

# MONTHLY REPORT



## Northwest Pennsylvania Veteran Suicide Prevention Program

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

**February 2024**

### Program Overview

The Northwest Pennsylvania Veteran Suicide Prevention Program (NWPVSP) 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 NWPVSP as of February 29, 2024.

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>• Creating protective environments by reducing access to lethal means among Veterans.</li> <li>• Identifying and supporting people at risk through implementing gatekeeper training for community members and Veterans.</li> <li>• Promoting connectedness through community greening and engagement activities.</li> </ul>
<b>HEALTHCARE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening access and delivery of suicide care through implementing system change initiatives in healthcare systems.</li> <li>• Identifying and supporting people at risk through implementing gatekeeper training for providers and treatment options to prevent reattempts.</li> </ul>
<b>UPSTREAM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise awareness and educate healthcare providers and community members about upstream suicide prevention strategies and mental health parity.</li> <li>• Reduce SDOH disparities related to housing instability, food insecurity, and provider shortages.</li> </ul>

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

## Tier 1: Community Activities

### Safe Storage Update

- Two members of our team attended the PA Farm Show in Harrisburg, the nation's largest farm show, and participated in the Salute to Veterans event with project partners DMVA. Additionally, we were able to hand out 87 gun locks and had numerous conversations about suicide prevention with Farm Show attendees.
- Gunshop engagement: The implementation team has scheduled a series of training courses with Erie's Keystone Gun Club, Erie's oldest and largest gun club and range. The club has committed to hosting PERU trainings for members at their facilities and has inquired about safe storage options. This set of SP training is being conducted with the Erie County Suicide Prevention Advisory Board. It will include QPR, QPR T-4-T, and select Military Culture trainings from PERU's Suicide Prevention Training Academy.

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

Nov 2023	Dec. 2023	Jan 2024	Feb. 2024	YTD 2024	Goal
90	30	112	55	167	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).

- As of January, the implementation team has provided one gun shop QPR training for 15 staff attendees. This gun shop has expressed a keen interest in working closely with Hold My Guns on safe storage and has committed to hosting further training opportunities.
- We are currently planning more training at SCI Houtzdale; the staff has also asked us to develop additional training and are preparing a list of opportunities they would like us to design. Previously, Houtzdale asked us to provide a targeted Veterans SUD training, which was developed with T&C and successfully presented to VSU trainees and staff.
- Our team facilitated an ASIST training in January for suicide prevention staff from the nonprofit Veterans Leadership Program. We have a second ASIST training scheduled for March 5-6 in Warren, PA, hosted by Beacon Light and the Be Well Collaborative.
- We currently offer two virtual QPR training courses and two virtual CALM training courses monthly. In February, we offered an additional in-person QPR training to Lakeshore Community Services in Erie.

The following table provides the monthly and total amounts of gatekeepers trained.

Nov 2023	Dec. 2023	Jan 2024	Feb. 2024	YTD 2024	Total to Date
63	42	60	96	156	1671

### Community Greening Update

- The PERU team is working with Bodhi Gardens to provide an Erie Veterans lunch in coordination with the Robert Irvine Foundation. This event's date is March 9. As of March 5th, the event is sold out. Our partners are expecting media coverage from 3 local venues and the Robert Irvine Foundation is sending a camera crew to record the event for potential future RIF media events and to publicize for the Second Annual Veteran's Chow Hall in 2025.
- PERU is working with Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy to collaborate on greening opportunities around Forest Bathing and other green space activities. PPC has provided grant opportunities as they would like to work with us. We are coordinating with them and Pitt's Office of Veterans Services to bring Pitt Veterans to the event. We have hosted meetings with Pitt Office of Veterans

Services and Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy and are in the planning stages for a spring Veterans walk in the park Forest Bathing event. More info to come as this event is developed.

### **Next Steps**

- Distribute 50-gun locks in March.
- Train 50 gatekeepers in March.
- Continue planning for and hosting the community greening events in 2024.

## **Tier 2: Healthcare Activities**

### **Healthcare Recruitment and Implementation**

- The implementation team is working with healthcare partners on data collection and reporting.
- The implementation team has been working on a toolkit to provide our healthcare partners for the referral of veterans to various services. Dissemination and training will continue through the remainder of the project.
- UPMC clinical care coordination and discharge planning have agreed to implement the suicide prevention training curriculum across its care management and coordination teams. Coordination and planning have started.
- The completed draft of the referral process from healthcare and community providers to VA services was shared with partners for review and is now being finalized.
- Creation of training and resources on the Compact and Mission Acts for community partners and healthcare providers has started.
- Creating an implementation plan for referral resources to be shared with all community organizations throughout this project has started.
- Adagio Health sites received approval to incorporate MH/SP materials into their waiting rooms (e.g., posters, 988 cards, SP booklets).
- Healthcare sites are working to embed the Safety Planning worksheet into EMR to be completed with patients who score greater than 'moderate risk' on PHQ9.
- Currently scheduling QPR, CALM, MI, and SBIRT training with healthcare sites.
- Adagio Health approved the Workflow Protocol for staff to implement PHQ screeners, brief intervention, safety plan, and internal/external referrals for BHC.
- Adagio Health staff are completing QPR and CALM training (as required) virtually between now and May 2024.
- The implementation team is working with Adagio Health to develop a training requirement protocol for baseline training with PERU, future training schedules, and recertification frequencies.

### **Community Veteran Support and Suicide Prevention Toolkit: The Resilient Veteran**

- The draft of the new community version of the toolkit is being reviewed prior to its distribution. Extensive changes were made to the toolkit that improved its intelligibility to novice audiences to address feedback received. The toolkit now opens to a two-page spread that clearly guides toward a list of activities tailored to the needs of community businesses, municipal and community organizations, and veterans and veteran family members. The items presented to each group include NWPVSP trainings and self-guided learning activities that develop community awareness of, and deepen knowledge of how they can help prevent, Veteran death by suicide in their communities. The Resource Guide containing support service contacts in the 15-county catchment area was simplified and included in the index for quick reference by county. Overall, the length of the toolkit has been reduced from 60 pages down to 34 pages. The Resource Directory will also be offered as a standalone document of only 14 pages.

Nov 2023	Dec. 2023	Jan 2024	Feb. 2024	YTD 2024	Total
363	143	390	57	447	1170

### Next Steps

- The new community toolkit is complete and under review. Once review of the community toolkit is complete, the current healthcare version will be adjusted to better align with the community version.

## Tier 3: Upstream Activities

### Mental Health Parity Updates

Ongoing education and resources on [Pennsylvania's mental health parity laws](#) occur throughout all 15 counties.

### Social Determinants of Health Updates

A comprehensive social determinant of health intervention plan has been developed to further address 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 has conducted research and developed a listing of housing and food resources.

- Social Determinant of Health (SDOH) Intervention Plan has been developed.
- Mental Health Parity education and resource distribution is ongoing.
- Finalized partnership with The Cohen Clinic to provide telehealth options for provider shortages.
- Continued work with digital equity partners.

### Next Steps

- Educational material about VA benefits eligibility for Military Sexual Trauma has been finalized and included in the referral toolkit.
- The team is working on researching telehealth solutions for the 15-county region.
- Continued work to identify ways to reduce provider shortages for the 15-county region

## Communication Updates

### Advisory Group Update

- The February Advisory Group meeting included updates on implementation and evaluation activities and discussions of social determinants of health considerations for Tier 3.
- A total of 8 out of 23 members external to the PERU team (35%) attended the February 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%).

Entity Type & Meeting Purpose	Meeting (#)
Advisory Group Partners: Project Planning	4
Community Partners: Continued Engagement	58
County Coalitions/Task Forces: Continued Engagement	19
Healthcare Partners: Recruitment/Engagement	63

Safe Storage Partners: Continued Engagement	5
State-Level Agencies: Continued Engagement	31
Total	180

### Journal Club Update

- January’s Journal Club presentation was led by Christy Nyakana and focused on the intersection of suicide and ADHD.
- March’s Journal Club features a special presentation from Pete Albert from VISN-4 regarding suicide safety planning.
- In February, four blog articles were created and shared on the group’s Facebook and LinkedIn pages:
  - [State-Level Veteran Suicide Data](#)
  - [PA Vet Connect](#)
  - [Veterans Chow Hall in Erie, PA](#)
  - [Women Veteran Peer Support Services](#)
- The February newsletter was emailed to 1,500 individuals with an open rate of 30%. The three most popular items in the newsletter were:
  - [Meet the Program Implementation Team](#)
  - [State-Level Veteran Suicide Data](#)
  - [Suicide and ADHD](#)
- The website had 624 visitors, with a total of 1,622 pages viewed. The top five pages were:
  - <https://www.theresilientveteran.org/> (program homepage)
  - [Veterans Chow Hall in Erie, PA](#)
  - [Meet the Program Implementation Team](#)
  - [Additional Training Opportunities Now Available](#) (listing of available classes)
  - [Women Veterans Retreat](#)

### Data Collection Updates

#### Coroner Data

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 study the impact of the project interventions on community suicide rates.

- The implementation team has solidified partnerships 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. We are still working with Clearfield and Jefferson coroners to improve their data commitment. Beaver, Armstrong, and McKean counties continue to refuse to provide data to the program.
- The team continued engaging with the remaining four county coroners (Armstrong/Beaver/McKean/Forest). Clearfield, Jefferson, and Warren Counties agreed to work with us and will send information in February.
- Suicide death data has been collected from these counties:

County	# of Suicide Deaths (date data collection started)	# of Veterans (unknown/not reported)
Erie	140 (Sept 2021)	13 (85)
Mercer	25 (Jan 2022)	1 (19)
Venango	17 (Jan 2022)	4

Butler	46 (Jan 2022)	5
Lawrence	25 (Jan 2023)	(25)
Clarion	28 (Jan 2020)	1 (19)
Crawford	21 (Jan 2022)	(21)
Elk	24 (Jan 2020)	2 (21)

### VA Data

PERU and the Veterans Affairs VISN4 Mental Illness Research Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC) are working 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.

### Syndromic Surveillance Data

Syndromic surveillance data and activities are moving forward. The Quarterly Report was submitted to the CDC in January 2024, and reports will continue quarterly. Data findings were reported to the Advisory Group in February 2024.

## Program Evaluation

### 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.
- A report of survey results will be available in March 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 training evaluation report for July through December 2023 is available.

### 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 forces and coalition partners beginning in summer 2023.
- An updated report using all responses to date will be available in March 30, 2024.