

Governor's Challenge to End Service Member, Veteran and Family Suicide



Joy Ashcraft, Director
Maryland's Commitment to Veterans
Maryland Department of Health

Why are we here?

Suicide is a national public health concern. We all 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.

Maryland Statistics:

- Between 2015-2018, an average of 105 deaths by suicide occurred among those who had served in the Armed Forces (typically identified as such by family member or neighbor)
- Accounting for all suicide deaths in 2018, those who had served made up 17.4% of deaths but made up only about 9% of the adult population
- Those 80 years and older represented the largest number veteran suicide deaths
- 92% were male, 86% were non hispanic white
- Primary means was firearm

Governor's Challenge Background

- Goal: Develop statewide plans based on the public health approach to prevent suicide
- Partnership between VA and SAMHSA
- Takes the Mayor's Challenge (started in 2018) to the state level
- 27 states have taken the “challenge”
- Maryland joined the newest cohort on May 19th

The Mission

- Convene a state interagency military, government, and civilian team of leaders
- Understand the issues surrounding suicide prevention for SMVF
- Implement promising, best, and evidence-based practices
- Engage with stakeholders to enhance and align statewide efforts
- Increase knowledge about the challenges and lessons learned by using state-to-state sharing
- Define and measure success

Our Team

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
 - MD Chapter
- American Legion Post 166
- American Red Cross of Southern Maryland
- Dundalk Vet Center
- Holy Cross Hospital
- Joint Base Andrews Transition Assistance Program
- Maryland Army National Guard
- Maryland Department of Health
- Maryland Department of Human Services
- Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs
- Maryland Governor's Office of Community Initiatives
- Maryland State Police
- Mid-Atlantic Permanente Medical Group
- Modern Military Association of America
- National Alliance for Mental Illness - MD Chapter
- Prince George's County Veterans Commission
- Reid Temple AME Church
- Salisbury University
- Serving Together
- United States Navy Reserves
- United Way of Central Maryland
- University of Maryland
- Veterans Affairs Capitol Health Care Network

Focus of Plan

- 4 Priority Areas
 - Identify SMVF and Screen for Suicide Risk
 - Promote Connectedness and Improve Care Transitions
 - Increase Lethal Means Safety and Safety Planning
 - Expand and Specialize Peer-to-Peer Service Coordination

Maryland's “Ask the Question” Campaign

Have You or a Loved One Ever Served in the Military?



Dana Burl, Director, Outreach and Advocacy Program
Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs

Maryland's SMVF Population: what do we know?

390,000 veterans

30,000 active duty service members

18,000 reservists/national guard

130,000 veteran households with children

60,000 reserve/national guard/active duty dependents

Only 40% of Maryland veterans are enrolled in the VA healthcare system

Nationally, 40% of veterans lost to suicide are not enrolled in the VA healthcare system

In 2018, veterans represented 17.4% of all deaths by suicide in Maryland

Of those veterans being seen for depression in the VA healthcare system, the VA is seeing a decreasing rate of suicide

**Before we can connect and prevent, we must first identify...
There is good news: other states have implemented similar initiatives
and Maryland has the resources to make it happen:**

**Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire and Virginia
have all managed pilot “Ask the Question” campaigns**

- *President’s Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End the National Tragedy of Suicide**
- *Governor’s Challenge to Prevent Service Member, Veteran and Family Suicide**
- *Governor’s Customer Service Initiative**
- *Governor’s Commission on Suicide Prevention**
- *Veterans Services Specialist Program in State Government**
- *Maryland Commitment to Veterans**

Meet service
members, veterans,
and families...



WHERE
THEY LIVE



WHERE
THEY WORK



WHERE THEY THRIVE

Maryland's "Ask the Question" Campaign Approach

Asking the question starts the conversation

Training promotes understanding

Educating on resources builds connections

Three Pillar Approach

1. Law Enforcement (MSP)/
Justice System
2. Healthcare System
3. State Government
 - a. Human Services/Local DSS
 - b. Aging
 - c. Disabilities

Champions:

MD National Guard

MD State Libraries

Other state agencies already asking
the question

Launch Date Goal
November 11, 2020

Questions and Follow Up

Joy Ashcraft, joy.ashcraft@maryland.gov

Dana Burl, dana.burl@maryland.gov



[https://veterans.maryland.gov/suicide-
prevention-resources/](https://veterans.maryland.gov/suicide-prevention-resources/)