

RCW 43.60A.260 Suicide prevention community-based services grant program.

(1) There is created in the department a suicide prevention community-based services grant program. The purpose of the grant program is to provide suicide prevention, peer support, and other assistance to at-risk and transitioning veterans and military members and their families in their communities.

(2) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for the specific purposes provided in this section and amounts disbursed from the veterans and military members suicide prevention account created in RCW 43.60A.270, the department, in consultation with the forefront suicide prevention center, must establish a process to receive, review, process, and award grants to organizations, including nonprofit and peer support community programs, that address veterans, military members, and their families who may be at risk of suicide and other mental health crises. Priority should be given to organizations using peer support models that use evidence-based, research-based, or promising practices.

(3) The department shall report to the legislature annually beginning July 1, 2023, on grant recipients, number of veterans and military members served, and the types of services offered by grant recipients.

(4) The forefront suicide prevention center shall evaluate the effectiveness of each grant program recipient providing suicide prevention and peer support services to veterans, military members, and their families who may be at risk of suicide and other mental health crises.

(5) For the purposes of this section, "forefront suicide prevention center" means the University of Washington's forefront suicide prevention center of excellence. [2022 c 191 s 2.]

Findings—Intent—2022 c 191: "(1) Suicide is a public health issue that affects many Washington families and communities daily. Over the last 10 years, Washington state has been at the forefront of suicide prevention, investing more in upstream suicide prevention strategies and supports with the goal of a noteworthy reduction in suicide by 2025.

(2) At the request of the governor, in 2020 Washington stakeholders engaged in a national and statewide initiative to end veteran and military member suicide. This initiative culminated in a new state plan to educate providers and help them address the unique needs of veterans and military members, particularly those in transition to civilian life; and to provide resources and supports including improved lethal means safety training. The purpose of this act is to support the implementation of that plan.

(3) Service members, veterans, and their families are at a higher risk of being affected by suicide as experiences prior to enlistment, during service, and transition from service can contribute to suicidal thoughts and behaviors. A report on post-9/11 era military deaths by the United States department of veterans affairs found that service members are four times more likely to die by suicide than in military operations. Over 7,000 service members died in combat during the global war on terror, while more than 30,000 active duty members and veterans died by suicide. For veterans of all United States military operations, there is an average of 22 suicide deaths per day across the country, with one occurring every 65 minutes.

(4) Washington is home to 544,290 veterans, 60,699 active duty service members, 17,941 guard and reserve service members, and 2,000,000 military and veteran family members. Although veterans themselves make up only seven percent of the Washington population, they account for 19 percent of total suicides in the state. Nearly 1,000 veterans have died by suicide in Washington state over the last five years. More than two-thirds of veterans who died by suicide in Washington used a firearm.

(5) Family members of veterans who die by suicide are at higher risk for future suicide due to the exposure of experiencing suicide loss. Research shows for every suicide that occurs, 135 people suffer from the effects either directly or indirectly, meaning veteran suicides impact a community of 2,600,000 people.

(6) There is no one path to suicide, but life experiences, moral injury, trauma, culture, and health can play a major role in suicidal behavior. Military and veteran culture in particular includes stigma around mental wellness and help-seeking behavior, emphasizes reliability on group cohesion, and facilitates access, comfortability, and familiarity with lethal means such as firearms. Additionally, a significant number of veterans do not seek care within the veterans administration system.

(7) The legislature intends to address the tragedy of suicide amongst veterans, military members, and their families through support of professionals and community and peer organizations serving veterans, cultural changes that support help-seeking behaviors, and investments in education, training, prevention, and care." [2022 c 191 s 1.]