

MONTHLY REPORT

Northwest Pennsylvania Veteran Suicide Prevention Program

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

May 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 May 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.

May 2023 Highlights

- **Engagement:**
 - **17** partner meetings were held
 - **7/23 (30%)** Advisory Group members attended the May meeting
 - **7/7 (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:**
 - **14** gun locks were distributed (Annual goal: 189)
 - **18** individuals attended an in-person training on Moral Injury
- **Tier 2:**
 - UPMC clinical care coordination and discharge planning has agreed to implement the suicide prevention training curriculum across their care management & coordination teams. Coordination and planning has started.
 - Completed overall draft of referral process from healthcare and community providers to VA services. Will be shared with stakeholders for review and finalization.
 - Analysis on PHN's screening data through April 2023 is occurring.
 - Creation of training & resources on the Compact & Mission Acts for community stakeholder and healthcare providers has started.
- **Tier 3:**
 - Social Determinant of Health (SDOH) Intervention Plan in conjunction with Tier 3 workplan focus, has been started.
 - Mental Health Parity education and resource distribution is ongoing.
- **Data Collection/Evaluation:**
 - After receiving IRB approval, completed data request for VINCI system to begin pulling data (DART)
 - Data Use Agreement for access to Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention's database finalized. (DUA)

Next Steps

- **Engagement:**
 - Identify a county coroner to join the Advisory Group.
 - The next Journal Club meeting will be in July 2023.
- **Tier 1:**
 - Distribute 30 gun locks in June
 - Train 50 gatekeepers in June
 - Hold a military culture and/or suicide prevention training in a Region 2 county in June
 - Continue planning for and host the fourth community greening event of 2023
- **Tier 2:**
 - Finalize site data report for PHN Wayne for February through April data share
 - Finalize data use agreement to Bradford Family Medicine legal team to set up data sharing process, and collect Memorandum of Understanding in June
 - Finalize data use agreement to UPMC Heritage Primary Care in June
 - Recruit 1 additional healthcare site to participate by the end of June
- **Tier 3:**
 - Finalize 1 educational material about VA benefits eligibility for Military Sexual Trauma by the end of June.
 - Finalize social determinant of health intervention plan and evaluation methods by end of June.

- **Data Collection/Evaluation:**
 - Recruit 3 additional county coroners to participate by the end of June
 - Finalize data use agreement and data request application with VA VISN4 MIRECC

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

- Began implementation processes at 5 new primary care sites across Erie and Venango Counties (3 sites for Adagio Health; 1 site for Community Health Net; 1 site for UPMC).

Region 2 Summary

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

Region 3 Summary

- Began implementation processes at 3 new Adagio Health primary care sites across Butler, Beaver, and Lawrence Counties.
- Participated in Suicide Prevention Task Force meetings in Butler, Clarion, and Lawrence Counties in May 2023.
- Provided in-person training on Moral Injury with incarcerated Veterans and staff from SCI Mercer in Mercer County in May 2023.
- Outreached to 13-gun shops in Armstrong, Clarion, and Butler Counties with safe storage toolkits in May 2023.

Partner Meetings in April 2023

Entity Type & Meeting Purpose	Meeting (#)
Advisory Group Partners: Project Planning	5
Community Stakeholders: Continued Engagement	5
County Coalitions/Task Forces: Continued Engagement	4
Healthcare Partners: Recruitment/Engagement	4
Safe Storage Partners: Continued Engagement	0
State-Level Agencies: Continued Engagement	3
Total	21

Meeting Outcomes

- The May Advisory Group meeting included updates on implementation and evaluation activities and discussions of local stakeholder engagement and healthcare partner recruitment strategies.
- A total of 7 out of 23 members external to the PERU team (30%) attended the May Advisory Group meeting.

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 May 16, 2023, the program team conducted a training on Moral Injury for 18 incarcerated Veterans and staff members at SCI Mercer in Mercer County.

Community Greening Update

Veteran-centric events focused on community gardening will be hosted throughout the summer in Erie County. The first of this series was hosted in April, and the program team will continue to work with Penn State Extension Master Gardeners and other local partners to coordinate registration, facilitators, and other logistics for these events.

Safe Storage Update

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

Feb 2023	Mar 2023	Apr 2023	May 2023	YTD 2023	Total to Date
50	0	14	14	217	752

**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.

Feb 2023	Mar 2023	Apr 2023	May 2023	YTD 2023	Total to Date
55	147	48	0	310	1205

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 3 health systems in May and has several follow-up recruitment discussions scheduled in June.

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

Ongoing education and resources on [Pennsylvania's mental health parity laws](#) is occurring throughout all 15 counties.

Further, a comprehensive social determinant of health intervention plan has been started, aimed at further addressing Tier 3 needs identified in the CDC technical package recommendations. This plan is focused on addressing housing instability, food insecurities, and provider capacity shortages and leveraging telehealth options.

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 6 coroners (Erie, Mercer, Venango, Lawrence, Clarion, 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 (14 suicide deaths since January 2022, 1 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)
 - Clarion (3 suicide deaths since April 2023, 0 Veterans)
- The team also continued engaging with the remaining 9 county coroners to work to solidify at one additional partner in June.

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.
- IRB was approved in April. Once signed by all subcommittees, the study will begin, and data can be analyzed and reported.

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 7 attendees out of 7 responded to the evaluation (100%).
- This month, there was unanimous agreement with both statements.
- Two qualitative comments were collected and positively remarked on the progress of the project and the focus of the meeting.

Key Informant Interviews

- A survey to gather feedback from project partners was disseminated in April 2023. This survey will be conducted annually and will replace Key Informant Interviews for the remainder of the project.
- A total of 12 responses have been collected thus far. The survey remains open with additional prompting being done to increase response rate.

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.
- The next quarterly training evaluation report will be available July 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 summer 2023.