

# MONTHLY REPORT

## Northwest Pennsylvania Veteran Suicide Prevention Program

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

**April 2023**

### Program Overview

The Northwest Pennsylvania Veteran Suicide Prevention Program (NWPASPP) 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 NWPASPP 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"> <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>

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

## April 2023 Highlights

- **Engagement:**
  - **13** partner meetings were held
  - **13/23 (57%)** Advisory Group members attended the April 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:**
  - **14**-gun locks were distributed (Annual goal: 189)
  - **48** individuals attended gatekeeper training sessions (Annual goal: 600 gatekeepers trained)
  - **12** individuals attended an in-person training on Military Sexual Trauma
  - **22** individuals attended an in-person training on Military Cultural Competency
  - **12** individuals attended an in-person training on Moral Injury
- **Tier 2:**
  - Engaged 5 health systems in partner recruitment efforts.
  - Received PHN's screening data through April 2023. Will complete analysis.
  - Developed assertive coroner outreach plan.
- **Tier 3:**
  - **1** educational material about VA benefits eligibility for Military Sexual Trauma under internal review (Annual goal: 3 educational campaigns completed).
  - Workplan future focus developed: Housing stabilization, Food insecurities, and Provider shortages in underserved areas. (Ongoing: Mental Health Parity education)
  - Social Determinant of Health (SDOH) Intervention Plan in conjunction with Tier 3 workplan focus, to be completed in May 2023.
- **Data Collection/Evaluation:**
  - Received a signed MOU from the Clarion County Coroner's Office to participate in suicide mortality data sharing for the program. A total of 6 county coroners are currently submitting data to PERU.
  - Received IRB approval from VA to receive data for impact model.
  - Data Use Agreement for access to Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention's database drafted.

## Next Steps

- **Engagement:**
  - Identify a county coroner to join the Advisory Group in May
  - There was no Journal Club in April. The next Journal Club meeting will be in July 2023.
- **Tier 1:**
  - Distribute 30 gun locks in May
  - Train 50 gatekeepers in May
  - Hold a military culture and/or suicide prevention training in a Region 2 county in May
  - Continue planning for and host the fourth community greening event of 2023
- **Tier 2:**
  - Finalize data use agreement to Bradford Family Medicine legal team to set up data sharing process, and collect Memorandum of Understanding in May
  - Submit data use agreement to UPMC Heritage Primary Care in May
  - Recruit 1 additional healthcare site to participate by the end of May 2023
- **Tier 3:**
  - Finalize 1 educational material about VA benefits eligibility for Military Sexual Trauma by the end of May
  - Finalize SDOH Intervention plan for Tier 3 future work

- **Data Collection/Evaluation:**
  - Recruit 1 additional county coroner to participate by the end of May
  - Submit Data Use Agreement for access to Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention's database by the end of May
  - Training evaluation report for 2023 Q1 finalized
  - Stakeholder satisfaction survey report drafted and shared with internal team by end of June

## 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 aim 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 community event in Erie County with the Penn State Extension Master Gardeners to teach local Veterans and community members how to start and plan a garden in April 2023.
- Provided in-person training on Military Culture and Moral Injury with staff from UPMC Safe Harbor in Erie County in April 2023.

### Region 2 Summary

- Participated in the Suicide Prevention Task Force meeting for Jefferson County in April 2023.
- Provided an in-person QPR (Question. Persuade. Refer.) training session in Clearfield County in April 2023 at SCI Houtzdale Veteran Service Unit.

### Region 3 Summary

- Participated in Suicide Prevention Task Force meetings in Butler, Clarion, and Lawrence Counties in April 2023.
- Provided in-person training on Military Sexual Trauma with students and staff from Slippery Rock University in Butler County in April 2023.
- Provided an in-person QPR (Question. Persuade. Refer.) training session in Lawrence County in April 2023 at BC3 New Castle.
- Hosted a community event in Lawrence County with Adagio Health to teach local women Veterans about the connection between nutrition and mental wellness in April 2023.

## Partner Meetings in April 2023

Entity Type & Meeting Purpose	Meeting (#)
Advisory Group Partners: Project Planning	2
Community Stakeholders: Continued Engagement	2
County Coalitions/Task Forces: Continued Engagement	3
Healthcare Partners: Recruitment/Engagement	5
Safe Storage Partners: Continued Engagement	0
State-Level Agencies: Continued Engagement	1
Total	13

## Meeting Outcomes

- The April 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 23 members external to the PERU team (57%) attended the April 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 April 18, 2023, the program team conducted a training on Military Sexual Trauma for 12 students and staff members at Slippery Rock University in Butler 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.

Jan 2023	Feb 2023	Mar 2023	Apr 2023	YTD 2023	Total to Date
139	50	0	14	203	738

## 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	Apr 2023	YTD 2023	Total to Date
60	55	147	48	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 5 health systems in April and has several follow-up recruitment discussions scheduled in May.
- In February, the program team worked with PHN Wayne Primary Care (Erie County) representatives to improve the EHR data export and reporting process.
  - PHN provided 350 screenings in January and identified 1 Veteran.
  - This covers 83% 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 39 patients endorsed a positive response on PHQ9 item 9 (presence and duration of suicidal ideation).
  - This report will be reviewed with PHN in March, to identify next steps for quality improvement.
  - Additionally, a data report for February 2023 will be developed for PHN in March.
- PERU recruited UPMC Heritage Primary Care and Bradford Family Medicine as project sites.
  - In March, PERU submitted 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 March, PERU held a kick-off meeting and develop and implementation timeline for UPMC Heritage Primary Care.

## 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. To learn more, visit the Program's website for information about [Pennsylvania's mental health parity laws](#).

Further, a work plan for the remainder of 2023, aimed at addressing housing stabilization, food insecurities, and provider shortages in underserved areas as well as an inter-connected social determinant of health (SDOH) intervention plan will be completed by end of May 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 and to study the impact of the project interventions on community suicide rates.

- 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 May.

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. PERU will use this information to understand better healthcare utilization preceding and following a positive suicide risk screen and to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions being implemented in the region.

## 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.
- One qualitative comment was collected and positively remarked on the progress of the project and the 'passion of the team.'

### Key Informant Interviews

- A survey to gather feedback from all project partners was developed and 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 now conducted quarterly.
- The next training evaluation report will be available in June 2023. Preliminary results show:
  - 92% agreed with all statements concerning training satisfaction
  - 80% trainees felt they now have a **HIGH LEVEL** of understanding of suicide prevention

### 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.
- The survey has been made available to all coalitions within the catchment area working on reducing suicide. Survey administrations will be coordinated by the NWPVSP implementation team and

results of the surveys shared with community partners as available to assist with planning and program evaluation needs.

- A total of 85 surveys have been collected to date.
- A cumulative report as well as two regional reports of current results are available.