

MONTHLY REPORT

Northwest Pennsylvania Veteran Suicide Prevention Program

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

October 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 October 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.

October 2023 Highlights

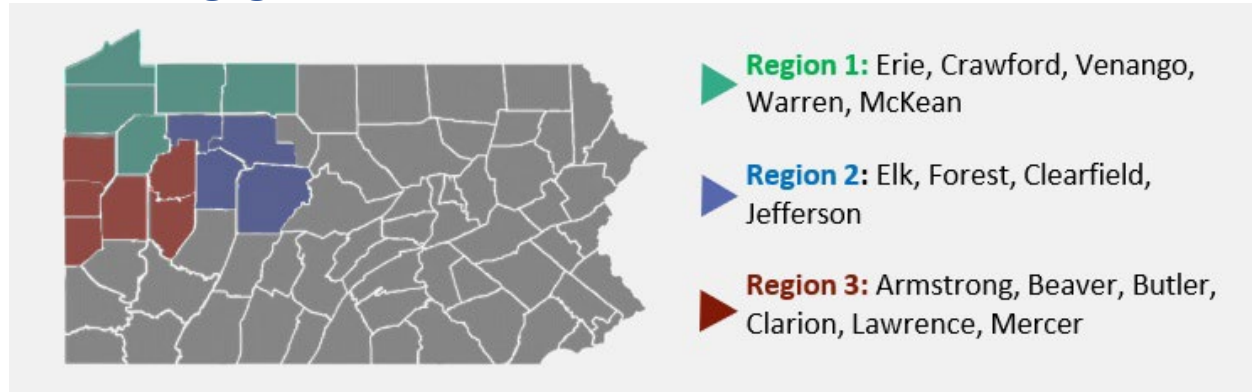
- **Engagement:**
 - **164** partner contacts occurred.
 - **20/23 (87%)** advisory group members attended the October meeting.
 - **20 (87%)** advisory group meeting evaluations were distributed this month
- **Tier 1:**
 - **65-gun** locks were distributed (Annual goal: 360).
 - The project team worked with UPMC Safe Harbor to outline the **2024 training schedule**, which is now posted on the program website.
- **Tier 2:**
 - UPMC's clinical care coordination and discharge planning team has agreed to implement the suicide prevention training curriculum across their teams. Coordination and planning have started.
 - PHN screening data analysis through September 2023 is occurring, with reports being completed.
 - Adagio data through September 2023 has been received, and reports are being completed.
- **Tier 3:**
 - Social determinant of health (SDOH) intervention plan has been developed.
 - Mental health parity education and resource distribution are ongoing.
 - The housing and food resource directory has been completed.
 - Training will occur with the Centers of Excellence (COE) in December. This group will allow the team to train 33 healthcare professionals in the 15-county area.
- **Data Collection/Evaluation:**
 - Preliminary mortality and morbidity data from the VA health records was shared at the October advisory group meeting.
 - Data use agreement (DUA) for access to the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention's database was approved.
 - The Department of Health will be working with our team to provide data for syndromic surveillance.

Next Steps

- **Engagement:**
 - Engagement with community partners for referral training beginning in October.
- **Tier 1:**
 - Distribute 30-gun locks in November.
 - Train 50 gatekeepers in November.
 - Hold a military culture and/or suicide prevention training in a Region 2 county in November.
 - Continue planning for the community greening events of 2024.
- **Tier 2:**
 - Finalize the site data report for PHN Wayne for August through October data sharing.
 - Obtain VA data for the healthcare sites currently recruited.
 - Refine the referral process toolkit and training materials.
 - Start the referral process toolkit dissemination in November.
- **Tier 3:**
 - The team completed housing and food resources research.
 - The team will share resources with community partners and VetConnect.
- **Data Collection/Evaluation:**
 - Veterans' data has been obtained and is being reviewed.

- DOH data set is currently being obtained.

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

- Performed a site visit for UPMC Heritage in Erie County.

Region 2 Summary

- Participated in the suicide prevention task force meeting for Jefferson County.

Region 3 Summary

- Participated in suicide prevention task force meetings in Butler, Clarion, and Lawrence Counties.

Partner Meetings in September 2023

Entity Type & Meeting Purpose	Meeting (#)
Advisory Group Partners: Project Planning	20
Community Stakeholders: Continued Engagement	41
County Coalitions/Task Forces: Continued Engagement	5
Healthcare Partners: Recruitment/Engagement	7
Safe Storage Partners: Continued Engagement	3
State-Level Agencies: Continued Engagement	15
Total	164

Meeting Outcomes

- The October advisory group meeting included updates on implementation and evaluation activities and discussions of social determinants of health considerations for Tier 3.
- A total of 20 out of 23 members external to the PERU team (87%) attended the October 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.

- Promoting connectedness through community greening and engagement activities.

Community Greening Update

The program team continues to work with Bodhi Gardens in Erie County to plan a spring event for 2024.

Safe Storage Update

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

June 2023	Aug 2023	Sept 2023	Oct 2023	YTD 2023	Total to Date
0	25	90	65	397	932

Gatekeeper Training Update

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

June 2023	Aug 2023	Sept 2023	Oct 2023	YTD 2023	Total to Date
0	35	45	80	515	1410

Tier 2: Healthcare Activities

Tier 2 activities target healthcare-based interventions:

- Strengthening access and delivery of suicide care through implementing system change initiatives in healthcare systems.
- 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 with 12 healthcare providers and is working on obtaining their data.
- The implementation team performed a site visit to UPMC Heritage in Erie County.
- The implementation team developed a detailed timeline to create a referral process toolkit and disseminate it to 59 people in October.
- The draft of the referral process from healthcare and community providers to VA services is finalized.

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](#) occur throughout all 15 counties.

A comprehensive social determinant of health intervention plan has been developed to address further Tier 3 needs identified in the CDC technical package recommendations. This plan addresses housing instability, food insecurities, and provider capacity shortages (including telehealth services). PERU researched and developed a housing and food resource directory in October 2023. The team is researching provider shortages and will complete this by February 2024. The team will also be working with local coalitions to provide feedback on ways that they can reduce the shortages in their respective counties. These meetings will start being held in the spring of 2024.

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 partnerships with 13 coroners (Erie, Mercer, Venango, Lawrence, Clarion, Forest, Elk, Crawford, Warren, Clearfield, Jefferson, Beaver, 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 October 2021, 10 Veterans)
 - Mercer (14 suicide deaths since January 2022, 1 Veteran)
 - Venango (13 suicide deaths since January 2022, 2 Veterans)
 - Butler (36 suicide deaths since January 2022, 4 Veterans)
 - Lawrence (0 suicide deaths since January 2023, 0 Veterans)
 - Clarion (24 suicide deaths since January 2020, 1 Veterans)
 - Crawford (21 suicide deaths since January 2022, Veterans unknown)
 - Elk (22 suicide deaths since January 2020, 2 Veterans)
- The team continued engaging with the remaining county coroners and aimed to recruit Armstrong County by January 2024.

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.

- Mortality and morbidity data from the Suicidal Behavior and Overdose Report (SBOR) for 2019-2023:
 - 2019 – 79 attempts, 8 suicides
 - 2020 – 40 attempts, 13 suicides
 - 2021 – 60 attempts, 13 suicides
 - 2022 – 114 attempts, 7 suicides
 - 2023 (Sept) - 25 attempts, 8 suicides
- The DUA for access to the OMHSP mortality data was approved, and the request for data was submitted.
- One additional data source has been identified, and inquiries are being made about accessing the Veterans' benefits data set to triangulate the mortality data for Veterans accessing VA medical services and those not accessing medical services through the VA health system.

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."

- The evaluation meeting was not distributed this month due to a technical issue. The plan is to continue monthly reporting.

Key Informant Interviews

- Key informant interviews (KII) have been discontinued in favor of an annual survey.
- A survey to gather feedback from project partners was disseminated in April 2023. This survey will be conducted annually and replace KIIs for the remainder of the project.
- 12 responses were collected during 2023.
- A report on this year's survey results was made available to the implementation team in September, and ideas for increasing engagement were discussed.

Training Evaluations

- Training evaluations are administered to trainees 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.
- Due to the small number of responses to last quarter's training evaluations, the quarter 3 and quarter 4 training evaluation report will be combined to maintain confidentiality. Moving forward, it is hoped that the report will contain evaluation information for four training topics: military culture, QPR, ASIST, and CALM.

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.
- 126 surveys have been collected to date.
- Survey results were shared at the September advisory group meeting.
- The advisory group discussed and recommended ways to distribute the survey widely across the region. A distribution plan is underway and has been disseminated to many of our partners.