

BVS POC REPORT

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH & REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

1. **Date of Report:** June 2023
2. **BVS POC(s):** David Ashe, Carlton Kent, Mike Cherry
3. **Service Area/Program:** Behavioral Health & Rehabilitative Services, Suicide Prevention
4. **VDVS Director/Program Manager:** Virginia Veteran and Family Support (VVFS) Director - Brandi Jancaitis, and Suicide Prevention and Opioid Addiction Services (SOS) Director – Dr. Angela Porter
5. **Mission of service area/program:**

The Virginia Veteran and Family Support Program (VVFS) is operated by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services and provides OUTREACH, CONNECTION and SUPPORT to Service Members, Veterans, caregivers, and family members as they address the challenges of military service, transition, deployments, Post Traumatic Stress, and other behavioral health concerns, as well as Traumatic Brain Injuries and other physical injuries. VVFS also provides housing/homeless, and justice services care coordination.

SERVICES THEY PROVIDE: VVFS provides peer and family support, care coordination, and resource linkages to Service members, veterans, and their families (SMVF). Referrals are coordinated with Community Services Boards, community nonprofits, brain injury service providers, VA medical facilities and other public and private agencies. VVFS also provides outreach and support to justice-involved service members and veterans interfacing with courts, diversion/veteran treatment docket programs, during incarceration in jails and prisons, and while on probation and/or parole supervision.

In July 2022, VVFS began to build a new Suicide Prevention and Opioid Addiction Services (SOS) subprogram. The 6 person SOS program designed the agency's first behavioral health grant program for community services providers and researchers. Through grant funds and ongoing coordination of the statewide Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide, SOS will build training and direct services capacity for suicide prevention and substance use disorders.

6. **Who does the service area/program serve?**

VVFS direct services - Veterans of any era (regardless of discharge status) who are Virginia residents; members of the Virginia National Guard and Armed Forces Reserves; transitioning service members, and family members/caregivers. VVFS staff work hard to

provide a "no wrong door approach", meaning if they can't provide that service within the program, they'll do their best to connect them to a resource/provider that can.

SOS grant program – grants are currently offered for community services providers, and public in or out of state higher education institutions (as long as the work benefits SMVF in the Commonwealth).

7. What are the service line's primary objectives?

VVFS provides care coordination, peer and family support services to Service Members, Veterans, and their families (SMVF).

VVFS facilitates access to behavioral health, rehabilitative, and supportive services at the Federal, State, and local levels for SMVF.

SOS aims to enhance understanding of suicide prevention and opioid addiction among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF) and build community support capacity to ensure the right help is widely available right now to military-connected citizens and families.

8. What are the key results that support the objectives?

In FY23 (thru May 2023), VVFS served an average of 322 total clients (new and existing clients) each week. Of these clients, 1,123 were new clients. This included connecting veterans and their family members for resources to approximately 2,523 service needs. These include housing needs (41%), behavioral health support (11%), benefits assistance (10%), employment (7%), and homeless assistance (9%).

In addition, VVFS provided 102 trainings (e.g. Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training, Military Cultural Competency, Crisis Intervention Training, Mental Health First Aid) to approximately 2,939 participants (community partners and providers).

9. What specific objectives has the service line established and what progress has the service line/program made toward achieving the objectives.

FY23 Data Overview (thru May 2023):

- 90% of all new VVFS clients will have a needs assessment completed in 7 days of initial client contact for the purpose of creating a coordinated resource plan **(95% out of 1,302)**
- 90% of veterans with a identified behavioral health need will be connected to an appropriate resource **(100% out of 218)**
- 90% of veterans experiencing literal homelessness will be connected to a shelter/housing resource **(98% out of 195)**
- VVFS and Benefits will screen 95% of new SMVF for suicide risk **(94% out of 17,733)**

10. What are some operational highlights from the past year?

VVFS expanded justice services in Northern Virginia and hired a second Veteran Justice Specialist (VJS) position in Northern Virginia to support outreach to local Veteran Treatment dockets (Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William) and jails. West, Central, and East regions have one VJS position.

Suicide Prevention – VVFS has been integral in training and supporting DVS Benefits staff in suicide screening efforts. Over a 1,000 veterans monthly are now being screened for suicide risk in VVFs and Benefits.

Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide (GCPS) – Nationwide Federal Call to Action from Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to implement a comprehensive public health approach to suicide prevention.

DVS/VVFS and DBHDS coordinate the Challenge activities including:

- Virginia's Identify, Screen, and Refer program
- Lock and Talk Virginia lethal means safety campaign
- Veterans Affairs, DVS, and local peer recovery support to enhance connectedness and care transitions.

11. What type of outreach did the service line conduct and what are the results?

VVFS continues outreaching to state and community partners and building resource connections to assist clients. The outreach consists of both in-person and virtual events as well as training on military culture and resources for veterans. VVFS also regularly participates in state workgroups for behavioral health and suicide prevention, housing/homelessness, peer support, and criminal justice.

12. What, if any, new initiatives / innovative solutions were launched during the past year?

For FY23, VVFS received new General Funds to hire a new Suicide Prevention Director who oversees new funding (\$5 million) to develop a Suicide and Opioid Addiction Prevention Program (now called SOS) within DVS/VVFS.

The new SOS team consists of the Director, three Grant Administrators, Procurement and Contracts Officer, and Suicide Prevention Coordinator.

SOS (Suicide Prevention and Opioid Addiction Services) Community and Research Grant Status Updates:

- **Request for Application (RFA 1)** – Community providers, closed 02/28/23 (18 grants awarded - \$1,885,000.00)
- **RFA 2** – Community providers, closed 03/31/23 (16 applications reviewed, finalizing 6 contracts)
 - 6 referred for review in RFA 3 (one review team)
- **RFA 3** – Community providers, will post for recruitment in July 3rd

- **MOA** – by way of a Research RFI, proposals due 06/02/23 (5 proposals under review, group consensus 6/23/23)

Another important highlight is the continued roll out of the new 988 crisis and suicide lifeline number. This replaced the previous suicide crisis hotlines and will streamline access to those needing behavioral health supports. The Veterans Affairs Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) has been combined with 9-8-8 (veterans can dial 1). Here's more information on the connection between 988 and the VCL <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/about/what-is-988>

13. What are the biggest challenges facing the service area / program at present?

Justice service needs – Veteran treatment dockets are expanding in Virginia (8 current dockets, growing to 10 with addition of Pulaski and Chesterfield).

Housing service needs - affordable housing continues to be a challenge as well as the impact on inflation to our clients. Statewide rents have increased on average about 15% and production issues have slowed the development of affordable housing. Stable housing is a key protective factor for behavioral health and in-turn suicide prevention.

VVFS has also experienced significant direct services staff turnover (~40% since 2020) due to competitive positions in other human services sectors (higher salary and telework eligibility).

14. How does delivering the service/program help Virginia's veterans?

VVFS helps Service Members, Veterans, and their families access care and support for behavioral health, rehabilitative, and supportive services needs. Often this can prevent a crisis and/or suicide. VVFS staff strive to help SMVF link to services and benefits in federal, state and local systems. In addition, leadership team members serve on statewide advisory committees (on justice, housing, peer support, behavioral health and suicide prevention services) and form strategic partnerships that enhance systems of care for SMVF.

15. By helping the veteran, how does it help the Commonwealth?

By helping the veteran, it helps the Commonwealth by continuing to ensure Virginia is the most military and veteran friendly state and provides comprehensive and wrap-around services for those residing in Virginia. Ready access to care and supportive services helps veterans and families Stay, Work, and Thrive in Virginia.

16. What strategic opportunities are there for the future?

Expanding Justice Services. VVFS would like to grow to 2 Veteran Justice Specialist positions in all regions – will need 3 new VJS positions (West, Central, and East regions) to continue to support outreach to Veteran Treatment dockets, and local and regional jails.

17. What else do you want the Board to know about this service area?

VVFS assists a range of veterans and their family members with complex needs including criminal justice involvement, caregiver support, homelessness and other housing issues, and behavioral health needs. VVFS staff are a crucial touchpoint and provide support to navigate through complex systems of care.

With the new \$5.1 million in general funds for Suicide Prevention and Opioid Addiction Services (SOS), DVS/VVFS received the largest general fund investment in veteran suicide prevention (at the state level) to date.

Prepared by:

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