



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

News Release

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420
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www.va.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 16, 2019

VA launches community-focused public health model to prevent Veteran suicide

New initiative encourages shared responsibility among stakeholders to promote protective factors and mitigate risks

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (OMHSP) and VA Midwest Health Care Network (Veterans Integrated Service Network [VISN] 23) have been working with academic researchers from the University of Pittsburgh's Program Evaluation and Research Unit (PERU) to spearhead a community-based program as one of many efforts aimed at lowering the rate of Veteran suicide.

Aligned with the [National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide](#), the program, which began in early 2019, is designed to increase community involvement within VISN 23 by leveraging the reach and impact of local stakeholders.

"We recognize that just as suicide has no single determining cause, *no single agency* can prevent Veteran suicide," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "In working with our partners on this pilot program, we are adding new opportunities to provide our Veterans with whole-health solutions before they reach a point of crisis."

Charged with carrying out the program's multiple objectives, VISN 23 has deployed 10 education and outreach specialists, who have received formal training from VA leadership and PERU on how to:

- Assess community readiness for increased engagement efforts.
- Build local coalitions to facilitate wider and more frequent touchpoints with Veterans.
- Use community-specific public health data to tailor interventions to population needs.
- Provide metrics on program effectiveness to inform national implementation strategy.

Learn more about VA's suicide prevention resources and programs at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention. Veterans who are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a Veteran in crisis, can call Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Call 800-273-8255 and press 1, send a text message to 838255 or chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat.

Media covering this issue can download VA's [Safe Messaging Best Practices fact sheet](#) or visit www.ReportingOnSuicide.org for important guidance on how to communicate about suicide.

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