

For Immediate Release

CONTACT: Jacob Dillon, Public Affairs Officer
EMAIL: Jacob.Dillon@va.gov
PHONE: 302-633-5389 | CELL: 302-299-3738
DATE: April 27, 2021

Ending Veteran Suicide in NJ and Keeping Our Veterans Alive

WILMINGTON, Del. — As part of the Governor's Challenge to end suicide among Veterans, the Wilmington Veterans Affairs Medical Center and the American Legion – Department of New Jersey are leading an effort to organize local Veteran service organizations, local, state and federal government agencies, law enforcement, faith-based organizations and other health care systems in New Jersey to develop strategies and programs to end Veteran suicide in New Jersey – *Keep Our Veterans Alive (KOVA)*.

The KOVA goal is to provide tools and coordinate resources to organizations to raise awareness, train and educate the community to combat Veteran suicide and save lives. Through this collaboration, KOVA worked with state leadership on a Governor's Challenge to bring state-level cohesion and legislation to better address Veteran suicide.

"Implementing the Governor's Challenge is an effective first step and demonstration of top-level New Jersey support. The goal of the Governor's Challenge is to eliminate Veteran suicide by using a comprehensive public health approach to suicide prevention," said Bob Looby, Chairman, American Legion – Department of New Jersey. "The objectives of the challenge include re-engaging the executive branch; public relations throughout state government; assigning a proactive and knowledgeable liaison; and endorsing all legislation pertaining to this and all Veteran-related subjects."

According to the [VA's Veteran Suicide Data and Reporting Mental Health](#), there were 370 Veteran suicides between 2014 and 2018 (2018 is the most recent data available). And in 2018, the New Jersey Veteran suicide rate was nearly seven points higher than the New Jersey non-Veteran suicide rate (17.4 vs. 10.9 per 100,000).

"Veteran mental health and suicide prevention are top priorities at VA," said Vince Kane, Director of Wilmington VA Medical Center (Wilmington VA provides health care services to New Jersey Veterans in Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland and Salem counties). "KOVA speaks to the partnership and community engagement needed to promote the health and well-being of Veterans and their families. Which is why this effort with three Veterans Affairs Medical Centers that service New Jersey (East Orange, Philadelphia and Wilmington), local Veteran service organizations, along with representatives from mental health and justice system agencies, is so important."

As part of this effort, Veterans of Foreign Wars – Department of New Jersey is conducting county-by-county member training and will engage with other Veteran service organizations and with local and public agencies to raise awareness and provide resources.

This is an enormous first step in an important mission to save the lives of those who fought to protect our homes and way of life, Kane and Looby said. It will take all of us together promoting treatment, housing, jobs and other supportive services to both prevent and end suicide among our nation's Veterans. It is these local partnerships that will *Get Together & Get It (KOVA) Done!*

KOVA Champions include, in no particular order:

- American Legion – Department of New Jersey
- Department of Veterans Affairs – East Orange, Philadelphia and Wilmington
- Veterans of Foreign Wars – Department of New Jersey
- Disabled American Veterans
- Jewish War Veterans of the United States

- Marine Corps League – Department of New Jersey
- NJ Reentry Corporation
- New Jersey Veterans Network
- Community Veterans Engagement Board of Southern New Jersey
- New Jersey State Patrol
- Catholic War Veterans
- Gloucester County Prosecutor

Veteran Crisis Line

If you are a Veteran or know a Veteran in crisis, the Veterans Crisis Line is a free, confidential resource that Veterans, their families, and their friends can access every day at any time. Call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net or text to 838255. Trained responders — some of them Veterans themselves — are ready to listen, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

###