

Foreword From Barbara Van Dahlen, Ph.D., PREVENTS Executive Director

Thank you for taking the time to read the President’s Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS). It has been an honor to execute the President’s vision for developing this PREVENTS Roadmap by working with hundreds of individuals within and outside the government who understand the importance of this mission as well as the opportunity that we have before us.

Suicide is one of the most challenging societal issues of our time, and sadly it is an issue that affects our Veterans at alarming rates. Like many of you, I have a personal connection to the Veteran community. My father was a first-generation American who lied about his age to join the Navy during World War II after the attack on Pearl Harbor. He served in the Pacific, he was wounded, and like many who served during WWII — and many who have served in conflicts before and since — he came home with invisible injuries in addition to his physical ones.

I became a psychologist because I wanted to help those who were hurting emotionally. Over the course of my career, I have seen intense suffering — as well as extraordinary resilience. I have seen the joy of personal growth and the power of effective clinical care. And I have witnessed the magic that happens when communities collaborate to combine their resources and coordinate their efforts.

While the debt we owe to those who serve can never be fully repaid, we must empower these men and women to lead healthy, meaningful, and productive lives after they put away their uniforms. Our goal is to ensure that Veterans find purpose and discover belonging within the civilian communities for which they fought. And for those who are struggling with emotional pain and hopelessness, we must provide hope and effective care.

The PREVENTS Roadmap is ready to be implemented across our government and within our communities. We have structured the plan to prioritize areas that will make the biggest impact in the lives of Veterans now, while building the foundation for a collaborative national effort that will adapt and evolve over time. This plan includes strengthening connections and coordinating services within our communities at the State and local levels to ensure that all Veterans in need receive the opportunities and the support they deserve.

My father would be proud of the work we are doing through PREVENTS. He would recognize that we each have a role to play in honoring and empowering those who have served our country, and he would understand that we must work together to reach all Americans who feel hopeless.

The PREVENTS Roadmap that follows is the result of thousands of hours of work by hundreds of individuals — subject matter experts, Veterans, Service members, military family members, and caring citizens. This is just the beginning of PREVENTS, but it is a proud beginning, and, now that we have begun, we will not turn back from this challenge.

Together, we will prevent suicide.