

**“We found that suicide prevention starts while they’re still in (service). The biggest thing that causes these suicides is that they lose their belongingness when they get out of the service. If we eliminate the stressors before they happen, we may be able to reduce veteran suicide.”**

**Dave Conley**, American Legion Rider and member of Post 113 in Meridian, Idaho

## VETERAN SUPPORT

# Department of Idaho launches ‘One More Day’ program

“One more day.”

Dave Conley, an American Legion Rider and member of Lloyd E. Hutcheson Post 113 in Meridian, Idaho, hears those three words a lot when speaking with families who have lost a veteran to suicide. The conversations always center on a wish for more time to help their loved one through the feelings of hopelessness and despair.

“That became my mission in life, to give them that one more day,” Conley says.

A new program initiative by the American Legion Department of Idaho and American Legion Riders, “One More Day” aims to reduce the state’s veteran suicides by connecting Legionnaires certified in suicide intervention and prevention training with veterans identified as at-risk. When a 911 call is received, a Veteran Dispatch Team will be contacted and sent to the scene with law enforcement.

“We want as little time as possible between our notification and our arrival,” says Conley, vice chairman of the Department of Idaho’s One More Day Committee. “Our ultimate goal is to be his or her advocate. Our job is to get them through the night ... one more day. Then we turn them

over to a higher level of treatment,” whether that’s VA, counselors or the nearest mental health facility.

The program’s first phase includes:

- **Extensive volunteer training.** At least one Veteran Dispatch Team member will be certified in ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training). With the help of local VA suicide prevention counselors, that person will then train and certify American Legion team volunteers statewide. “We’re there for the veteran,” says Abe Abrahamson, Department of Idaho adjutant. “We’re here to get that veteran through that crisis and to the next step of help.”
- **Community buy-in.** The One More Day Committee is communicating with mayors, chiefs of police and sheriffs about the program, and how volunteers and officials can work together. Conley calls the buy-in “phenomenal.”
- **Access to bases.** Believing suicide prevention starts before a person leaves the military, the committee wants to make contact with servicemembers at Mountain Home Air Force Base and the Idaho Army and Air National Guard prior to their transition to civilian life, Conley says.

– Cameran Richardson



American Legion Family members participate in the Out of the Darkness Campus Walk at the University of Akron on April 28, 2019.

Photo by Schelly Stone



Photo courtesy American Legion Department of Wisconsin

## DEPARTMENT OF WISCONSIN USES VIRTUAL EVENT TO PROMOTE VETERAN SUICIDE AWARENESS

Walkers, runners and bikers from several states came together virtually on July 17 to support the Wisconsin American Legion’s Engage22 Suicide Awareness event.

“Some people don’t realize how real PTSD and TBI is,” says David Wischer, Department of Wisconsin commander. “The

only people who can really understand it is fellow veterans. We want to make the message clear that The American Legion is here to assist you. With suicide awareness, it’s forward together. When we were serving, that’s how we got things done. You couldn’t do it on your own.”

Whether they completed a 22-mile bike ride or a 2.2-mile run or walk, participants were encouraged to be creative and share their story through social media channels using the hashtags **#wilegion**, **#engage22** and **#22aday**.

Each participant paid a \$15 registration fee and received an Engage22 T-shirt. The event raised nearly \$5,000 for Department of Wisconsin programs that support veterans suicide awareness.

The idea behind the T-shirt is to generate conversations about veterans suicide awareness, Wischer says. “People will ask, ‘What is that shirt about?’ For people to be able to discuss it with one more person, we’re farther ahead than we were before. It may change somebody’s life, or a family. Our hope is one at a time.”