

AMVETS Position Paper 2021  
Suicide Prevention among SMVF

**OBJECTIVE:** To maintain momentum on state-level efforts to prevent suicide among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF) in the Commonwealth of Virginia by hiring a dedicated veterans suicide prevention coordinator, creating a unified, cohesive system for current static data collection and analysis, and continuing efforts to build public awareness.

**BACKGROUND:**

- The Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (Governor's Challenge) has yielded success in coordinating the efforts of state, federal, and local government agencies, non-profits, and other partners to prevent suicide. To ensure that Virginia does not lose momentum in this area, a dedicated state SMVF prevention coordinator is essential;
- Virginia currently has a patchwork system of identifying current suicide data. Key priorities for the Governor's Challenge are to identify and screen for suicide risk. Virginia's Identify SMVF, Screen for Suicide Risk, and Refer for Services (VISR) pilot is yielding results, with further progress being made in this area, but more effort in this area is needed.
- Currently available suicide data has been produced by various resources at the National level and is several years old. This creates confusion as to the actual method /cause of suicides in the Commonwealth of Virginia. More timely information – from VISR and from state and federal resources, is needed.
- It can be difficult for members of the public (including members of Veterans Service Organizations – VSOs) to understand/assess the results of suicide prevention efforts. A publicly-reported/accessible means of assessing effectiveness of SMVF suicide-prevention efforts is warranted.
- Suicidal individuals are often hesitant to seek help and need help from someone trained in the basics of crisis management.
- Despite rising awareness of suicide among SMVF, more is needed in this area.

**DISCUSSION:**

- The Governor's Challenge team should promote a centralized data collection point and determine current lethal means of suicide among SMVF in Virginia.
- Additional data as to final outcome of the current suicide awareness campaign should be collected to help determine best practices of the current protocols.
- The Virginia Department of Veterans Services and the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental should collaborate to develop more effective protocol for suicide risk screening and delivery of life saving services for perceived suicidal individuals.
- VDVS and DBHDS should collaborate with other partners to develop an online training program to provide basic crisis skills and suicide risk screening to community services providers, Veterans Service Organizations, and other partners.
- A dedicated SMVF suicide prevention coordinator should be hired to accomplish these objectives.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the Governor and General Assembly approve funding and corresponding legislation to create a dedicated SMVF coordinator position in the Virginia Department of Veterans Services to continue to unify efforts in this area, to research, study and provide timely data on actual method/cause of suicides in the Commonwealth, to help roll out an online training tool for front-line providers, and to continue to build public awareness in this area.