



## Defense Health Agency (DHA) Clinical Communities Speaker Series

### OCT 2023 CCSS: Collaborative Best Practices in Military Health Care

#### **S06: Assessing Social and Community Environments with National Data (ASCEND) for Veteran Suicide Prevention: Enhancing Surveillance of Non-Fatal Suicidal Self-Directed Violence**

##### Resource List

Suicide is a major public health problem that disproportionately impacts veterans in the general U.S. population. Recent analyses indicate that American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) veterans may be two to three times as likely as non-Hispanic White veterans to experience suicidal ideation. Although suicide prevention programs have been successfully implemented for many at-risk populations a limited amount have been designed or implemented for AI/AN veterans specifically. To address this gap, the study, [A scoping review of veteran suicide prevention programs in Native American communities and in the general population \(2023\)](#) was conducted to review suicide prevention programs with the objective of identifying promising strategies and lessons learned to identify promising practices for preventing suicide among AI/AN veterans. Findings indicated that many of the VA evidence-based or best practice programs are available system-wide, but none have been tailored for AI/AN veterans or the communities in which they live. Conversely, many culturally specific programs implemented in AI/AN communities were rarely disseminated beyond tribal land and none were specifically developed for veterans. Based upon these findings, and to advance suicide prevention programs for AI/AN veterans, the authors proposed a suicide prevention model that builds upon existing VA infrastructure to disseminate best practices to AI/AN communities and integrate tribal-specific cultural approaches to suicide prevention.

SAMHSA has partnered with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to bring the [Governor's and mayor's challenges to prevent suicide among service members, veterans, and their families \(SMVF\) \(2023\)](#) to states, territories, and communities across the Nation. For the Governor's Challenge, 54 states and territories are currently taking part in the challenge and are working to develop and implement state-wide suicide prevention best practices for SMVF, using a public health approach. For the Mayor's Challenge, 22 communities were originally engaged as part of the challenge. Currently, 19 of those teams are still actively participating. SAMHSA's SMVF TA Center is providing technical assistance for these initiatives.

In the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) \(2022\)](#) effort to reduce military and veteran suicide they noted suicide and suicidal behavior affect millions of individuals, families, and communities, and can result in lasting health, emotional, and economic consequences. Veterans disproportionately experience factors linked to suicide, including post-traumatic stress disorder, social isolation, and access to lethal means. CDC continues its dedication to using data, science, action, and collaboration to identify disproportionately affected populations including Veterans, with a focus on upstream prevention strategies across the U.S. that complement the work of the DoD and VA.

Every life lost to suicide is a tragedy, magnified when evidence-based prevention strategies exist that can make a profound and lasting difference. The CDC's comprehensive approach to suicide prevention uses data and the best available evidence to inform strategic partnerships and programming with a vision for societal-level change. At this moment in history, it is imperative to address the challenges Veterans face head-on and provide supports to increase hope and resilience at the individual, family, and community level. Through a collaborative and comprehensive public health approach centered on the experiences of those most impacted, CDC can achieve the ultimate shared vision of no lives lost to suicide.



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<https://www.samhsa.gov/smvf-ta-center/mayors-governors-challenges>