



**Maryland Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide
among Military Service Members, Veterans, and Families
Ask the Question Campaign
*HAVE YOU OR A LOVED ONE EVER SERVED IN THE MILITARY?***



Background:

This year the Hogan-Rutherford Administration accepted an invitation from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to participate in the Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide among Service Members, Veterans, and Families (SMVF). The Challenge is a call to action to collaborate, plan, and implement suicide prevention SMVF best practices and policies. The Department of Health (MDH) and Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) are leading a team of more than 30 federal, state, and local partners to develop the plan.

The National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide 2018-2028 provides Governor's Challenge Teams a framework for identifying priorities. The strategic priorities work together to promote wellness, increase protection, reduce risk and promote effective treatment and recovery. The three best policy and practice priorities include: identify SMVF and screen for suicide risk, promote connectedness and improve care transitions, and increase lethal means safety and safety planning. In order to align the SAMHSA action plan to Senate Bill 521 (Comprehensive Statewide Veterans Suicide Prevention Plan) Maryland added one additional priority: peer support.

Maryland is home to approximately 390,000 veterans, 30,000 active duty service members and 18,000 reservists/national guard members. In addition, there are 130,000 veteran households with children and another 60,000 reserve/national guard/active duty dependents.

According to the MDVA 2019 Annual Report, only about 40% of Maryland veterans are enrolled in the VA healthcare system. The Maryland veteran suicide rate is 17% and hovers almost 4% higher than the total rate of 13% (per 100,000 population). Of the veterans lost nationally to suicide, an average of 40% were not enrolled in VA healthcare. RAND studies indicate that many providers do not know whether their clients have served and also do not have high military cultural competency. One of the key barriers to SMVF not seeking civilian services is because they do not feel understood. Asking consumers the question, "Have you or a loved one ever served in the military?" starts the conversation, training providers on military cultural competency promotes understanding, and educating providers on military/veteran resources builds connections.

Maryland's Ask the Question Campaign: Have you or a loved one ever served in the military?

Using a targeted approach, the Ask the Question Campaign pilot will focus on three key professional organizations/providers:

1. Law Enforcement/Justice System (MD State Police/MD Judiciary)
2. Healthcare System (Trinity/Holy Cross as a model/Invitation to Kaiser)
3. State Government (Human Services/Disabilities/Aging)

Each professional organization/provider will be encouraged to complete training on the purpose of the campaign, how to ask the question, military cultural competency and related resources. State agencies will examine touch points where SMVF may be receiving services and staff will identify SMVF by asking if they have served. They will provide referrals to identified SMVF to MDVA, MCV, or USDVA and SMVF will be given Maryland specific resource cards.

The timeline for this pilot will be November 11, 2020 (launch) and June 30, 2020 (reporting due). For questions contact Joy Ashcraft, Director, Maryland's Commitment to Veterans, MDH-BHA, Lead Governor's Challenge Team, joy.ashcraft@maryland.gov, or Dana Burl, MDVA Outreach Program Director, Co-Lead Governor's Challenge Team, dana.burl@maryland.gov.