



VETERAN SUICIDE PREVENTION COMMUNITY BASED GRANT

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

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"Serving Those Who Served"

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Introduction

The 2022 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual report finds that in 2020, there were 6,146 Veteran suicides. This was on average 16.8 per day, or one suicide every 85 minutes. In 2020, suicide was the 13th leading cause of death among Veterans overall, and it was the second leading cause of death among Veterans under age 45¹.

Suicide is a public health issue affecting Washington's Service Members, Veterans, and military families (SMVF) and is on the rise. This community is at a higher risk of suicide due to their unique life experiences, culture, and environmental stressors. Suicide disproportionately impacts the military community. Veterans accounted for over 18% of all suicides in Washington State in 2020 despite comprising only 7% of the population.

Several factors contribute to Veteran suicide, including mental health issues, trauma, and difficulty transitioning back into civilian life. Many veterans struggle with PTSD, depression, and anxiety, which can lead to feelings of hopelessness and despair. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these issues, as many Veterans have been isolated from their support systems and are experiencing financial stress.

To combat veteran suicide, WDVA is prioritizing mental health resources and support services for veterans. This includes increasing access to counseling and therapy and promoting community-based programs that provide social support and connection. WDVA is also working to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health and encourage veterans to seek help when they need it.

Overall, veteran suicide in Washington is a complex and urgent problem that requires immediate attention. By collaborating with community partners, service members, veterans, and their families WDVA is working to prevent further tragedies and ensure that those who have served our country receive the care and support they deserve.

In January 2020, Washington State formed a collaborative group of interagency and community partners to create the Washington State SMVF Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan for 2021-2023. This plan aligned with the National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide 2018-2028's focus areas and strategic planning, which are:

- Identify SMVF and Screen for suicide risk
- Promote Connectedness and Improve Care Transition
- Increasing Lethal Means Safety and Safety Planning

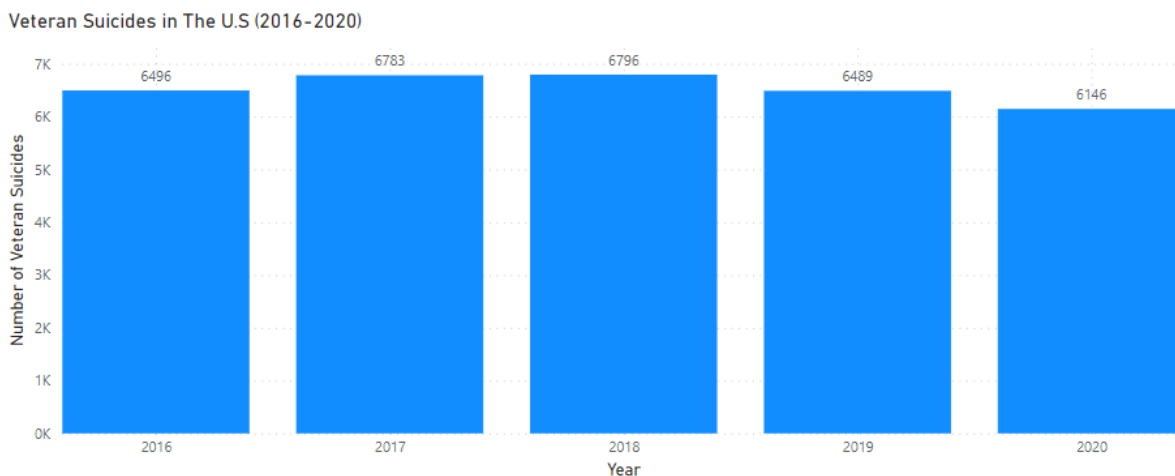
¹ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Mental Health, and Suicide Prevention. 2022 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report. 2022. Retrieved {May 25, 2023} from https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/data.asp.

Background

Washington is home to 544,290 Veterans, 60,699 Active Service Duty members, 17,941 guard and reserve service members and 2 million military and veteran family members. Family members who die by suicide are at higher risk of suicide themselves due to the experience of suicide loss. Research shows that, for every suicide that occurs, 135 people suffer from direct or indirect effects, which means Veteran suicides impact a community of 2.6 million people. Although Veterans themselves make up 7% of the Washington population, they account for 18% of total suicides. There is no one path to suicide, but life experiences and circumstances, culture, and health can play a major role in suicidal behavior. Military and Veteran culture includes stigma against help-seeking behavior and mental wellness, emphasis and reliance on group cohesion, and access, comfort, and familiarity with lethal means such as firearms.

Veteran Suicides Deaths in the U.S

Figure 1: Veteran Deaths in the U.S from (2016 -2020)



Source: 2022 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Report

The 2022 National Veteran Suicide Prevention report indicates that, last year, there were 6,146 instances of suicide among veterans in Washington, which is 5.2% fewer than the previous year. However, it is essential to note that the country has had an average of 6,378 veteran suicides per year for the past two decades, which means that last year's figures were lower than average. In the past 20 years, 2001 had the fewest veteran suicides with 6,001 deaths, while 2018 had the highest number of suicides with 6,796. The last five-year average of veteran suicides in the county is 6,542 meaning that 2020 saw a 6% drop in veteran suicide deaths when compared to the five-year average.

Veteran Suicide by Race in The United States

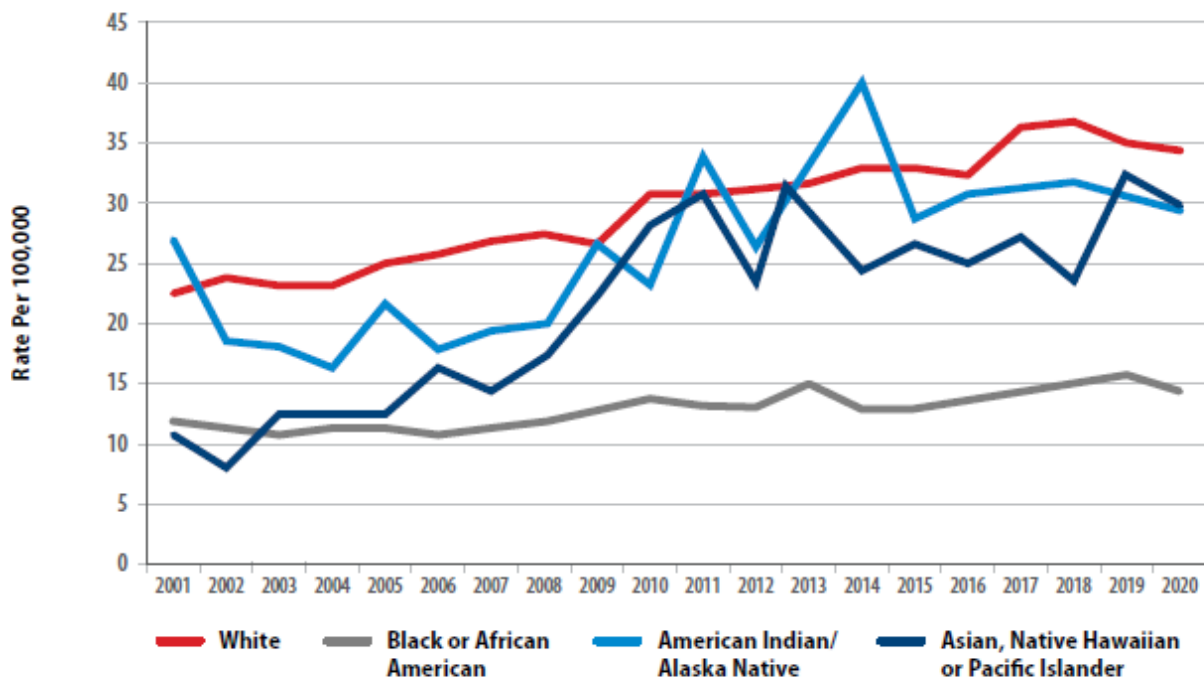
In 2020, the suicide rate was:

- 34.2 per 100,000 among White Veterans.
- 30.2 per 100,000 among Asian Veterans
- 29.8 per 100,000 among American Indians or Alaska Native Veterans.
- 14.2 per 100,000 among Black or African American Veterans.

In 2020, the suicide rate among White Veterans was more than twice the rate among Black or African American Veterans.

From 2019 to 2020, rates decreased for Veterans in each category.

Figure 2: Veteran Suicide rates per race in the U.S (2001 - 2020)



Source: 2022 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Report

Veteran Suicide by Sex

Table 1: Veteran Suicide by Sex (2016 – 2020)

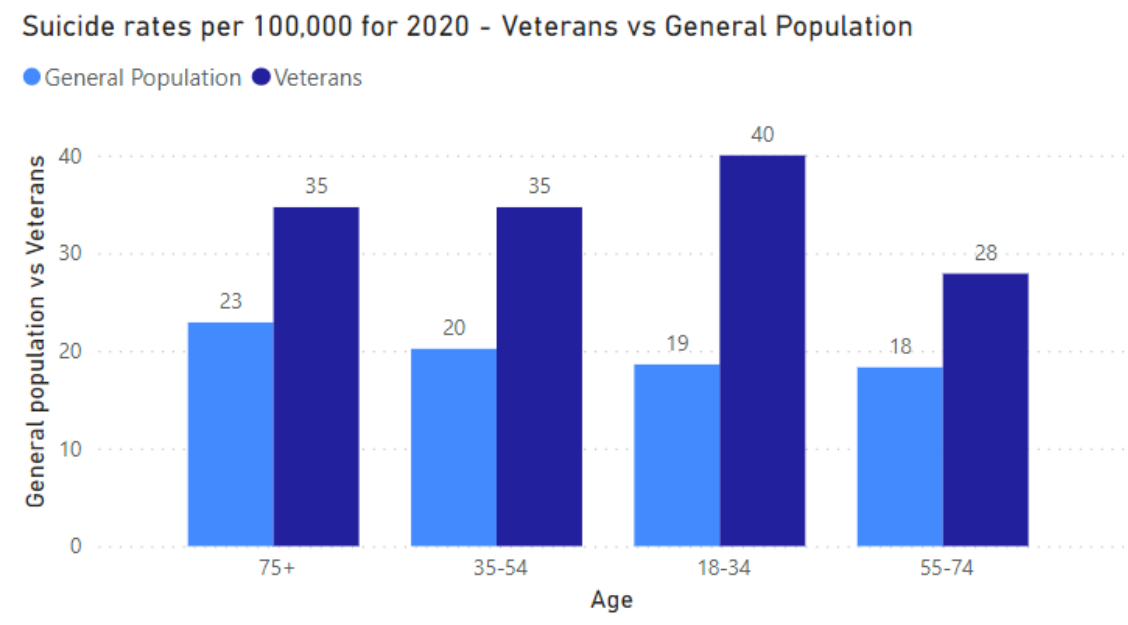
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Male	178	182	170 - 180	190	170 - 180
Female	10	17	<10	10	<10
Total	188	199	187	210	181

Source: 2022 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Report

The 2022 National Veteran Suicide Prevention report finds that most veteran suicides in Washington over the past five years have been male veterans. In 2020, out of the 181 veteran suicides, there were fewer than ten female deaths and 170 – 180 male deaths. Table 2 presents the number of suicides for Veteran men and Veteran women from 2016 to 2020. For Veteran women, the suicide rate has been ten or fewer for the past year except for 2017, which saw 17 Women Veteran suicides. For Veteran males, 2019 saw the highest suicide rates, where 210 Veterans lost their lives to suicide.

Veteran Suicide by Age

Figure 3: Suicide rate - Veterans vs General population



In the past five years, the suicide rate among veterans has been consistently higher than that of the general population in all age groups. From 2017 to 2020, veterans aged 18-34 had the highest suicide rate compared to other age groups. In 2020, this group had 40 suicide deaths per 100,000, while the general population had 19 deaths. In 2019, veterans aged 18-34 suffered 57 suicide deaths, while the general population had 18 deaths in the same age range. Among the age group of 35-54, there were 35 veteran suicide deaths in 2020 compared to 20 deaths in the general population. In 2019, there were 38 veteran suicide deaths and 22 general population suicide deaths in this age group. For those aged 55-74, there were 28 veteran suicide deaths and 18 general population suicide deaths in 2020, while in 2019, there were 30 veteran suicide deaths and 21 general population suicide deaths. For those aged 75 and above, there were 28 veteran suicide deaths and 18 general population suicide deaths in 2020, and in 2019, there were 30 veteran suicide deaths and 21 general population suicide deaths.

Veteran Suicides by Method

Table 2: Veteran suicide by method (2016 – 2020)

	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020	
	Veterans	General population	Veterans	General population	Veterans	General population	Veterans	General population	Veterans	General population
Suffocation	16.0	24.4	12.6	26.3	15.0	24.4	17.5	25.3	14.4	24.7
Poisoning	15.4	19.0	14.1	15.2	11.2	14.8	10.5	15.7	11.6	14.2
Firearms	59.6	45.6	68.3	49.9	64.2	48.6	66.0	50.7	66.3	51.4
Other Suicide	9.0	11.1	5.0	8.6	9.6	12.1	6.0	8.3	7.7	9.7

Source: 2022 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Report

As per the National Veteran Suicide Prevention report, in the last five years, a higher percentage of Veterans have chosen firearms as a means of suicide. Specifically, 60% of all Veteran suicides occurred using firearms. More recently, in 2020, 66.3% of Veteran suicide deaths involved firearms, and in 2019, 66% of Veteran suicides were by firearms.

Implementation of E2SHB1181

The legislature directed WDVA to establish a grant program that focuses on community-based services. This program aims to provide suicide prevention, peer support, and other assistance to military members, veterans, and their families at risk or in transition. The funds for the grant program will come from Veterans and Military Member Suicide Prevention Account. In addition, the legislation directed WDVA to work with the UW Forefront Suicide Prevention Center to create a process for receiving, reviewing, and awarding grants to organizations that address mental health crises of veterans, military members, and their families.

E2SHB 1181 directs WDVA to 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. Although sufficient funds are not available to allow WDVA to award grants to organizations, this report details some of the program's activities.

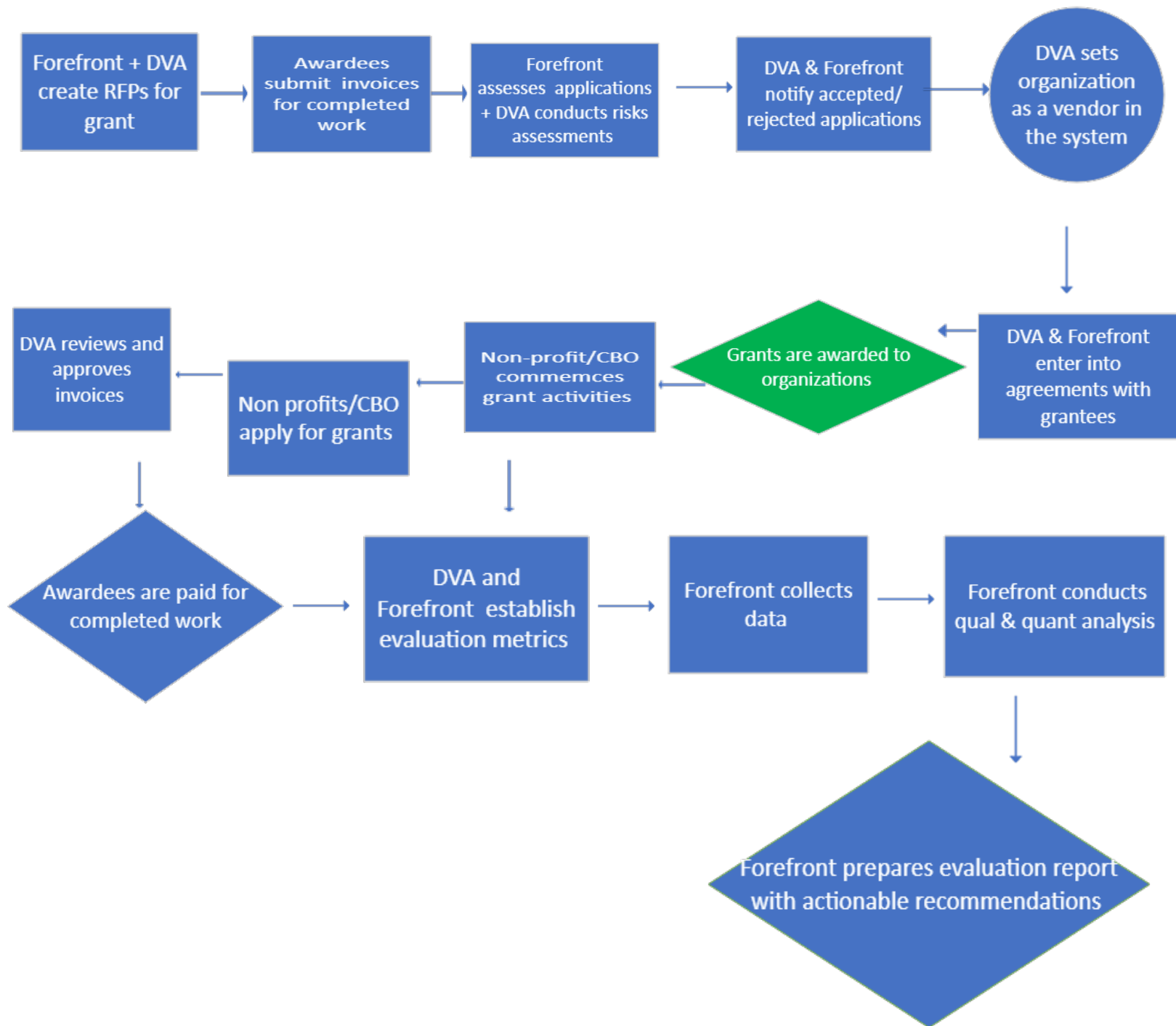
Some of the accomplishments of the grant program so far are:

- In consultation with stakeholders, WDVA established a process to receive and award grants.
- Conducted a needs assessment to understand the gaps and barriers veterans, military members, and their families face.
- Collaborated with other state agencies and veteran affairs departments across the county to learn processes and challenges VA offices face in implementing similar programs.
- Developed reporting templates for grants applicants for grant applicants to fill.
- Raised funds in the veteran suicide prevention account by advertising the suicide prevention emblem.

The Grant Process:

To establish a grant process for suicide prevention, the grant specialist consulted with the Suicide Prevention Grant Manager and the Forefront Suicide Prevention Center. The process has two components: the application process and the evaluation of activities. WDVA and Forefront will create "Request For Proposals" for the grant, and after non-profits apply, they will be assessed based on predetermined metrics. Once WDVA considers the applications, we will notify applicants, set them up in the system, and award grants. WDVA will also establish evaluation metrics to assess grant activities. Lastly, Forefront will present an evaluation report with actionable recommendations for improving the grant program.

Figure 4: Grant Process for the Veteran Suicide Prevention Grant Program



The Request for Proposal Process:

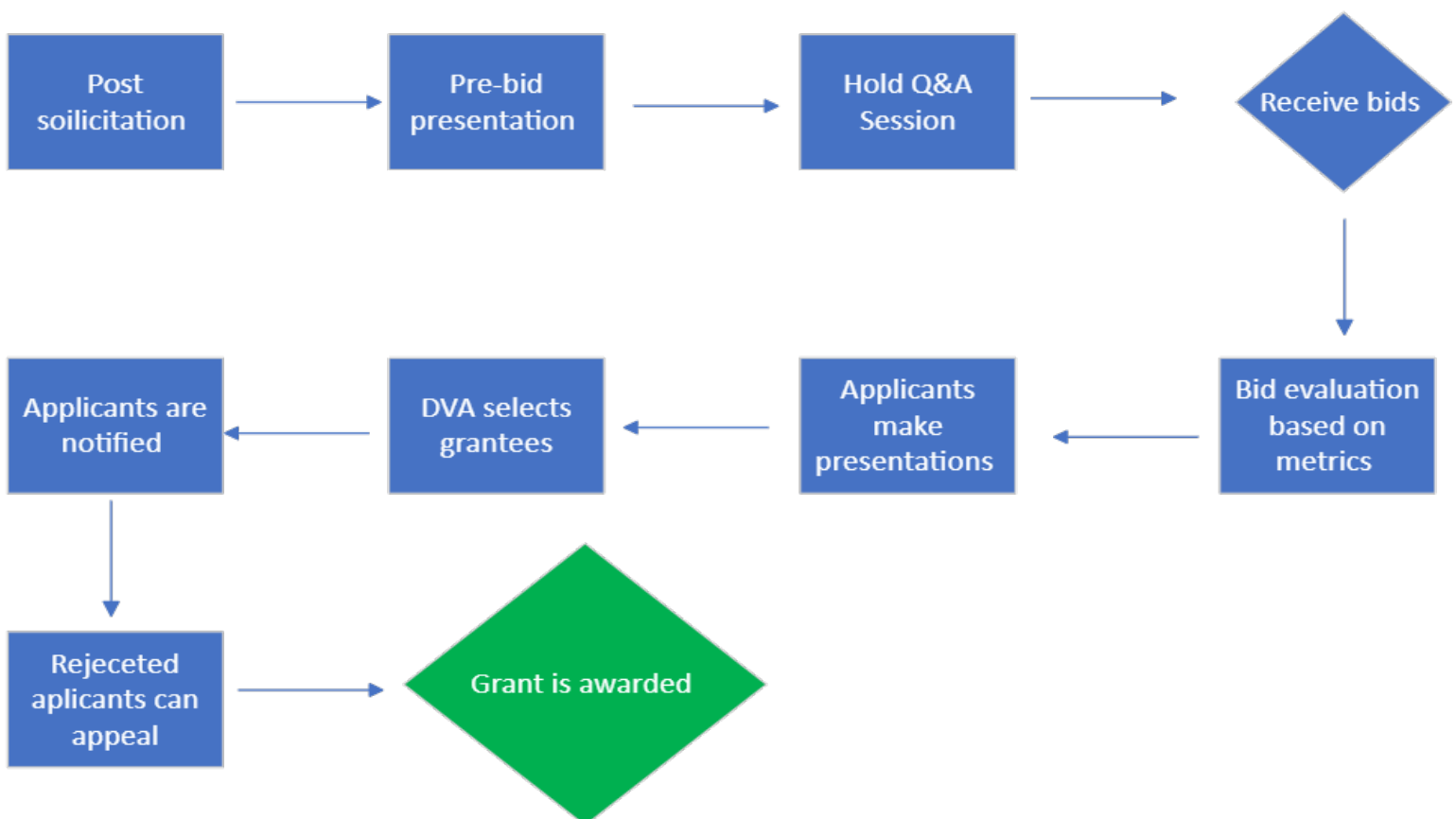
The WDVA Contracts Team collaborated with the grant specialist to create a 40-month RFP process with three main stages: solicitation, evaluation, and award.

The solicitation period spans 12 days and involves:

- Posting the RFP.
- Hosting a pre-bid conference.
- Facilitating a question-and-answer session.

The evaluation period takes 18 days, including a responsiveness check, oral presentations with applicants, and selection of top bidders. Finally, the award period is ten days long, allowing rejected applicants to protest and enabling WDVA to sign contracts with accepted applicants. Figure (7) provides a visualization of the RFP Process.

Figure 5: RFP process for the suicide prevention grant program

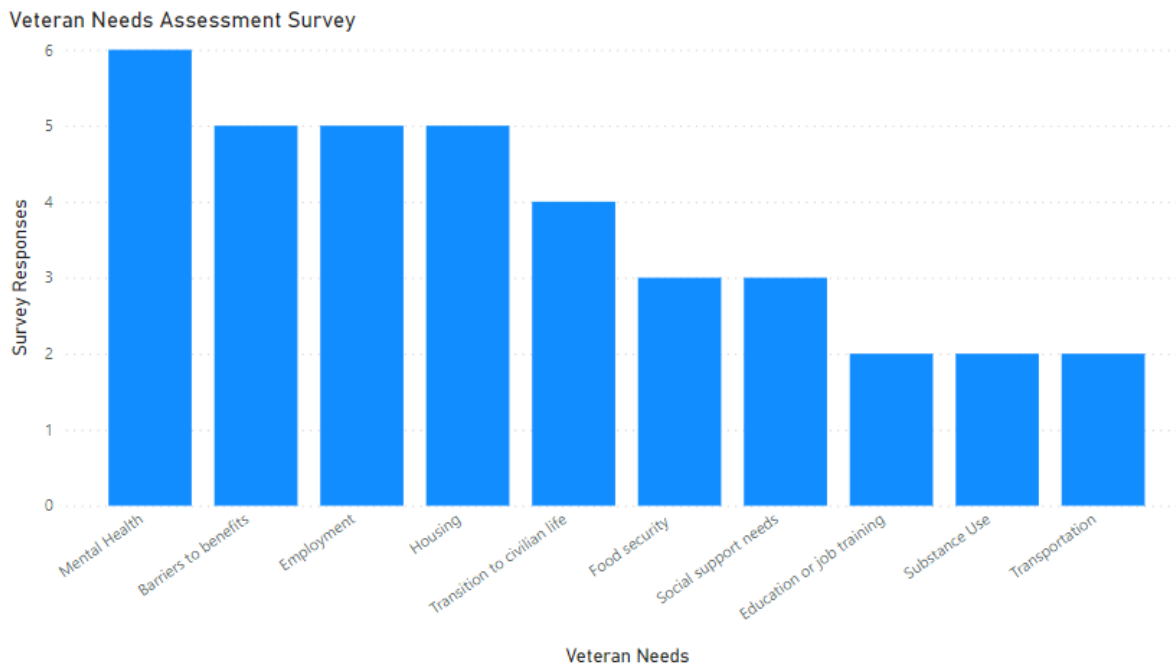


Veterans Needs Assessment

The Veteran needs assessment aims to learn about veterans' needs and gaps and use the funds from the Veteran Suicide Prevention Grant Program to address these needs. As of May 2023, the survey has had 10 responses. 40% of the respondents identified as Veterans, 30% as families of service members and 20% as individuals providing care to veterans. The needs assessment is comprised of an online survey with quantitative and qualitative questions. WDVA posted the questions on their social media accounts making it available to all members of the public. Appendix C provides a snapshot of the questions the survey asked.

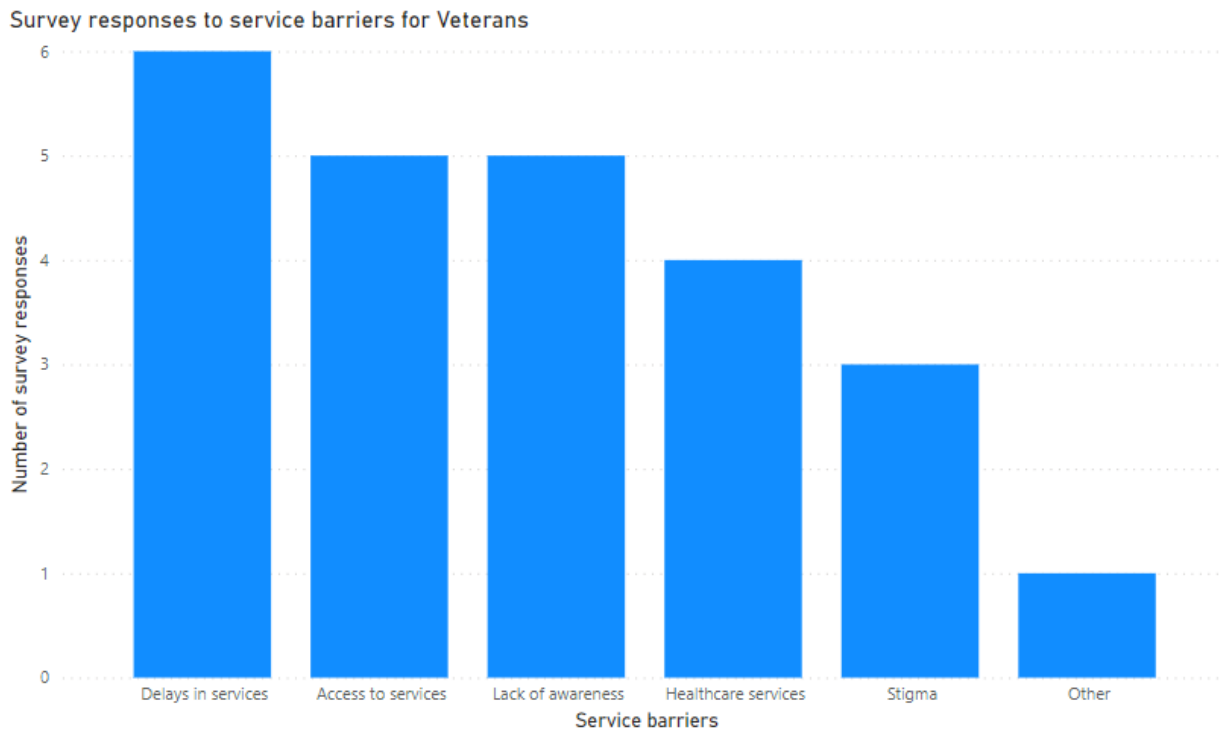
Figure 6 provides an illustration of what the respondents believe are the veteran areas of needs that require attention. According to the survey, mental health, employment, housing, and barriers to benefits were the most common needs for veterans.

Figure 6: Veteran Needs Assessment Survey



Additionally, as displayed in Figure 7, delays in services, lack of awareness and access to services were identified as common services barriers.

Figure 7: Survey responses of service barriers veterans face



Lastly, respondents also reported that the following resources will be helpful in providing quality care to service members, veterans, and their family members:

- Funding to support service projects.
- Networking events for veteran service organizations to coordinate services and enhance inter-organization communication.
- Apprenticeship opportunities.
- Access to resources, helping with barriers to resources.
- Financial assistance for veterans and their families, more staff to run programs such as the King County WDVA office.
- Higher salaries for WDVA employees who are on the frontline.
- Grants to provide resources to rural areas.
- Culturally responsive trauma informed arts activities.
- Providing mental health and trauma-informed care services specifically tailored to the needs of Black and Indigenous communities.

The Veteran Suicide Prevention Emblem

- In October 2022, WDVA created a donation form to accompany Concealed Pistol License (CPL) applications and firearm background checks.
- WDVA worked collaboratively with the Washington Association of Sheriffs & Police Chiefs (WASPC) to distribute these forms to law enforcement agencies and federal firearm dealers across the state,
- In November 2022, WDVA held a license plate emblem unveiling event.
- The program manager collaborated with the WDVA communications team and The Washington Department of Licensing to advertise the emblem across the State.
- In May 2023, the grant specialist raised awareness on the grant program and the emblem by presenting at a Department of Licensing conference.
- As of June 2023, WDVA has distributed over 400 posters (1 per DoL licensing office) and 11,000 postcards (50 per DoL licensing office) to raise awareness and promote the emblem. Other advertising efforts include:
 - Placing fence banners on Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM)
 - Digital advertising on JBLM
 - Bi-monthly social media posts in collaboration with DoL

Funding

The Veteran Suicide Prevention Emblem costs \$18 out of which \$10 will go towards the Veteran suicide prevention grant program. As of May 2023, Washington Department of Licensing has sold 225 emblems, raising over \$2,000 dollars in the Veteran Suicide Prevention Account. WDVA, collaborated with the Department of Licensing created a donation form for the Veteran Suicide Prevention Account which is attached to the concealed pistol license and background applications. WDVA's outreach and engagement efforts resulted in private donations from organizations such as: Washington State Independent Auto Dealers Association who donated \$ 1500 and The Vietnam Veterans / Legacy Veterans Motorcycle Club who donated \$ 890.

Table 3: Veteran Suicide Prevention Account balance - May 2023 (does not include \$1,500 received in June 2023)

Source	Amount
Sale of emblem	\$2,250.00
Donations	\$890.00
Total	\$ 3,140.00

Figure 8: Sample of the Veteran Suicide Prevention License Plate



Next Steps for the grant program

Advertising the emblem:

WDVA will keep promoting the suicide prevention emblem and collecting donations for the account. Moreover, WDVA actively seeks opportunities to engage with the community and spread awareness about the suicide prevention emblem, account, and grant program.

Community Advisory Committee:

WDVA is forming a community advisory committee made up of subject matter experts and members of the public. The committee's purpose is to assist in evaluating grant applicants and improving the program. They offer valuable feedback on applicants, advocate for the needs of Service Members, Veterans and their Families, and suggest ways to make the program equitable and inclusive for vulnerable veterans.

Creating the grants

Finally, in FY 2023-2024, WDVA intends to release RFPs. As directed by the state legislature, WDVA will allocate funds to organizations implementing peer support models based on evidence-based, research-based, or promoting practices.

Summary

According to the 2022 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report, 6,146 veterans took their own lives in 2020. This averages out to 16.8 suicides per day or one every 85 minutes. To address this crisis, the state legislature passed a bill creating a suicide prevention emblem that includes the 988 hotline and a message of hope. Sales of the emblem support the veteran suicide prevention grant program, which is measured by the number of recipients, the number of veterans served, and the types of services provided. Although the grant program is inactive as of May 2023, this report details its accomplishments and activities.

Appendix – A: Key Terms

SMVF – Service Member, Veteran, and/or Family Member

Veteran – Anyone who has ever served in the Armed forces

Service Member – a military member, whether active duty, reserve, or National Guard

Military Family – a family member of a service member who may be impacted by military culture

WDVA – Washington Department of Veterans Affairs

PTSD – Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Lethal Means – objects that can be used to engage in suicidal self-directed violence

RFP – Request for Proposals

CPL – Concealed Pistol License

DoL – Department of Licensing

JBLM – Joint Base Lewis McChord

Appendix – B: References

1. 2022 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Report
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Mental Health, and Suicide Prevention. 2022 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report. 2022. Retrieved {May 25,2023} from https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/data.asp.
2. Supporting United States Veterans: A Review of Veteran-Focused Needs Assessments from 2008 – 2017
Perkins, D. F., Aronson, K. R., & Olson, J. R. (2017, November). Supporting United States Veterans: A review of veteran-focused needs assessments from 2008-2017. University Park, PA: Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State.

Appendix – C: Suicide Prevention Emblem Poster



**WASHINGTON STATE
DEPARTMENT OF
VETERANS
AFFAIRS** "Serving Those Who Served"

**BE A SIGN OF HOPE FOR
ALL THOSE IN NEED!**

988 LIFELINE | THERE IS HOPE!

*Become an ally in the fight against suicide by purchasing
a new suicide prevention license plate emblem for only \$18!*

***Proceeds of each sale
will go to providing
community-based
suicide prevention
services for Veterans.***

**Ask for an application
today!**

Questions About How WDVA Serves Veterans?
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**988
SUICIDE
& CRISIS
LIFELINE**



The Veteran Suicide Prevention Grant - Community Needs Assessment List

This form aims to learn about veterans' needs and gaps and use the funds from the Veteran Suicide Prevention Grant Program to address these needs.

Note: None of the questions in this form are mandatory. If you are uncomfortable answering any question, please skip to the next one.
Responses may be subject to public disclosure.

* Required

1. What is your name?

2. Would you or your organization be interested in joining a Veteran - Community coalition to improve access and choice for Veterans and their caregivers? *

Yes

No

3. Please leave your contact information (phone number or email address) below if you answered yes to the previous question.

4. Which of the following best describes you?

Service member, Veteran, or their families

Non-profit/Business/Community partner/Individual providing care to veterans

5. Which of the following best describes you:

- Active Service Member
- Veteran
- Family of service members or veterans
- Community partner
- Individual providing care to veterans
- Other

6. which of the following best describes your age?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 65+
- Prefer not to say

7. Which of the following most closely describes your gender

- Woman
- Man
- Non-binary
- Transgendered Man
- Transgendered Woman
- Prefer not to say
- Other

8. Which of the following veteran areas of needs do you think require attention?
(Please select all the options you think are applicable)

- Mental Health
- Employment
- Housing
- Barriers to benefits
- Transportation
- Physical health
- Finances
- Social support needs
- Transition to civilian life
- Substance Use
- Food security
- Education or job training
- Other

9. Please elaborate on the option/options you selected in the previous question

10. Which of the following do you think are common service barriers the veteran population face? (Please select all the options you think are applicable)

Access to services

Lack of awareness

Stigma

Healthcare services

Delays in services

Other

11. Please elaborate on the option/options you selected in the previous question

12. What is the name of your organization and what is your role within it?

13. What kind of services/care do you provide to veterans?

14. In your opinion, what specific resources would be helpful to you in providing quality care for Veterans in your area?

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