

# MONTHLY REPORT



## Northwest Pennsylvania Veteran Suicide Prevention Program

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

**March 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 March 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
<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.

Dec. 2023	Jan 2024	Feb. 2024	March 2024	YTD 2024	Goal
30	112	55	75	242	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.
- Our efforts to engage gun clubs are ongoing. Leadership and members of Keystone Gun Club, the largest in Erie, have committed to holding recurring suicide prevention training at their primary location. So far, commitments have been made for the club to host QPR and Moral Injury training with our partners at UPMC Safe Harbor.
- Our team facilitated an ASIST training in March for members of the Be Well Collaborative in Warren, PA.
- We currently offer two virtual QPR training courses and two virtual CALM training courses monthly.

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

Dec. 2023	Jan 2024	Feb. 2024	March 2024	YTD 2024	Total to Date
42	60	96	42	198	1713

### 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.
- The Bodhi Garden Veterans lunch, styled as the First Annual Veterans Chow Hall, was a big success and received significant media attention. In total 150 individual attendees were registered, a sold-out event, and more than 170 attended. The event, sponsored by the Robert Irvine Foundation, PERU and the PA DMVA, had tables from major mental health agencies in the region including the Erie VA, two massage therapy stations musical performances from several local and regional musicians. Speaking topics included discussions of gun safety and safe storage, access to local

crisis services, and local 988 providers. The Robert Irvine Foundation has committed to conducting the event annually with the local connections provided in collaboration with PERU.

- 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. This event has been expanded to include a local mental health service provider who has committed to being on site as a certified therapist to provide additional care for veterans who may need it. Meetings to solidify the partnership are planned and our community partner at PPC has been funded to engage with our suicide prevention efforts more robustly.

### **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 revised their data set to include data about patient food insecurity and food pantry use at their sites. This data will be used to look at correlations between food insecurity and PHQ scores.
- 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, ITIC, 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.
- The implementation team is beginning to re-engage with staff from PHN Wayne following staff turnover.

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

- The updated versions of the toolkit have successfully completed our internal review process and are now in the final stages of revisions and proofreading, in preparation for review by the Advisory Group in April. Since our last update, we have concentrated our efforts on integrating comprehensive links to all pertinent resources and agencies, guaranteeing the toolkit's efficacy as a vital resource in both its digital and print formats. Also, the Resilient Veteran website was updated to include placeholders for the content, where the finalized versions of the toolkit will be freely available.

Dec. 2023	Jan 2024	Feb. 2024	March 2024	YTD 2024	Total
143	390	57	91	538	1261

### Next Steps

- Distribute Community toolkit to Advisory Group for feedback and adjust as needed then upload to Resilient Veteran Website.
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## 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	1
Community Partners: Continued Engagement	53
County Coalitions/Task Forces: Continued Engagement	12
Healthcare Partners: Recruitment/Engagement	48
Safe Storage Partners: Continued Engagement	9
State-Level Agencies: Continued Engagement	24
Total	147

### Journal Club Update

- March's Journal Club presentation was led by Pete Albert from VA VISN 4 and focused on safety planning worksheets.
- May's Journal Club will feature a special presentation from UPMC Western Behavioral Health at Safe Harbor, topic TBD.
- In March, four blog articles were created and shared on the group's Facebook and LinkedIn pages:
  - [New Expansions in Veteran Health Care](#)
  - [Erie Chow Hall Event a Success](#)
  - [What to Do If a Veteran You Served With is Talking About Suicide](#)
  - [Helping Military Caregivers Overcome Loneliness](#)
- The March newsletter was emailed to 1,507 individuals with an open rate of 47%. The three most popular items in the newsletter were:
  - [Hold My Guns Expands Firearm Storage in Pennsylvania](#)
  - [Integrating Trauma Informed Care into Suicide Response](#)
  - [Erie Chow Hall Event a Success](#)
- The website had 633 visitors, with a total of 1,746 pages viewed. The top five pages were:
  - <https://www.theresilientveteran.org/> (program homepage)
  - [Contact Us](#)
  - [Hold My Guns Expands Firearm Storage in Pennsylvania](#)
  - [Additional Training Opportunities Now Available](#) (listing of available classes)
  - [Women Veteran Peer Support Services](#)

### 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 (11)
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.