

VA awards \$1,490,211.00 to community organizations in Pennsylvania working to prevent Veteran suicide

By Piork, Steve

WASHINGTON — Today, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced several steps in VA's ongoing fight to prevent Veteran suicide — including awarding \$1,490,211.00 in grants to community organizations implementing tailored suicide prevention programs and services for Veterans and their families in Pennsylvania, and an additional \$750,000.00 to organizations that serve Veterans in numerous states, including Pennsylvania.

Through its Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program, VA will award a total of \$52.5 million this fiscal year to 85 organizations across 41 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, American Samoa, and Puerto Rico to fund services in FY 2025. Eight additional previous grantees will also continue services into FY 2025. VA prioritizes awards for organizations that focus on providing services in rural communities, Tribal lands, U.S. territories, medically underserved areas, areas with a high number or percentage of minority Veterans or women Veterans, and areas with a high number or percentage of calls to the Veterans Crisis Line.

These grants are a part of VA's National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide and the Biden-Harris Administration's strategy to reduce military and Veteran suicide. Since 2021, VA has worked aggressively to expand support for Veterans in crisis, including offering no-cost emergency suicide prevention care, launching Dial 988 then Press 1 to streamline Veterans' access to the Veterans Crisis Line, expanding firearm suicide prevention efforts, and more.

"It takes all of us, working together, to prevent Veteran suicide," said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. "By working together with these organizations in the community, we'll be able to save more lives and get one step closer to our goal of ensuring that no Veteran is ever alone in their time of need."

In addition to awarding these grants, VA has taken many additional steps during this fiscal year to expand Veteran suicide prevention efforts, including:

Offering free emergency suicide prevention care, regardless of enrollment status. VA now provides free emergency care at VA and non-VA facilities for Veterans in acute suicidal crisis, regardless of VA health care enrollment status. As of Aug. 14, 2024, VA has provided care to over 74,000 Veterans through this policy.

Streamlining access to the Veterans Crisis Line via Dial 988 then Press 1. Since the launch of Dial 988 then Press 1 as the shortened Veterans Crisis Line number in July 2022, more than 2 million contacts have been fielded. This includes over 1.6 million calls, with an average speed to answer of 9.17 seconds. Increases in daily text messages (76.7%) and online chats received (27.5%) over the two years since Dial 988 then Press 1's launch are evidence that the hotline is working — Veterans in crisis are getting the help they need in the moment they need it.

Conducting outreach to Veterans in need. Since October 2021, VA and the Ad Council's national "Don't Wait. Reach Out." campaign has encouraged Veterans to reach out for help if they are struggling and provides resources for common life challenges. This year's campaign introduces "The Bravest Thing", a new PSA on how — in the eyes of loved ones — seeking help is an act of bravery. Since 2021, the campaign has reached more than 9.2 million Veterans, including 4.5 million visits to the resource webpage.

Collaborating with local partners to prevent Veteran suicide. Due in part to efforts by VA's Community-Based Interventions for Suicide Prevention program, all 50 states and five territories are now participating in the Governor's Challenge to prevent Veteran suicide. In a coordinated effort to implement the National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide, each state and territory has developed a strategic action plan focused on suicide prevention. VA is also now working with more than 2,000 community-based coalitions on efforts to prevent Veteran suicide. More than 60% of Veterans now live in a community where a coalition has implemented at least one strategy for suicide prevention.

Supporting Veterans experiencing financial stress. Because economic and financial uncertainty can increase the risk of suicide, VA launched the National Veterans Financial Resource Center (FINVET) in March 2024 to provide Veterans and their families with a one-stop website to locate trustworthy financial tools, information, videos, calculators, and worksheets from across more than 25 government agencies.

Informing suicide prevention actions through enhanced data. VA announced \$10 million in new funding in FY 2024 to better inform Veteran suicide prevention strategies through suicide mortality review committees. Additionally, the VA's latest National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report provided the largest national analysis of Veteran suicides through 2021. VA will release the 2024 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report later this year.

If you're a Veteran in crisis or concerned about one, contact the Veterans Crisis Line to receive 24/7 confidential support. You don't have to be enrolled in VA benefits or health care to connect. To reach responders, Dial 988 then Press 1, chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat, or text 838255.



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