community greening event of 2023
- **Tier 2:**
  - Develop 1 January site data report for PHN Wayne Primary Care in February
  - Recruit 1 additional healthcare site to participate by the end of 2022
- **Tier 3:**
  - Finalize 1 educational material about VA benefits eligibility for Military Sexual Trauma by the end of February
- **Data Collection/Evaluation:**
  - Recruit 1 additional county coroner to participate by the end of February
  - Finalize draft of agreements with VA VISN4 MIRECC by the end of February
  - Produce 1 Key Informant Interviews report in February

## 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 January.

### Region 1 Summary

- In January, the program team finalized details for the Erie Nonprofit Partnership networking event to be held in March 2023.
- A training symposium with Erie County justice and safety stakeholders is scheduled for March 2023.
- The program team solidified a training date for An Epidemic in Our Ranks: Military Sexual Trauma in Erie County (March 2023) and a QPR training in McKean County (February 2023).

### Region 2 Summary

- Engagement efforts in January continued with county coalitions and justice officials to discuss scheduling a local training series on military culture and/or suicide prevention in early 2023.
- The program team solidified training dates for An Epidemic in Our Ranks: Military Sexual Trauma in Elk, Jefferson, and Clearfield Counties (February 2023).

### Region 3 Summary

- 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 January, the program team attended Suicide Prevention Task Force meetings in Butler and Lawrence Counties.
- The program team solidified training dates for An Epidemic in Our Ranks: Military Sexual Trauma in Clarion (February 2023) and Mercer (March 2023) Counties.

### Partner Meetings in January 2023

Entity Type & Meeting Purpose	Meeting (#)
Advisory Group Partners: Project Planning	1
Community Stakeholders: Continued Engagement	6
County Coalitions/Task Forces: Continued Engagement	2
Healthcare Partners: Recruitment/Engagement	10
Safe Storage Partners: Continued Engagement	1
State-Level Agencies: Continued Engagement	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>

## Meeting Outcomes

- The January Advisory Group meeting included updates on implementation and evaluation activities and discussions of local stakeholder engagement and healthcare partner recruitment strategies.
- A total of 11 out of 24 members external to the PERU team (46%) attended the January Advisory Group meeting.
- The January Journal Club discussion focused on Mental Health Considerations for Multigenerational Military Families.
- A total of 3 attendees external to the PERU team attended the January Journal Club meeting. Beginning in 2023, PERU will host Journal Club meetings every other month.

## 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 January 28, 2023, the program team collaborated with Storm Harbor Equestrian Center and the Butler VA to host an equine event for Veterans and their families in Butler County. The event was attended by 47 individuals and was used to promote the free equine program at Storm Harbor and highlight a variety of other services, supports, and resources available locally for Veterans.

### Community Greening Update

A Veteran-centric event focused on the intersection of nutrition and mental health is scheduled for April 2023 in Lawrence County. Throughout January, the program team continued to work with Adagio Health, the Butler VA Medical Center, and other local partners to coordinate registration, facilitators, and other logistics for this event.

### Safe Storage Update

Distributing gun locks at events and trainings began in August 2022. The following table provides monthly and total overall distribution amounts.

Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Total
358	95	0	139	674

### Gatekeeper Training Update

In January, 27 individuals attended a QPR (Question. Persuade. Refer) training and 34 individuals attended a Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM) training.

The following table provides monthly and total overall amounts of gatekeepers trained.

Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Total
40	113	179	89	19	91	34	146	85	103	60	959

## 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 Recruitment and Implementation:

- The implementation team engaged 9 health systems in January and has several follow-up recruitment discussions scheduled in February.
- In January, the program team worked with PHN Wayne Primary Care (Erie County) representatives to improve the EHR data export and reporting process.
  - PHN has provided 134 screens (including 8 Veterans).
  - This covers 46% of patients that had been seen at the site.
  - 97% of patients in need of high-risk screening received the appropriate full screening tools.
  - Patients seen at this office represent the 15-county region well (91% reside within region).
  - A total of 11 patients endorsed a positive response on PHQ9 item 9 (presence and duration of suicidal ideation).
- A data report for January 2023 will be developed for PHN in February.
- In January, the Advisory Group reviewed the template referral protocol to assist primary care sites with referrals to outpatient mental/behavioral health services for Veteran patients. This resource will be revised with Advisory Group feedback in February.

## Tier 3: Upstream Activities

Tier 3 activities target upstream (policy) interventions: Raise awareness and educate healthcare providers and community members about upstream suicide prevention strategies and mental health parity.

### Upstream Implementation Updates

The new educational material about VA benefits eligibility for Military Sexual Trauma is under internal review and will be shared with external partners in the first quarter of 2023. 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.

- 3 coroners, Erie, Mercer, 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), Mercer (8 suicide deaths to date), or Venango (4 suicide deaths to date) Counties.
- During January the implementation team continued engaging with the 10 county coroners to solidify additional partnerships in 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 for this collaboration are complete.
- In February, the necessary agreements will be developed. Future reports will include progress updates on data transfer planning and facilitation.

# Program Evaluation

## Meeting Evaluations

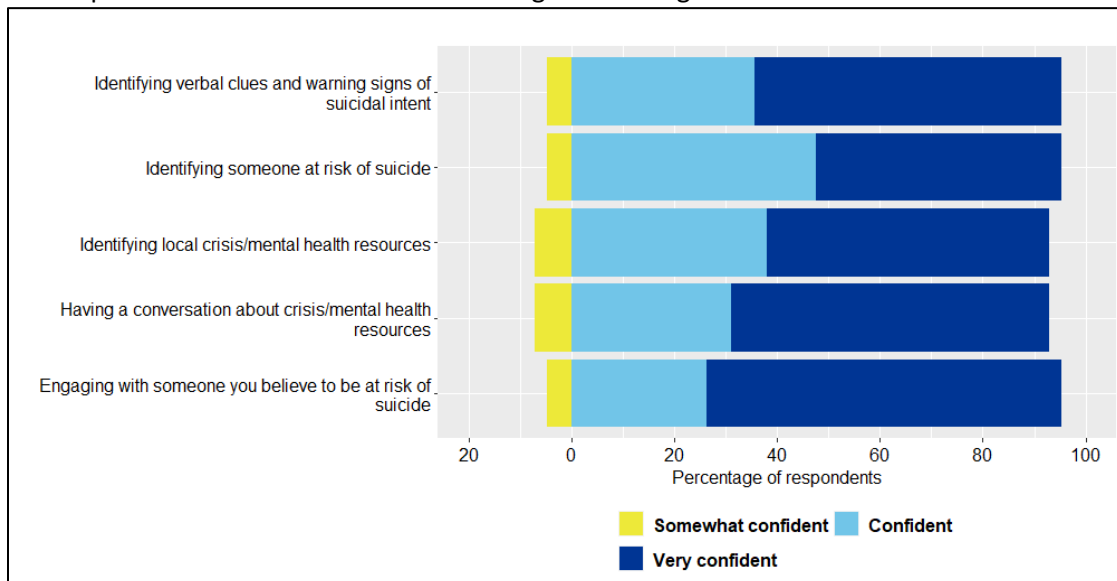
- Real-time meeting evaluation polls gather feedback from Advisory Group members following the monthly meeting.
- The poll asks members to rate agreement (Yes/No) on two questions (below) about the content and relevance of the meeting. An open-ended comment space was also included.
  - "Today's meeting moved the project forward."
  - "I'm glad I attended this meeting."
- A total of 11 attendees out of 11 responded to the evaluation (100%).
- This month, there was unanimous agreement with both statements.
- Three qualitative comments were 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 last round of KIIs occurred in November and December 2022, and the data from 3 interviews is currently being reviewed. A summary report will be completed by the end of February 2023.

## 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.
- In January 42 training evaluations were completed by 60 training participants (70%).
- Participants rated their confidence following the training as follows:



- A full analysis of training evaluation data is conducted twice per year. The next report will be available in April 2023.

## 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.
- A total of 85 surveys have been collected to date.
- A full analysis of survey data is conducted twice per year. The next report will be available in April.