

MONTHLY REPORT

Northwest Pennsylvania Veteran Suicide Prevention Program

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

June 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 June 30, 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.

June 2023 Highlights

- **Engagement:**
 - **40** partner meetings were held
 - **6/23 (26%)** Advisory Group members attended the June meeting
 - **6/6 (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)
 - Project team worked with UPMC Safe Harbor to outline **2023 training schedule**, which is now posted on the program website
- **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 have started.
 - Completed draft of referral process from healthcare and community providers to VA services was shared with Advisory Group.
 - Creation of training & resources on the Compact & Mission Acts for community stakeholder and healthcare providers is progressing.
 - Upon receiving feedback from healthcare stakeholders this month - Will also start development on a training resource on eligibility tips and tools for Veteran's to access VA services and supports.
 - Finalized DUAs for UPMC Heritage and Community Health Net.
 - Received MOU from Community Health Net.
 - Received verbal agreement from 4 additional county coroners for suicide death data reporting to the project – Elk, Forest, Warren, Crawford (November 2023, coroner elect).
- **Tier 3:**
 - Social Determinant of Health (SDOH) Intervention Plan in conjunction with Tier 3 workplan focus with evaluation approaches, is being developed.
 - Ongoing focus is: Housing instabilities, Food insecurities, and Provider capacity shortages & leveraging telehealth supports.
 - Mental Health Parity education and resource distribution is ongoing.
- **Data Collection/Evaluation:**
 - Pulling mortality data from VINCI system has begun.
 - Data Use Agreement (DUA) for access to Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention's database was recommended. Request for data sent to owner of the data.

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 July
 - Train 50 gatekeepers in July
 - Hold a military culture and/or suicide prevention training in a Region 2 county in July
 - 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 July
- Finalize DUA for Adagio Health in July
- Recruit 1 additional healthcare site to participate by the end of July
- **Tier 3:**
 - Finalize 1 educational material about VA benefits eligibility for Military Sexual Trauma by the end of July.
 - Finalize social determinant of health intervention plan and evaluation methods by end of July.
- **Data Collection/Evaluation:**
 - Finalize MOUs for 3 additional county coroners by the end of July
 - Awaiting approval from OMHSP for access to suicide mortality data

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.

Partner Meetings in June 2023

Entity Type & Meeting Purpose	Meeting (#)
Advisory Group Partners: Project Planning	9
Community Stakeholders: Continued Engagement	17

County Coalitions/Task Forces: Continued Engagement	5
Healthcare Partners: Recruitment/Engagement	4
Safe Storage Partners: Continued Engagement	1
State-Level Agencies: Continued Engagement	4
Total	40

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 6 out of 23 members external to the PERU team (26%) attended the June 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 June 24, 2023, the program team held a community greening event in Erie County, in collaboration with the Penn State Extension Master Gardeners and Keep Erie Beautiful.

Community Greening Update

The program team built a partnership with local volunteers and fishing enthusiasts in Erie County to coordinate a free Lake Erie fishing trip for Women Veterans. This event is scheduled to take place on Saturday, July 22nd, with a rain date of Sunday, July 23rd.

Safe Storage Update

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

Mar 2023	Apr 2023	May 2023	June 2023	YTD 2023	Total to Date
0	25	14	0	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.

Mar 2023	Apr 2023	May 2023	June 2023	YTD 2023	Total to Date
147	48	0	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 4 health systems in June and has additional outreach activities scheduled in July.

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 10 coroners (Erie, Mercer, Venango, Lawrence, Clarion, Forest, Elk, Crawford (November 2023), Warren (verbal) 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 continues engaging with the remaining 6 county coroners to work to solidify at least one additional partner in July.

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 pull deidentified electronic health record information for Veterans. PERU will use this information to evaluate the program's impact and calculate suicide mortality and morbidity rates for annual reporting purposes.

- Data pulling from the VINCI system has been approved and preliminary mortality data has been counted
- The DUA for access to the OMHSP mortality and morbidity data was recommended for approval and we await the final answer from the owner of the data.

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 4 attendees out of 6 responded to the evaluation (67%).
- This month, there was unanimous agreement with both statements.

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.
- Key informant interviews have been discontinued in favor of an annual survey. A report on this year's survey results is being prepared and will be available in August.

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.