

MONTHLY REPORT

Northwest Pennsylvania Veteran Suicide Prevention Program

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

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

Additional information can be found on the [NWPASVPP website](#), the Resilient Veteran.

March 2023 Highlights

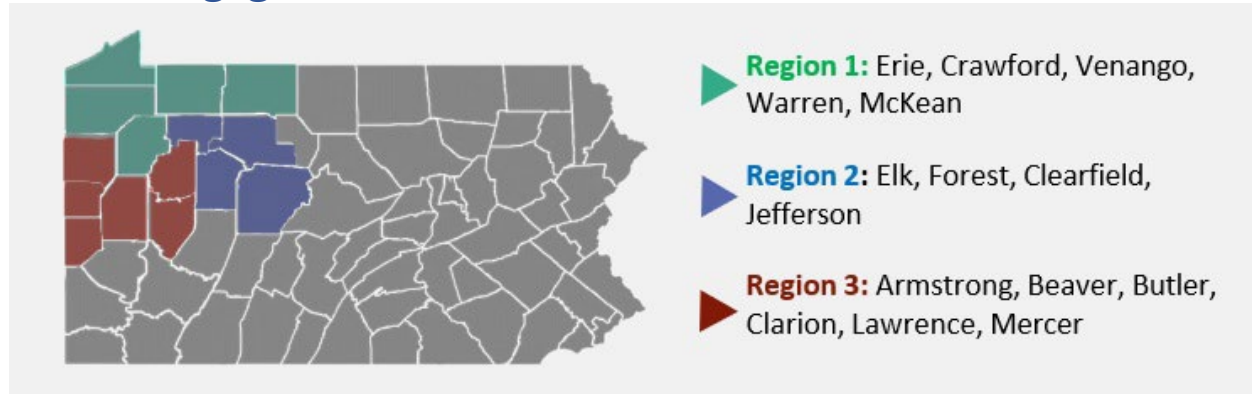
- **Engagement:**
 - **28** partner meetings were held
 - **13/24 (54%)** Advisory Group members attended the March meeting
 - **13/13 (100%)** Advisory Group members completed meeting evaluations, with unanimous agreement that the meeting moved the project forward and they were glad they attended
- **Tier 1:**
 - **0** gun locks were distributed (Annual goal: 189)
 - **147** individuals attended gatekeeper training sessions (Annual goal: 600 gatekeepers trained)
 - **35** individuals attended an in-person training on Military Sexual Trauma
 - **24** individuals attended an in-person training on Military Cultural Competency
- **Tier 2:**
 - Produced one data report for PHN Wayne Primary Care, where 350 mental health and suicide screens were completed.
 - Recruited UPMC Heritage Primary Care and Bradford Family Medicine as project sites.
 - Engaged 4 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. A total of 5 county coroners are currently submitting data to PERU.
 - Drafted IRB and data use agreements with the VA VISN4 MIRECC team.
 - 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 April
 - **2** members of the Advisory Group attended the March Journal Club meeting about the impacts of trauma-informed suicide prevention approaches. The next Journal Club meeting will be in May 2023.
- **Tier 1:**
 - Distribute 30 gun locks in April
 - Train 50 gatekeepers in April
 - Hold a military culture and/or suicide prevention training in a Region 2 county in April
 - Continue planning for and host the second community greening event of 2023
- **Tier 2:**
 - Develop 1 March site data report for PHN Wayne Primary Care in April
 - Submit data use agreement to Bradford Family Medicine legal team in order to set up data sharing process, and collect initial partnership documentation (Memorandum of Understanding, Pre-Implementation Questionnaire, etc.) in April
 - Submit data use agreement to UPMC Heritage Primary Care to set up data sharing process, and collect initial partnership documentation (Memorandum of Understanding, Pre-Implementation Questionnaire, etc.) in April
 - Recruit 1 additional healthcare site to participate by the end of April 2023
- **Tier 3:**
 - Finalize 1 educational material about VA benefits eligibility for Military Sexual Trauma by the end of April
 - Develop a Tier 3 workplan for the remainder of 2023 by the end of April
- **Data Collection/Evaluation:**

- Recruit 1 additional county coroner to participate by the end of April
- Finalize data use agreement with VA VISN4 MIRECC by the end of June
- Produce a Key Informant Interview summary report in April

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 March.

Region 1 Summary

- Hosted a networking event with the Erie County Nonprofit Partnership to convene Veteran-focused community organizations in March 2023.
- Provided a Military Sexual Trauma (MST) training at the Crime Victim Center in Erie County in March 2023.
- Provided an in-person QPR (Question. Persuade. Refer.) training session with the Erie County Justice System and 2 ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) with Erie County Department of Corrections and Warren County School District Central Office in March 2023.

Region 2 Summary

- Participated in the Suicide Prevention Task Force meeting for Jefferson County in March 2023.

Region 3 Summary

- Participated in Suicide Prevention Task Force meetings in Butler, Clarion, and Lawrence Counties in March 2023.
- Provided MST training for stakeholders in Mercer County in March 2023.
- Provided 3 in-person QPR (Question. Persuade. Refer.) training sessions in Mercer County in March 2023 at Prince of Peace, SCI Mercer Veteran Service Unit, and Mercer County Veterans Treatment Court.
- Provided an in-person QPR (Question. Persuade. Refer.) training session in Butler County in March 2023 at Storm Harbor Equestrian Center.

Partner Meetings in March 2023

| Entity Type & Meeting Purpose | Meeting (#) |
|---|-------------|
| Advisory Group Partners: Project Planning | 2 |
| Community Stakeholders: Continued Engagement | 14 |
| County Coalitions/Task Forces: Continued Engagement | 5 |
| Healthcare Partners: Recruitment/Engagement | 4 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Safe Storage Partners: Continued Engagement | 1 |
| State-Level Agencies: Continued Engagement | 2 |
| Total | 28 |

Meeting Outcomes

- The March Advisory Group meeting included updates on implementation and evaluation activities and discussions of local stakeholder engagement and healthcare partner recruitment strategies.
- A total of 13 out of 24 members external to the PERU team (54%) attended the March Advisory Group meeting.
- 2 members of the Advisory Group attended the March Journal Club meeting about the impacts of trauma-informed suicide prevention approaches.

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 March 17, 2023, the program team conducted a training on Military Cultural Competency and Military Sexual Trauma for 24 staff members from the local rape-crisis center in Mercer County.

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 March, 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

The following table provides monthly and total distribution amounts of gun locks.

| Jan 2023 | Feb 2023 | Mar 2023 | YTD 2023 | Total to Date |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------------|
| 139 | 50 | 0 | 189 | 724 |

Gatekeeper Training Update

Gatekeeper trainings include: QPR (Question. Persuade. Refer), ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training), and CALM (Counseling on Access to Lethal Means). The following table provides monthly and total amounts of gatekeepers trained.

| Jan 2023 | Feb 2023 | Mar 2023 | YTD 2023 | Total to Date |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------------|
| 60 | 55 | 147 | 262 | 1,157 |

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 4 health systems in March and has several follow-up recruitment discussions scheduled in April.
- In March, the program team worked with PHN Wayne Primary Care (Erie County) representatives to improve the EHR data export and reporting process.
- PERU recruited UPMC Heritage Primary Care and Bradford Family Medicine as project sites.
 - In April, PERU will submit a data use agreement to Bradford Family Medicine legal team in order to set up data sharing process, and collect initial partnership documentation (Memorandum of Understanding, Pre-Implementation Questionnaire, etc.).
 - In April, PERU will submit a data use agreement to UPMC Heritage Primary Care to set up data sharing process, and collect initial partnership documentation (Memorandum of Understanding, Pre-Implementation Questionnaire, etc.).

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](#).

Further, a workplan for the remainder of 2023, aimed at reassessing needs and developing policy recommendations to strengthen access to and delivery of mental health services, will be developed by the end of April 2023.

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.

- The implementation team has solidified partnership with 5 coroners (Erie, Mercer, Venango, Lawrence, and Butler Counties), who have committed to submit quarterly data related to the suicide deaths in their respective counties.
- Suicide death data has been collected from these counties:
 - Erie (100 suicide deaths since September 2021, 10 Veterans)
 - Mercer (8 suicide deaths since January 2022, 0 Veterans)
 - Venango (11 suicide deaths since January 2022, 0 Veterans)
 - Butler (19 suicide deaths since January 2022, 2 Veterans)
 - Lawrence (0 suicide deaths since January 2023, 0 Veterans)
- The team also continued engaging with the remaining 10 county coroners to work to solidify at one additional partner in April.

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 data use agreement and IRB were drafted, to be complete by the end of June.

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 13 attendees out of 13 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.
- Further, a survey to gather feedback from project partners has been developed and will be disseminated in April 2023. This survey will be conducted annually and will replace Key Informant Interviews for the remainder of the project.

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. 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.
- The survey will be distributed to county suicide prevention task force and coalitions partners beginning in spring 2023.