

MONTHLY REPORT



Northwest Pennsylvania Veteran Suicide Prevention Program

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

January 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 January 31, 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
COMMUNITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating protective environments by reducing access to lethal means among Veterans. • Identifying and supporting people at risk through implementing gatekeeper training for community members and Veterans. • Promoting connectedness through community greening and engagement activities.
HEALTHCARE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 options to prevent reattempts.
UPSTREAM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness and educate healthcare providers and community members about upstream suicide prevention strategies and mental health parity. • Reduce SDOH disparities related to housing instability, food insecurity, and provider shortages.

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

Tier 1: Community Activities

Safe Storage Update

- Participated in an event at the Farm Show with project partners DMVA.
- Gunshop engagement: Currently, 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 have inquired about safe storage options.

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

Oct 2023	Nov. 2023	Dec. 2023	Jan. 2024	YTD 2024	Goal
65	90	30	112	112	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 was successfully presented to VSU trainees and staff.

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

Oct 2023	Nov. 2023	Dec. 2023	Jan. 2024	YTD 2024	Total to Date
80	63	42	60	60	1575

Community Greening Update

- The PERU team is currently working with Bodhi Gardens to provide an Erie Veterans dinner in coordination with the Robert Irvine Foundation. This event's date is tentatively set as March 9th with a backup date of March 23rd.
- PERU is currently working with Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy to collaborate on greening opportunities around Forest Bathing and other green space activities. PPC has provided grant opportunities they would like to work closely with us on. We are also coordinating with them and Pitt Office of Veterans Services to bring Pitt Veterans to the event.

Next Steps

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

Tier 2: Healthcare Activities

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.
- 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.
- Creation of implementation plan for referral resources to be shared with all community organizations throughout this project have started.
- Adagio Health sites received approval to incorporate MH/SP materials into their waiting rooms (e.g., posters, 988 cards, SP booklets).
- Healthcare sites working to embed Safety Planning Worksheet into EMR to be completed with patients who score greater than ‘moderate risk’ on PHQ9.
- Currently scheduling QPR, CALM, and SBIRT trainings with healthcare sites.
- Working with Adagio Health to develop a Workflow Protocol for staff to implement PHQ screeners, brief intervention, safety plan, and internal/external referrals for BHC.

Community Veteran Support and Suicide Prevention Toolkit: The Resilient Veteran

- The toolkit has been successfully compiled into an indexed reference resource from the originally suggested materials. We updated the first draft with a new set of materials and a more intuitive index to enhance navigation. Ongoing discussions with colleagues have highlighted an opportunity to divide the toolkit into two versions to meet the needs of different stakeholders.
- The existing toolkit will remain mostly intact to serve as a reference for expert audiences, such as physical and behavioral healthcare entities. The other version, currently in development, targets novice/general audiences including businesses, nonprofits, and Veterans and their family members. It will feature significantly less detail and include a “take action” area which provides a short list of three to five clear steps suggested as most appropriate to each community audience. These actions will include ongoing education and training activities offered by the NWPVSP and suggestions for how each audience can help engage their community. An attempt is to answer the, potentially unasked, question “How can I help?” with a short list of clear and discrete actions to simplify participation and improve the likelihood of engagement.

Oct 2023	Nov. 2023	Dec. 2023	Jan. 2024	YTD 2024	Total
85	363	143	390	390	1113

Next Steps

- Adagio Health data exports from August through December 2023 have been received, with 1 report having been discussed.
- Toolkit is in continued development. There are two versions of it currently: healthcare and community partners respectively.
- Finalize training schedule for health care sites.

Tier 3: Upstream Activities

Mental Health Parity Updates

Ongoing education and resources on Pennsylvania’s mental health parity laws is occurring throughout all 15 counties.

Social Determinants of Health Updates

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 has conducted research and developed 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 MOU 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.
- Team working to research telehealth solutions for 15-county region.
- Continued work to identify ways to reduce provide shortages for 15-county region

Communication Updates

Advisory Group Update

- 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%).

Entity Type & Meeting Purpose	Meeting (#)
Advisory Group Partners: Project Planning	1
Community Partners: Continued Engagement	26
County Coalitions/Task Forces: Continued Engagement	3
Healthcare Partners: Recruitment/Engagement	4
Safe Storage Partners: Continued Engagement	6
State-Level Agencies: Continued Engagement	10
Total	50

Journal Club Update

- January's Journal club presentation was led by Christy Nyakana and focused on the intersection of suicide and ADHD.
- March 2024 with a special presentation from Pete Albert from VISN-4 regarding suicide safety planning.
- In January, four blog articles were created and shared on the group's Facebook and LinkedIn pages:
 - [VA Offers Rural Veterans Options to Connect with Providers](#)
 - [Sharing Mental Health Information in Your Family](#)

- [Strengthening Bonds Between Pets and Veterans](#)
- [Suicide and ADHD](#)
- The January newsletter was emailed to 1,459 individuals and had an open rate of 37%. The three most popular items in the newsletter were:
 - Updated details for the [Caring Messages Campaign](#)
 - [Suicide Awareness Survey](#)
 - [ASSIST Workshop in Warren, PA](#)
- The website had 593 visitors with a total of 1,412 pages viewed. The top five pages were:
 - <https://www.theresilientveteran.org/> (program homepage)
 - [Caring Messages Campaign](#)
 - [January and February listing for QPR+CALM training](#)
 - [Additional Training Opportunities Now Available](#) (listing of available classes)
 - [Sharing Mental Health Information in Your Family](#)

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

- 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. We are still working with additional coroners in Clearfield, Jefferson to improve their commitment to data. Beaver, Armstrong and McKean counties continue to refuse to provide data to the program.
- The team also continued engaging with the remaining 4 county coroners (Armstrong/Beaver/McKean/Forest). Clearfield, Jefferson, Warren counties have agreed to work with us and start to send us information as of February.
- Suicide death data has been collected from these counties:

County	# of Suicide Deaths (date data collection started)	# of Veterans
Erie	140 (Sept 2021)	13 (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)

VA Data

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

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 will be included in reports and Advisory Group meetings beginning 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 will be available February 2, 2024.

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.
- An updated report using all responses to date will be available February 29, 2024.