

COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT

Maryland Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide among Service Members, Veterans, and Families

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this toolkit is to help the Maryland Governor's Challenge team effectively communicate our work with local communities, government, media and other stakeholders.

The toolkit contains data, talking points, training portal information and more.

Team members are encouraged to utilize this toolkit to share the very important work being done to implement evidence-based interventions that are locally driven and designed for change.

Sources for information contained in this toolkit are the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), US Department Health and Human Services/Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), and the Department of Defense (DoD).



TALKING POINTS: PREVENTING SUICIDE IN SERVICE MEMBERS, VETERANS, AND FAMILIES

All of our nation's health systems and communities must work collectively to reduce suicide rates using the best available information and practices.

Coordinated efforts at the federal, state, and local levels are key to preventing suicide.

- Every death by suicide is a tragedy, and we will not relent in our efforts to connect veterans who are experiencing an emotional or mental health crisis with lifesaving support.
- Our goal is to reduce suicide and suicidal behavior among service members, veterans and their families. By coordinating resources and services, the Maryland Governor's Challenge team and our partners can save lives.

There is hope.

- The military-connected community is strong and resilient, but none of us are immune from life's challenges.
- Evidence-based interventions work and are available to address suicide and its underlying causes.

Suicide is a complex issue with no single cause. It is a national public health issue that affects people from all walks of life, not just veterans.

- As a community and as a nation, we have a collective responsibility to study the underlying risk factors for suicide and implement broad protective factors.



The public health approach utilizes partnerships with communities to implement tailored, local prevention plans while incorporating evidence-based clinical strategies for intervention.

- The combination of community prevention strategies and evidence-based clinical interventions empowers action at the national, regional, and local levels.
- This combination of strategies allows us to reach the military-connected community with suicide prevention resources where they work, live, and thrive.
- We all have a role to play in preventing suicide among service members and veterans in our communities. Every person, system, and organization should ask themselves how they can help because, together, we can win this fight.

TALKING POINTS: 2021 NATIONAL VETERAN SUICIDE PREVENTION ANNUAL REPORT

Data is an integral part of our comprehensive public health strategy and enables us to tailor suicide prevention initiatives to reach diverse groups of veterans in Maryland. The 2021 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report provides the most recent analysis of suicide rates for both veteran and non-veteran populations. These findings underscore the fact that suicide is a national public health issue that affects communities everywhere.

Top Line Findings

- In 2019, 6,261 veterans died by suicide, representing 13.7% of suicides among US adults, as compared to 5,989, or 20.2% of suicides among US adults in 2001
- Among US adults, the average number of suicides per day rose from 81.0 in 2001 to 125.6 in 2019. These numbers included 16.4 veteran suicides per day in 2001 and 17.2 in 2019.
- In 2019, among the average 17.2 veteran suicides per day, an estimated 10.4 per day were among veterans with no VA healthcare encounters in 2018 or 2019.
- Firearms were the method of suicide in 70.2% of male veteran suicide deaths and 49.8% of female veteran suicide deaths in 2019.
- In addition to the aforementioned veteran suicides, there were 580 service member suicide deaths in calendar year 2020 (includes the Active Component, Reserves, and National Guard)

Risk and Protective Factors

- There is no single cause of suicide. Suicide is often the result of a complex interaction of risk and protective factors at the individual, community, and societal levels.



- Risk factors are characteristics that are associated with an increased likelihood of suicidal behaviors. Some risk factors for suicide include: prior suicide attempt history, certain mental health conditions, access to lethal means, and stressful life events, such as divorce, job loss, or the death of a loved one.
- Protective factors can help offset risk factors. These are characteristics associated with a decreased likelihood of suicidal behaviors. Some protective factors for suicide include access to mental health care, feeling connected to other people, and positive coping skills.
- To prevent veteran suicide, we must maximize protective factors while minimizing risk factors at all levels, throughout communities nationwide.

TALKING POINTS

MAYOR'S AND GOVERNOR'S CHALLENGE TEAMS

- VA is using data to tailor the best possible targeted prevention strategies to reach all veterans — not just those identified as being at high risk.
- The Mayor's and Governor's Challenges are prime examples of this approach.
 - A partnership between VA and SAMHSA launched the Mayor's and Governor's Challenges, including ours right here in Maryland, to help local leaders in the community and state governments work together to prevent suicide among service members, veterans and their families. Thirty-five states are actively engaged with a goal to reach all 50 states by the end of 2022.
 - In 2020, Maryland was invited to join the Governor's Challenge. As Governor's Challenge teams develop state-wide strategic action plans, these plans will include strategies that local governments can implement within their communities.
 - As part of the Governor's Challenge, our team participated in policy, implementation and evaluation academies.
- The team developed a strategic action plan informed by evidence to prevent veteran suicide across the state and was provided with tools and technical assistance to support these efforts.
- Technical assistance and support continues to be provided and allows our team access to national subject matter experts on suicide prevention, in order to build community-specific plans to meet suicide prevention needs in our state.
- In addition, team members have the opportunity to participate in a variety of Communities of Practice Collaboratives to connect with and learn from other state and local teams about their successes and challenges launching and maintaining their initiatives.
- The Mayor's and Governor's Challenges facilitate the development of partnerships and support to help address the critical loss of veterans' lives in our communities.

TALKING POINTS

MAYOR'S AND GOVERNOR'S CHALLENGE TEAMS CONTINUED

- Since the Challenge launched, our team has learned how to:
 - Build an interagency military and civilian leadership team to develop and implement a strategic action plan to reduce suicidal behavior at the local level.
 - Acquire a deep familiarity with the issues surrounding suicide prevention for service members, veterans, and their families.
 - Increase knowledge about the challenges and lessons learned in implementing strategies by utilizing team to team sharing.
 - Employ best practices to prevent and reduce suicide attempts and completions at the local level.
 - Evaluate program outcomes and impact.
- Maryland's team has benefited from increased collaboration between community-led, VA-led, and DoD-led efforts aimed at preventing veteran suicide.
- This work is critically important because local and state officials know their populations best. VA wants to equip state leaders with the ability to advance VA's shared goals and generate impactful change in local communities and states.
- The Maryland Governor's Challenge team is focused on three priority areas: (1) Identifying and Screening for Suicide Risk, (2) Promoting Connectedness and Improving Care Transitions, and (3) Increasing Lethal Means Safety and Planning.

Priority Areas

#1- IDENTIFICATION AND SCREENING FOR SUICIDE RISK

Develop an "Ask The Question" training curriculum and produce a training video. Market the training to state government personnel and encourage them to screen constituents for military service and to refer to VA related resources.

#2- PROMOTE CONNECTEDNESS AND IMPROVE CARE TRANSITIONS

#2A- Peer Endorsement

Develop an endorsement training for credentialed Certified Peer Recovery Specialists who work with SMVF populations. Training will cover four domains: advocacy, wellness and recovery, mentoring and education, and ethics.

#2B- Crisis Intercept Mapping

Convene local teams to identify gaps and barriers in the community's crisis system. Discuss ways to implement best practices and improve partnerships to close gaps and reduce SMVF death by suicide.

#3- LETHAL MEANS SAFETY AND SAFETY PLANNING: TRAINED MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (TMAP)

The TMAP pilot program is a web-based, culturally competent, SMVF lethal means safety and safety planning training portal for primary care practices. Practices that successfully complete the training receive a unique designation as well as virtual and physical resources to support their practice and patients.



Lethal Means Safety

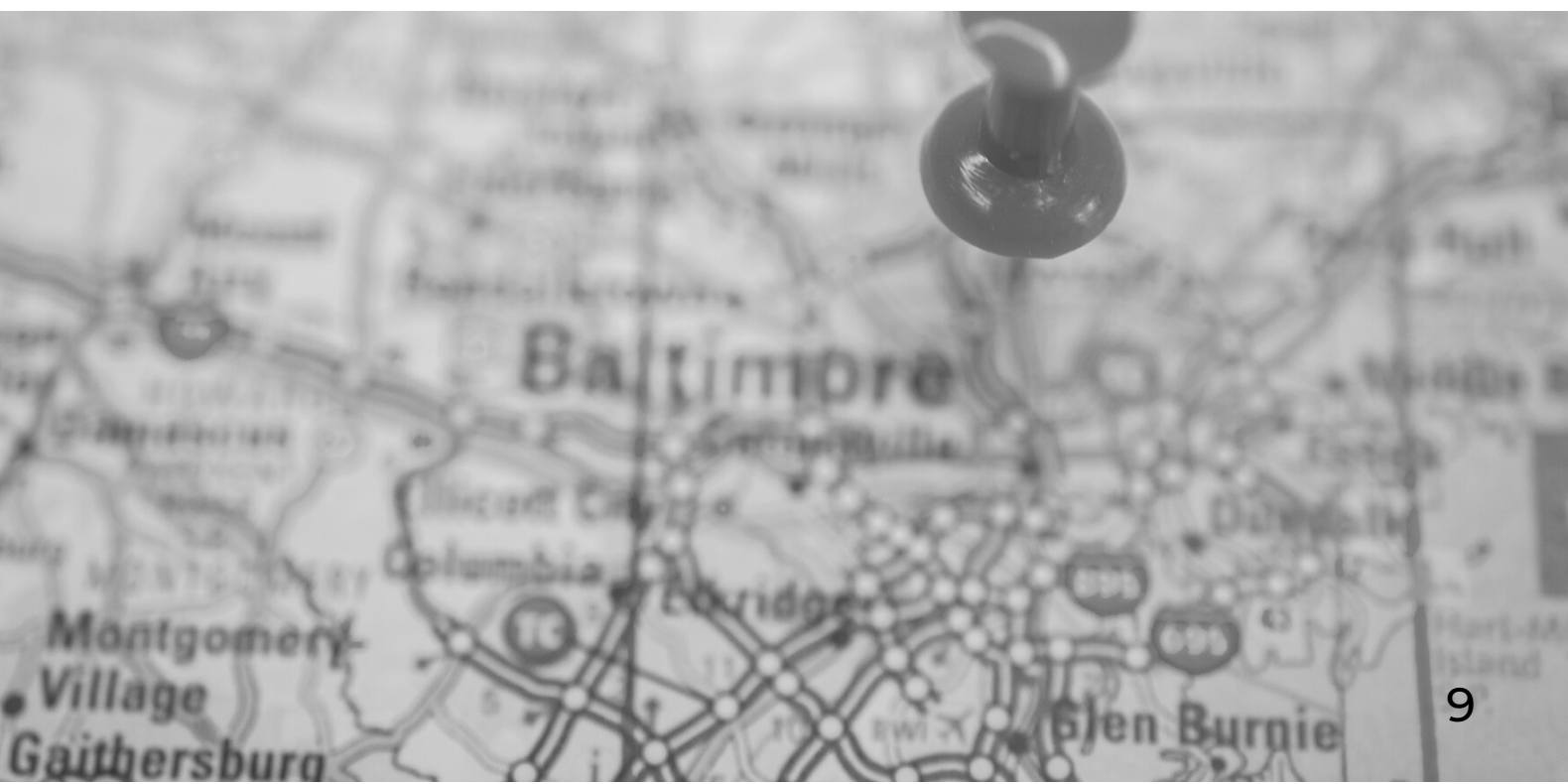
SAFE STORAGE MAP

<https://mdpgv.org/safestoragemap/>

The safe storage map was developed to help community members seeking local options for temporary, voluntary firearm storage. Out-of-home gun storage can be especially helpful to persons in crisis at risk for suicide.

As of the spring of 2020, the businesses and law enforcement agencies listed on the map are willing to consider requests for temporary, voluntary gun storage.

The link also provides a list of frequently asked questions about safe storage of firearms.



Veteran Suicide Prevention Action Plan

Chapter 35 of the Acts of 2019, Veteran Suicide Prevention- Comprehensive Action Plan

For the purpose of requiring the Maryland Department of Health to develop a certain action plan to increase access to and the availability of professional veteran health services to prevent veteran suicides that includes certain initiatives and reforms and a plan for implementation beginning on or before certain dates; requiring the plan to address certain matters; requiring the Department to collaborate with interested parties in developing the plan; requiring the Department to implement certain initiatives and reforms by certain dates; requiring the Department to report to the Governor and the General Assembly on or before a certain date; providing for the termination of this Act; and generally relating to a comprehensive action plan for veteran suicide prevention.

Approved by the Governor, April 18, 2019

Short Term Action Plan

Chapter 35



TRAINING PORTAL

The Governor's Challenge Training Portal (Portal) was developed in partnership with SAMHSA's Service Members, Veterans and their Families (SMVF) Technical Assistance (TA) Center and the PsychArmor Institute. The Portal is a web-based, single point of entry for Governor's Challenge state teams and their partners to PsychArmor's learning management system.

The Portal provides access to a set menu of PsychArmor's online trainings, as well as links to off-site trainings through VA and the Education Development Center.

With access to the Portal, team members can promote online trainings to community partners, providers, and others to support strategies related to their suicide prevention strategic action plans.

In addition, Maryland's team dashboard provides custom metrics and learner evaluation data.

Training Menu:

- 15 Things Veterans Want You to Know (also available specific to healthcare providers)
- Communication Skills with Veterans
- Connecting with the VA
- Crisis Response Plan for Health Care Providers
- Finding Stability After Suicide Loss
- Inner Conflict and Survivor's Guilt
- Myths and Facts About Wounded Warriors
- Postvention: Healing After Suicide
- Substance Use Disorder in Military and Veteran Populations
- Suicide in Military Members and Veterans
- VA S.A.V.E.: Gatekeeper Suicide Prevention
- VA S.A.V.E.: Preventing Caregiver Suicide
- Women Who Serve

Accessing the Portal:

- [Visit the Portal here.](#)
- Complete registration
- Once registered, access will be given to an individualized dashboard with a menu of available trainings, as well as links to off-site trainings
- To access the dashboard, follow the link at any time and login with the email and password created at registration
- If you are already registered, email Jenna Pryor, jpryor@psycharmor.org, to migrate your dashboard to the Portal

TEAM COMPOSITION



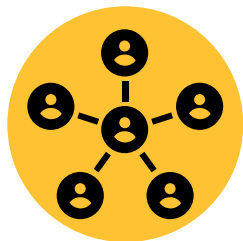
- US Department of Veterans Affairs
 - Baltimore VA Medical Center
 - Martinsburg VA Medical Center
- Joint Base Andrews



- MD Department of Health
- MD Department of Veterans Affairs
- MD Department of Human Services
- MD Army National Guard



- Harford County Commission on Veterans Affairs



- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention-Maryland Chapter
- American Legion Post 166
- American Red Cross of Southern Maryland
- Maryland Military Coalition
- National Alliance for Mental Illness
- Serving Together
- Sheppard Pratt
- Steven A Cohen Military Family Clinic at Easter Seals
- United Way of Central Maryland
- The VA Way

VA RESOURCES

- VA Mental Health Website: VA's repository of mental health resources, information, and data materials. Examples of downloadable materials include:
 - Community Provider Toolkit: Community providers play an essential role in ensuring America's veterans receive the support they have earned. The purpose of this toolkit is to link community providers with information and resources that are relevant to veteran's health and well-being.
 - VA's Safe Messaging Best Practices Fact Sheet: Guidelines for how to write about suicide in the media. The way in which suicide is covered can have life-changing consequences.
 - Social Media Safety Toolkit: includes best practices, resources, and sample posts for responding to social media posts that indicate a veteran is having thoughts of suicide.
 - Safe Firearm Storage Toolkit: guides communities through the process of building coalitions to raise awareness about safe storage and its connection to suicide prevention.
 - Rocky Mountain MIRECC for Veteran Suicide Prevention- Education Core: information about suicide prevention that is accessible to veterans and the wider community

Veterans Crisis Line



REFERENCES

2021 NATIONAL VETERAN SUICIDE PREVENTION ANNUAL REPORT

Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention
US Department of Veterans Affairs
September 2021

ANNUAL SUICIDE REPORT CALENDAR YEAR 2020

Department of Defense
Under Secretary of Defense For Personnel and
Readiness

GOVERNOR'S AND MAYOR'S CHALLENGES TO PREVENT SUICIDE AMONG SERVICE MEMBERS, VETERANS, AND THEIR FAMILIES

US Department of Health and Human Services
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services
Administration

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR PREVENTING VETERAN SUICIDE

US Department of Veterans Affairs

PREVENTING SUICIDE: A TECHNICAL PACKAGE OF POLICY, PROGRAMS, AND PRACTICES

National Center for Injury Prevention and Control
Division of Violence Prevention



**ASK.
CONNECT.
PROTECT.
RESPECT.**

CONTACT US



veterans.maryland.gov/suicide-prevention-resources/

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