Important information about Suicide Awareness Month

Veterans Health Administration sent this bulletin at 09/16/2021 08:00 AM EDT

Wilmington VA Medical Center Update
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Delaware Governor's Challenge

September is Suicide Prevention Month and the Governor's Office of Delaware and Wilmington VAMC are coming together to call attention to end Veteran suicide with a Governor's Challenge.
Dear Veterans, Community Partners and Stakeholders,

Suicide is a national public health issue that impacts people from all walks of life. Suicide causes immense distress and suffering that can affect families and communities for generations. We know that suicide is preventable when we work together in a caring and coordinated way to identify people at risk and promote access to care.

September is National Suicide Awareness Month. It is a time to raise awareness, to end the stigma, to shift public perception, and to spread hope and information about effective treatments. It is critically important for all of us to understand that suicide prevention is everyone’s business. We must work together through our state agencies, healthcare systems, community organizations, faith-based organizations, advocates, surviving family members, and friends to promote access to resources, information, and care whenever and wherever needed.

Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States, and the 11th in Delaware. Risk factors can include past histories of suicidal behavior, mental health diagnoses; including PTSD, exposure to trauma, substance abuse, and recent life stressors such as separation and divorce, death of a loved one, unemployment, housing loss, recent serious medical diagnoses, and chronic pain. According to the most current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data, approximately 45,000 people die from suicide each year. The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimates that 20 veterans die from suicide every day. Mental health and crisis support services are critical for people showing signs of suicide risk in their thoughts or behavior. But we must go beyond simply engaging mental health providers, to involve the entire community in recognizing risk and intervening before an individual reaches a crisis point.

The VA’s Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has partnered with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) through a call to action for state and local communities to implement the 2018-2028 National Strategy for the Prevention of Veteran Suicide. The aim of the National Strategy is to prevent suicide among at-risk Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF) using a comprehensive public health approach. The National Strategy provides a framework for identifying priorities, organizing efforts, and contributing to a national focus on preventing and ending suicide among Veterans.
Later this fall, Delaware will join this partnership. Both our state and nation owe a debt of gratitude to the men and women who have served in uniform. Helping SMVF find the mental health resources they need is vital to taking care of our community. This will also give us a chance to work with a defined group and to utilize what we learn to help improve our overall approach to suicide prevention.

It is imperative that our Veteran and military communities, service organizations, and community organizations work with the state to plan our approach. The VA has already established a number of pathways for helping Veterans find treatment. These apply for those who get care from the Wilmington VA Medical Center, and those who call the VA’s 24/7 National Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255 and Press 1) or the Delaware Hope Line (1-833-9-HOPEDE).

However, we need to go further to reach all SMVF in the state. We must take a broad approach to suicide prevention training and education about risk factors and warning signs. Additionally, we must work to recognize when Veterans show signs of suicide risk and when they have had contact from state agencies and community organizations. While safeguarding the privacy of our Veterans is crucial, there are steps we can take to identify at-risk SMVF so that they may be offered treatment options.

All Delawareans must work together to adopt effective strategies statewide that will help reduce risk among our military communities. I urge you to take action, start the conversation, and help spread the word to make Delaware the first state to end suicide among our military and Veteran populations.

Sincerely,

John C. Carney
Governor, State of Delaware

Bethany A. Hall-Long, PhD, RNC
Lieutenant Governor, State of Delaware

Vince Kane
Director, Wilmington VA Medical Center

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