



Washington State
Department of
Veterans Affairs

Suicide Prevention
Program

Some of the information we'll cover today may feel overwhelming or remind you of a loss you've experienced. Please take care of yourselves first and feel free to step away if needed.



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"Serving Those Who Served"



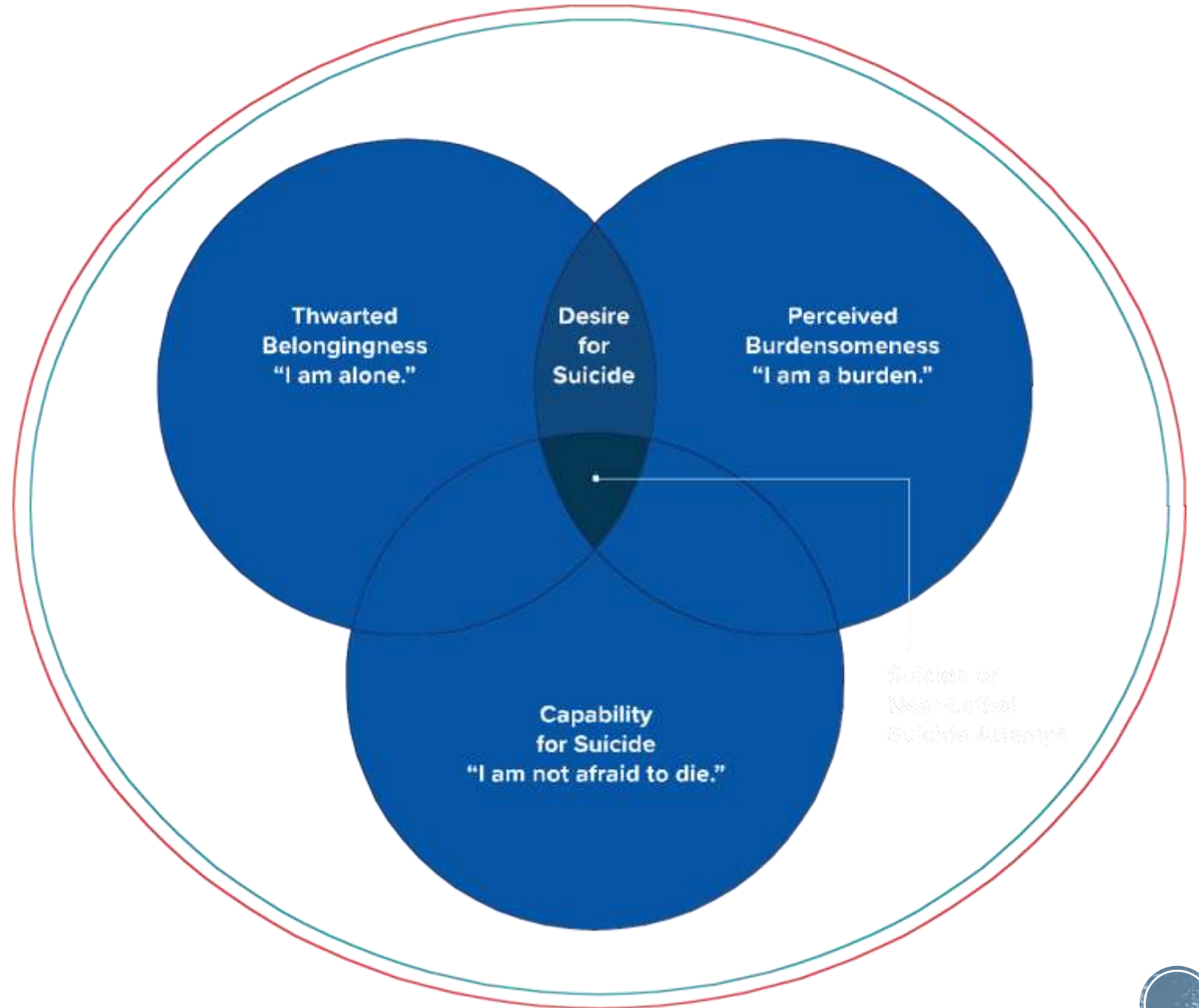
Veteran Suicide in Washington

- 7% of the population; represent 18% of suicides
- 709 Veterans have died by suicide in Washington over the last 3 years
 - 221 Veterans in 2020
- Roughly two-thirds of decedents had not enrolled VHA healthcare
 - Nationally, between 2017 and 2018, the suicide rate among Veterans with recent VHA use decreased by 2.4%, while among Veterans who did not use VHA care the rate increased by 2.5%
- Life circumstances at the time of death were:
 - 19-34 - intimate partner crisis/problems
 - 35-64 - job/financial problems & mental health or substance use history
 - 65+ - physical health problems
- More than two-thirds of Veterans who died by suicide in Washington used a firearm



Thomas Joiner's Interpersonal Theory of Suicide

Risk and Protective Factors



Governor's Challenge Overview



Goal: Eliminate suicide by using a comprehensive public health approach to suicide prevention

- Partnership between VA and HHS Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).
- The teams include collaborative groups of community, municipal, military, Veteran, and other stakeholders.
- VA and SAMHSA provide technical assistance to support local efforts, document outcomes, and share strategies with other municipalities.



Public Health Strategy



- VA's public health strategy combines partnerships with communities to implement tailored, local prevention plans while also focusing on evidence based clinical strategies for intervention. Our approach focuses on both what we can do now, in the short term, and over the long term, to implement VA's [National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide](#).

Focused Priority Areas Across CBI-SP Unifying Model



Identify Service Members, Veterans, and their Families and Screen for Suicide Risk



Promote Connectedness and Improve Care Transitions



Increase Lethal Means Safety and Safety Planning

Governor's Challenge Overview

- In February 2019, seven state leaders kicked off the Governor's Challenge to create plans to implement the [National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide](#), which provides a framework for identifying priorities, organizing efforts and contributing to a national focus on Veteran suicide prevention.
- States worked to identify their top priorities, best strategies, lessons to take back home, outline technical assistance needed, and efforts they will use to evaluate their outcomes and performance.
 - Not one plan will fit every state, so strategies vary across states.
- To date, the teams have participated in a policy academies, implementation academies, site visits to revisit objectives, and even attended other states' sessions for consultation.

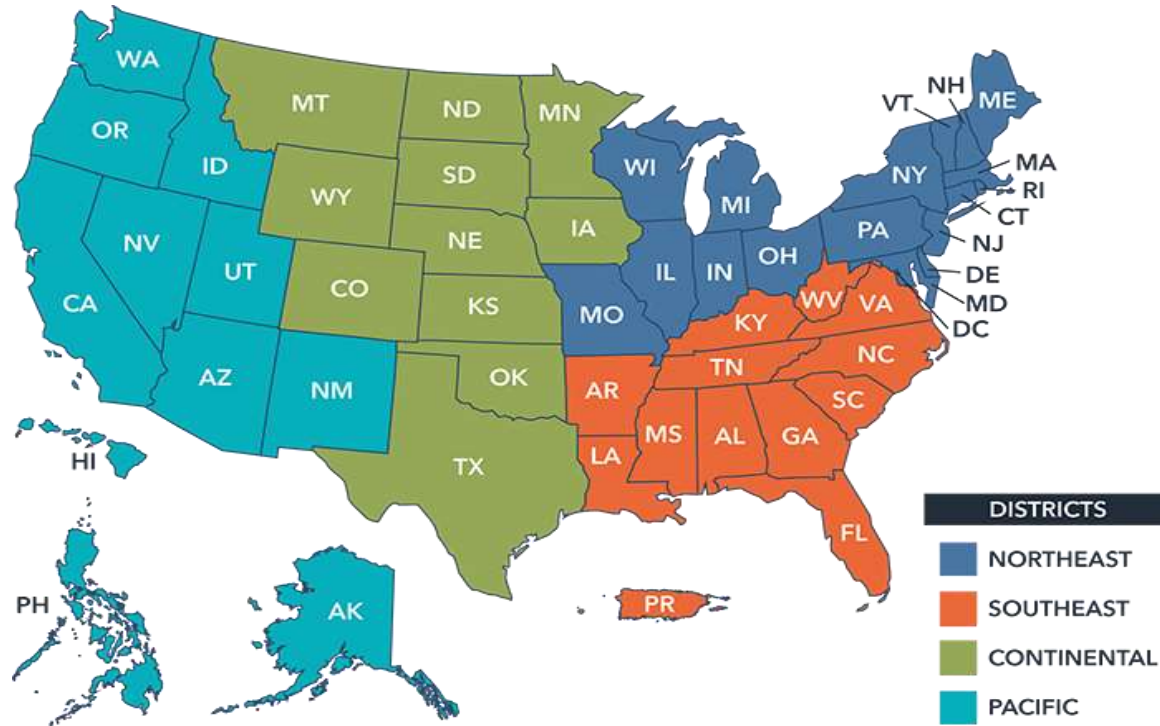
Objectives

- Convene a state (Governor's Challenge) or city/community (Mayor's Challenge) interagency military and civilian team of leaders to develop an implementation plan to prevent suicide among SMVF that will advance the VA's [*National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide \(PDF | 2.9 MB\)*](#) and incorporate evidence-based strategies from the CDC's [*Preventing Suicide: A Technical Package of Policy, Programs, and Practices \(PDF | 6.3 MB\)*](#).
- Engage with city, county, and state stakeholders to enhance and align local and state-wide suicide prevention efforts.
- Understand the issues surrounding suicide prevention for SMVF.
- Increase knowledge about the challenges and lessons learned in implementing best policies and practices by using state-to-state and community-to-community sharing.
- Implement promising, best, and evidence-based practices to prevent and reduce suicide at the local level.
- Define and measure success, including defining assignments, deadlines, and measurable outcomes to be reported.



2018/2019

Arizona
Kansas
Montana
Virginia
New Hampshire
Texas
Colorado



2020/2021

Utah
Wyoming
Missouri
Louisiana
Massachusetts
Arkansas
New Jersey
Mississippi

2019/2020

Pennsylvania	Kentucky
Minnesota	Georgia
Nevada	Illinois
Maryland	Florida
Rhode Island	New York
Oklahoma	Wisconsin
Washington	West Virginia
Alabama	North Carolina
Michigan	Ohio
Tennessee	South Carolina



2021/2022

Delaware	Hawaii
Maine	Alaska
Connecticut	Vermont
Indiana	North Dakota
Virgin Islands	Iowa
Puerto Rico	Nebraska
Guam	New Mexico
American Samoa	California



Team Composition

- A Team Leader, appointed by the Governor, who serves as the point of contact throughout the Policy Academy process, and throughout the process of implementing the action plan.
 - Leadership from SMVF Caregiver Organizations
 - Private sector provider and peer support leadership from programs serving the health and behavioral health needs of Service members, Veterans, and their families
 - Data and evaluation lead
 - Others with a vested interest and experience serving Veterans
- Senior level suicide prevention and behavioral health representatives from:
 - State agencies responsible for mental health, substance abuse (e.g., Single State Authority), and State Veterans Affairs
 - National Guard (i.e., The Adjutant General or his/her representative)
 - Medicaid and/or Social Security
 - Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) serving your state (Chief Mental Health Officer and/or VISN Suicide Prevention lead)



Outcomes

- A reduction in the occurrence of suicide among service members, veterans, and their families
- Increased access to services and support;
- Expansion of a state-wide capacity to engage SMVF in public and private services;
- Enhancement of provider and SMVF peer practices;
 - Implementing innovative best practices
 - Forming cross-system military and civilian consensus on priorities and plan for action
- Identification of critical data elements to measure impact and quality of care;
- Strengthened continuum of care
- Knowledge sharing of evidence-based practices, policies, and strategies that are effective across teams, systems, and silos.



Washington State SMVF Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan 21-23

Identify SMVF & Screen for Suicide Risk

- ✓ Goal 1: Culturally informed healthcare providers and community partners
- ✓ Goal 2: Screening in community healthcare
- ✓ Goal 3: Improved environment among SMVF for help-seeking, growth, & wellness

Promote Connectedness & Improve Care Transition

- ✓ Goal 4: Promote cultural competency trainings for direct service providers and frontline staff
- ✓ Goal 5: Increase and encourage SMVF to access community resources and enroll with VHA & VBA
- ✓ Goal 6: Sufficiently fund programs for community and non-profit programs that serve Veterans

Increase Lethal Means Safety & Safety Planning

- ✓ Goal 7: Increase public and policymaker awareness about lethal means
- ✓ Goal 8: Educate SMVF about firearm safety inclusive of lethal means safety
- ✓ Goal 9: Improve current Safety Planning Intervention (SPI) training among VA and community healthcare providers



Identify SMVF & Screen for Suicide Risk

Identify SMVF & Screen for Suicide Risk

- Military Cultural Competency
 - Identified curriculum (Psych Armor)
- Screening in the Community
 - MIRECC Suicide Risk Management Program
 - Survey with education (two populations or providers)
 - Ask the Question
 - 49% WA State LEO (as of Apr 2022)
 - Established interest and connections in Pierce, Thurston, King, and Kitsap County
- Improve Help-Seeking Behavior
 - National Guard social media
 - Governor's Challenge/Suicide Prevention Program Newsletter to engage rural communities
 - Rural Suicide Prevention Peer Specialist (FY23)



Promote Connectedness and Improve Care Transitions

- Veteran Ready Certification Program (Psych Armor)
 - Under contract to provide 300 seats to Swedish/Providence providers
- ETS Sponsorship Program
 - 50 sponsors have been certified
 - 7 transitioning Service Members connected
 - Automatic enrollment for transitioning Service Members
- Peer Support Programming Expansion
 - Lead Suicide Prevention Peer Specialist (WDVA)
 - 3 Suicide Prevention Peer Specialists (WDVA)
 - VISN-wide person to lead CEPCs (VA)
 - 4 Community Engagement Partnership Coordinators (VA)
 - Additional Rural Suicide Prevention Peer Specialist (WDVA - FY23)
- Resource Database and Web-Based Application
- Establish a grant program for community peer organizations

Promote Connectedness &
Improve Care Transition



Increase Lethal Means Safety & Safety Planning

Increase Lethal Means Safety and Safety Planning

- Be Sure of Your Target
 - WDVA Suicide Prevention Peer Specialists to collaborate with Forefront on FFL education
 - WDVA Vet Services lethal means brief
 - Improve education and behavior regarding lethal means safety
- FFL toolkit and online course
 - Available online
 - <https://saferhomescoalition.org/training/firearm-retailers-safety-instructors/>
- SAFER Structured Conversations
 - Disseminated through flyers for tele-SAFER conversations
- LEARN SAVES LIVES
 - WDVA Suicide Prevention Peer Specialists certified to provide training on demand
- Firearm Cultural Competency
 - Available on All Patients Safe
 - <https://www.apsafe.uw.edu/>



Recommendations/Needs Identified

Washington State Service Member, Veteran and Family Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan 2021-2023

Codie Marie Garza, MSPH

Suicide Prevention Coordinator

Counseling and Wellness Programs

Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs

December 2020

- ✓ Require health care providers to ask about military status and use standardized screening tool
- ✓ Establish a grant program for community-based non-profits serving transitioning and at-risk Veterans and their family members, prioritizing peer support models
- ✓ Build a database of non-profit organizations serving SMVF
- ✓ Implement sustainable funding for Veteran suicide prevention programming through voluntary contributions
- ✓ Reauthorize UW Safer Homes, Suicide Aware program and Safer Homes Task Force
- ✓ Support temporary transfer by waiving liability for FFLs and individuals accepting firearms in crisis
- ✓ Develop and implement cultural competency and moral injury trainings
- ✓ Establish public health campaign for identifying and screening SMVF for suicide risk
- ✓ Require the Governor's Challenge team to report back to legislature bi-annually to address progress on implementing the Statewide Plan



WDVA Suicide Prevention Team



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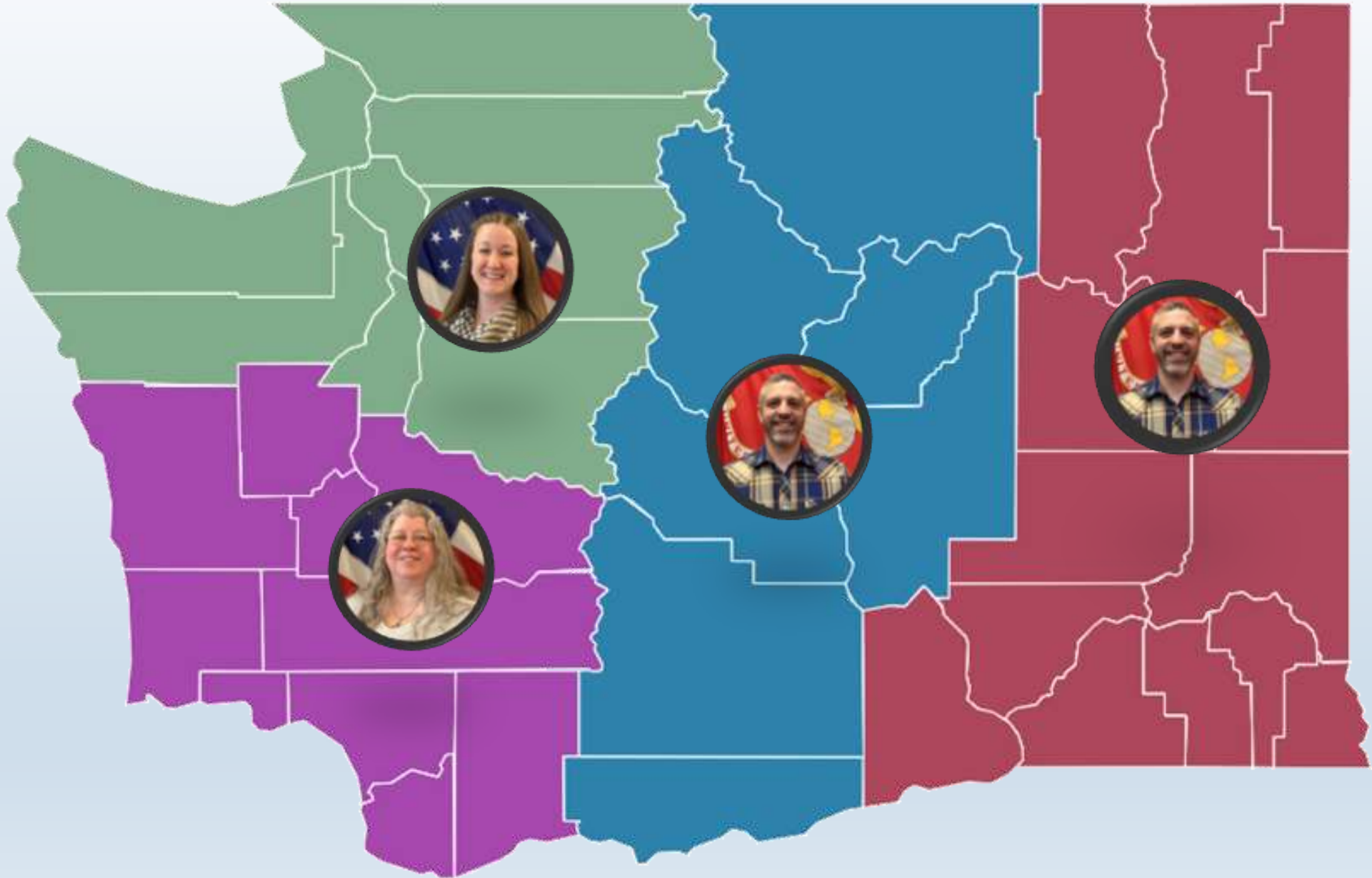


Connie O'Brien-Larsen
Suicide Prevention Peer
Specialist



Mike Badgley
Suicide Prevention Peer
Specialist





“Peer” Activities

- Suicide prevention & Military Culture training
 - LEARN
 - Veteran Cultural Engagement
- Crisis Response
- Suicide Prevention Webpage
- Resource Database/Web-based App
- Peer Services collaboration (VC/VPC)
 - VC Navigators
 - Certified Peer Counseling



Get connected by emailing: connect@dva.wa.gov

