

# MONTHLY REPORT

## Northwest Pennsylvania Veteran Suicide Prevention Program

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

**December 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 August 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
<b>COMMUNITY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offering suicide awareness and interventional trainings</li> <li>Promoting connection within communities</li> </ul>
<b>HEALTHCARE</b>	<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>
<b>UPSTREAM</b>	<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.

### 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.

### Safe Storage Update

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

Sept 2023	Oct. 2023	Nov. 2023	Dec. 2023	YTD 2023	Total to Goal
90	65	90	30	502	600

### 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 monthly and total amounts of gatekeepers trained.

Sept 2023	Oct. 2023	Nov. 2023	Dec. 2023	YTD 2023	Total to Date
45	80	63	19	579	1492

### Community Greening Update

The program team is working with Bodhi Gardens in Erie County to plan a Spring event for 2024.

#### Highlights

- The next Journal Club meeting will be in September 2023 with a special presentation from the Executive Director of Fluence. He will be presenting on MDMA-assisted psychotherapy for PTSD.
- New engagement with Ceasefire PA to help with safe storage efforts.
- Participated in an event in Cranberry, PA and handed out several gun locks and information regarding our program.

#### Next Steps

- Distribute 30-gun locks in February.
- Train 50 gatekeepers in February.
- Hold a military culture and/or suicide prevention training in February.
- Continue planning for and hosting the fifth community greening event of 2023.

## 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 is currently working with health care partners on data collection and reporting.
- The implementation team has been working on a toolkit to provide our healthcare partners for referral of veterans to various services. This dissemination and training will continue through the remainder of the project.

Site Name	DUA	MOU	Survey	Screen Utilized	Data
CHN - Erie	DUA00004341 - 6/23/23	Y - 7/10/23	Not complete	PHQ 2; PHQ 9; Columbia (BH only)	N
UPMC Heritage	DUA00004281 - 7/5/23	Y - 4/4/23	Y - 4/4/23	PHQ 2; PHQ 9	Y

Adagio Health (Multiple Sites)	DUA00004304 - 8/9/23	-	-	-	-
Butler	-	-	Y - 8/28/23	PHQ 2; PHQ 9	Y
Edinboro	-	-	Y - 8/28/23	PHQ 2; PHQ 9	Y
Erie	-	-	Y - 8/28/23	PHQ 2; PHQ 9	Y
Hopewell	-	-	Y - 8/28/23	PHQ 2; PHQ 9	Y
New Castle	-	-	Y - 8/28/23	PHQ 2; PHQ 9	Y
Seneca	-	-	Y - 8/28/23	PHQ 2; PHQ 9	Y
BRMC - Bradford Family Practice	DUA00004187	N	Y - 4/25/22	C-SSRS	N
PHN Wayne	DUA00003858 - 10/11/22	N	Y - 4/21/22	PHQ 2; PHQ 9	Y

### Highlights

- 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.
- The completed draft of referral process from healthcare and community providers to VA services was shared with partners for review and is now being finalized.
- Creation of training & resources on the Compact & Mission Acts for community partners and healthcare providers has started.
- Created implementation plan for referral resources to be shared with all community organizations throughout the course of this project.

### Next Steps

- Adagio Health data exports from August through September 2023 have been received, with reports have been discussed.
- Develop the referral process toolkit and training materials. This will be an ongoing update process through the term of the grant.
- Complete initial training for health care sites.

## 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 developed, aimed at further addressing Tier 3 needs identified in the CDC technical package recommendations. This plan is focused on addressing housing instability, food insecurities, provider capacity shortages and leveraging telehealth options. PERU will conduct research and develop housing resources by the end of September 2023.

### Highlights

- Social Determinant of Health (SDOH) Intervention Plan has been developed.
- Mental Health Parity education and resource distribution is ongoing.

## Next Steps

- Educational material about VA benefits eligibility for Military Sexual Trauma has been finalized and included in the referral toolkit.
- Team working to provider shortage and telehealth solutions for 15-county region.
- Team working with Cohen Clinic to assist with telehealth services for veterans and their families. MOU currently being developed.

## 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, Warren, and Butler Counties), who have committed to submit quarterly data related to the suicide deaths in their respective counties.
- The team also continued engaging with the remaining 2 county coroners (Armstrong/Beaver) to work to solidify one additional partner in December. Clearfield, Jefferson, Warren counties have agreed to work with us and start to send us information as of November.
- Suicide death data has been collected from these counties:

County	# of Suicide Deaths (year)	# of Veterans
Erie	140 (Sept 2021)	13 confirmed (58 Unknown)
Mercer	25(Jan 2022)	1 (11 unknown)
Venango	17 (Jan 2022)	4
Butler	46 (Jan 2022)	5
Lawrence	25 (Jan 2023)	0 (unknown/not reported)
Clarion	28 (Jan 2020)	1 (unknown 2020-2022)
Crawford	21 (Jan 2022)	Unknown/not reported
Elk	22 (Jan2020)	2 (unknown/not reported)

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.

- Mortality data from the Suicidal Behavior and Overdose Report (SBOR) has been pulled for 2019-2023. Data is being corroborated with data from the coroners.
- OMHSP mortality data is being received.
- One additional data source has been identified and inquiries are being made about gaining access to the Veterans' benefit data set to triangulate the mortality data for Veterans accessing VA medical services and those who are not accessing medical services through the VA health system.

## Program Evaluation

### Partner Meetings in December 2023

Entity Type & Meeting Purpose	Meeting (#)
Advisory Group Partners: Project Planning	1

Community Partners: Continued Engagement	38
County Coalitions/Task Forces: Continued Engagement	1
Healthcare Partners: Recruitment/Engagement	3
Safe Storage Partners: Continued Engagement	10
State-Level Agencies: Continued Engagement	3
Total	56

### Meeting Outcomes

- The December Advisory Group meeting included updates on implementation and evaluation activities and discussions of social determinants of health considerations for Tier 3.
- A total of 13 out of 25 members external to the PERU team (52%) attended the December Advisory Group meeting.
- 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 14 responded to the evaluation (93%).

### Key Informant Interviews

- Key informant interviews have been discontinued in favor of an annual survey in 2022 which solicits the same information.
- The survey will be administered in February 2024.

### Training Evaluations

- Training evaluations are administered to partners 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 November 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 141 surveys have been collected to date.
- The survey will be distributed to county suicide prevention task force and coalitions partners beginning in summer 2023.