

MONTHLY REPORT

Northwest Pennsylvania Veteran Suicide Prevention Program

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

November 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.

November 2023 Highlights

- **Engagement:**
 - **58** partner contacts occurred.
 - **19/37 (51%)** Advisory Group members attended the November meeting.
 - **19/37 (51%)** Advisory Group meeting evaluations were distributed this month.
- **Tier 1:**
 - **90** gunlocks were distributed (Annual goal: 360).
 - The project team worked with UPMC Safe Harbor to outline the **2024 Gatekeeper training schedule**, which is now posted on the program website.
- **Tier 2:**
 - UPMC's clinical care coordination and discharge planning team have agreed to implement the suicide prevention training curriculum across their teams. Coordination and planning have started.
 - The Suicide Risk Assessment and Referral Toolkit for healthcare and community providers to VA services is now finalized. To date, the toolkit has been disseminated to 200 people, and plans for 221 more before the end of March 2024.
 - Created an implementation plan to share referral resources with all community organizations throughout this project.
 - Adagio Health data exports from August through September 2023 have been received, with reports being completed.
 - Creation of training and resources on the Compact and Mission Acts for community partners and healthcare providers has started.
- **Tier 3:**
 - Social Determinant of Health (SDOH) planning is being developed and completion is expected during the first quarter of 2024.
 - Mental Health Parity education and resource distribution is ongoing.
- **Data Collection/Evaluation:**
 - Preliminary mortality and morbidity data from the VA health records were shared at the October Advisory Group meeting.
 - The 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:**
 - Engage with community partners for referral training beginning in October and ongoing through the end of the project timeline.
- **Tier 1:**
 - Distribute 50-gun locks in December.
 - Train 50 gatekeepers in December.
 - Continue planning for the community greening events of 2024.
- **Tier 2:**
 - Obtained VA data for the healthcare sites currently recruited.
 - Refined the referral process toolkit and training materials.
 - Dissemination of the Suicide Risk Assessment and Referral toolkit has continued in November 2023.
- **Tier 3:**
 - Completed housing and food resources research.
 - Shared resources with community partners and VetConnect.
- **Data Collection/Evaluation:**
 - Obtained Veterans' data is being reviewed.

- Working on obtaining DOH data set.

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	6
Community Stakeholders: Continued Engagement	24
County Coalitions/Task Forces: Continued Engagement	5
Healthcare Partners: Recruitment/Engagement	5
Safe Storage Partners: Continued Engagement	3
State-Level Agencies: Continued Engagement	15
Total	58

Meeting Outcomes

- The November Advisory Group meeting included updates on implementation and evaluation activities and discussions of social determinants of health considerations for Tier 3.
- 19 out of 37 members external to the PERU team (51%) attended the November 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.

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.

Aug 2023	Sept 2023	Oct 2023	Nov 2023	YTD 2023	Total to Date
25	90	65	90	472	1007

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.

Aug 2023	Sept 2023	Oct 2023	Nov 2023	YTD 2023	Total to Date
35	45	80	63	578	1473

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 with 9 healthcare providers and is working on obtaining their data.
- The implementation team developed a detailed timeline to create a referral process toolkit, and dissemination will continue through the end of the project.

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, provider capacity shortages, and leveraging telehealth options. PERU conducted research and developed housing and food resources in November 2023. We are currently working on researching provider shortages and solutions.

Data Collection Updates

Identifying an accurate number of Veteran suicides remains a challenge because of inconsistency in reporting Veteran status and past military service, along with definitions of the term Veteran being interpreted differently among groups working with Veterans as well as those with past military service. PERU has collected data from multiple sources to gather the most accurate data available.

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 (140 suicide deaths since October 2021, 13 Veterans, 85 unknown military status)
 - Mercer (25 suicide deaths since January 2022, 1 Veteran, 8 unknown military status)
 - Venango (17 suicide deaths since January 2022, 4 Veterans)
 - Butler (46 suicide deaths since January 2022, 5 Veterans)
 - Lawrence (25 suicide deaths since January 2023, 0 Veterans, 25 unknown military status)
 - Clarion (28 suicide deaths since January 2020, 1 Veterans, 19 unknown military status)
 - Crawford (21 suicide deaths since January 2022, Veterans unknown, 21 unknown military status)
 - Elk (24 suicide deaths since January 2020, 2 Veterans, 21 unknown military status)
- The team also continued engaging with the remaining county coroners to work to solidify that additional partner in December.

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 intersecting with the Veterans' healthcare system. 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
- We are now receiving data from the OMHSP.
- 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.”

Key Informant Interviews

- Key informant interviews have been discontinued in favor of an annual survey.
- The survey gathers feedback from project partners and will be administered in February 2024.

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 4 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.
- A total of 126 surveys have been collected to date.
- A new report will be generated in February in anticipation of the March submission of the APR to the CDC.
- Results from the suicide awareness survey were shared at the Advisory Group meeting in March 2024.
- 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.