

# PA – Governor’s Challenge Team (GCT)

## Inputs

## Outputs

## Outcomes

### Activities

### Performance Metrics

### Short- and Mid-term

### Long Term

#### Suicide Mortality Review Board

SMR Committee Data Collection/Reporting Oversight

GCT SMR Board Annual Reporting to Governor’s Office

#### Priority Area 1

‘Ask the Question’ Initiative

#### Priority Area 2

Healthcare/BH Regional Communities of Practice (CoPs)

#### Priority Area 3

Plan. Pause. Protect. LMS Campaign

- Refine/implement SMR data collection and GCT reporting protocols
- Compile an annual SMR report with recommendations for the Governor’s Office

- Distribute ‘Ask the Question’ pocket cards at all levels
- Recruit agency champions for ‘Ask the Question’ campaign
- Develop policy to support ‘Ask the Question’ campaign implementation at state-agency level

- Recruit health/MH providers as members for regional CoPs
- Implement regional CoP meetings (2x/year/region)
- Develop education plan for regional Health/MH CoPs
- Develop and implement SMVF-centric trainings for providers

- Distribute toolkit and materials for LMS campaign
- Recruit state agencies and other stakeholders for the LMS campaign

- # and % of county SMR teams reporting to GCT
- # and % of county SMR teams with completed data collection and SMR protocols

- # and % of state agencies participating in ‘Ask the Question’ campaign
- # of pocket cards distributed
- Policy recommendations for ‘Ask the Question’ campaign

- # of regional CoP meetings held
- # and % of veterans and individuals in attendance at CoP meetings
- # and % of satisfactory CoP meeting evaluations
- # of SMVF-centric trainings developed
- # of SMVF-centric trainings provided
- # and % of satisfactory SMVF-centric training evaluations and passing (>80%) posttests

- # of gun safes/locks distributed
- # of LMS magnets/tags distributed
- # of safety plans completed
- # of LMS toolkits distributed and # of entities in receipt
- # and % of state agencies partnered on Plan. Pause. Protect. LMS campaign
- # of stakeholders involved in LMS campaign

- Increased # of counties with completed data collection and SMR protocols
- Increased # of counties reporting SMR data and recommendations to GCT

- Increased engagement of state agencies with ‘Ask the Question’ campaign
- Increased collaboration and integration among state agencies for ‘Ask the Question’ campaign

- Increased # of providers educated on SMVF
- Increased # of providers educated on ‘Ask the Question’ campaign
- Increased # of community providers connected to VA
- Increased awareness of SMVF needs and referral networks
- Increased # of providers educated on LMS campaign
- Increased engagement of Health/MH providers through CoPs

- Increased engagement of state agencies with LMS campaign
- Increased # of agencies and other stakeholders collaborating on LMS campaign
- Increased awareness and use of safety planning worksheets
- Increased awareness and implementation of safe storage practices

- Increased SMR activity and reporting statewide
- Adopted sustainable model for SMR team operations statewide, embedded with policy/legislation
- Improved policy recommendations based on SMR team findings

- Adopted policy by state agencies implementing mandatory Veteran status question as demographic variable

- Increased understanding of SMVF population and importance of ‘Ask the Question’ among Health/MH providers
- Increased knowledge of SMVF suicide risk and referral networks among Health/MH providers
- Increased knowledge of suicide risk, response skills, and trauma-informed care models among Health/MH providers

- LMS campaign implemented statewide with interagency support
- Increased understanding of LMS campaign objectives and use of campaign resources

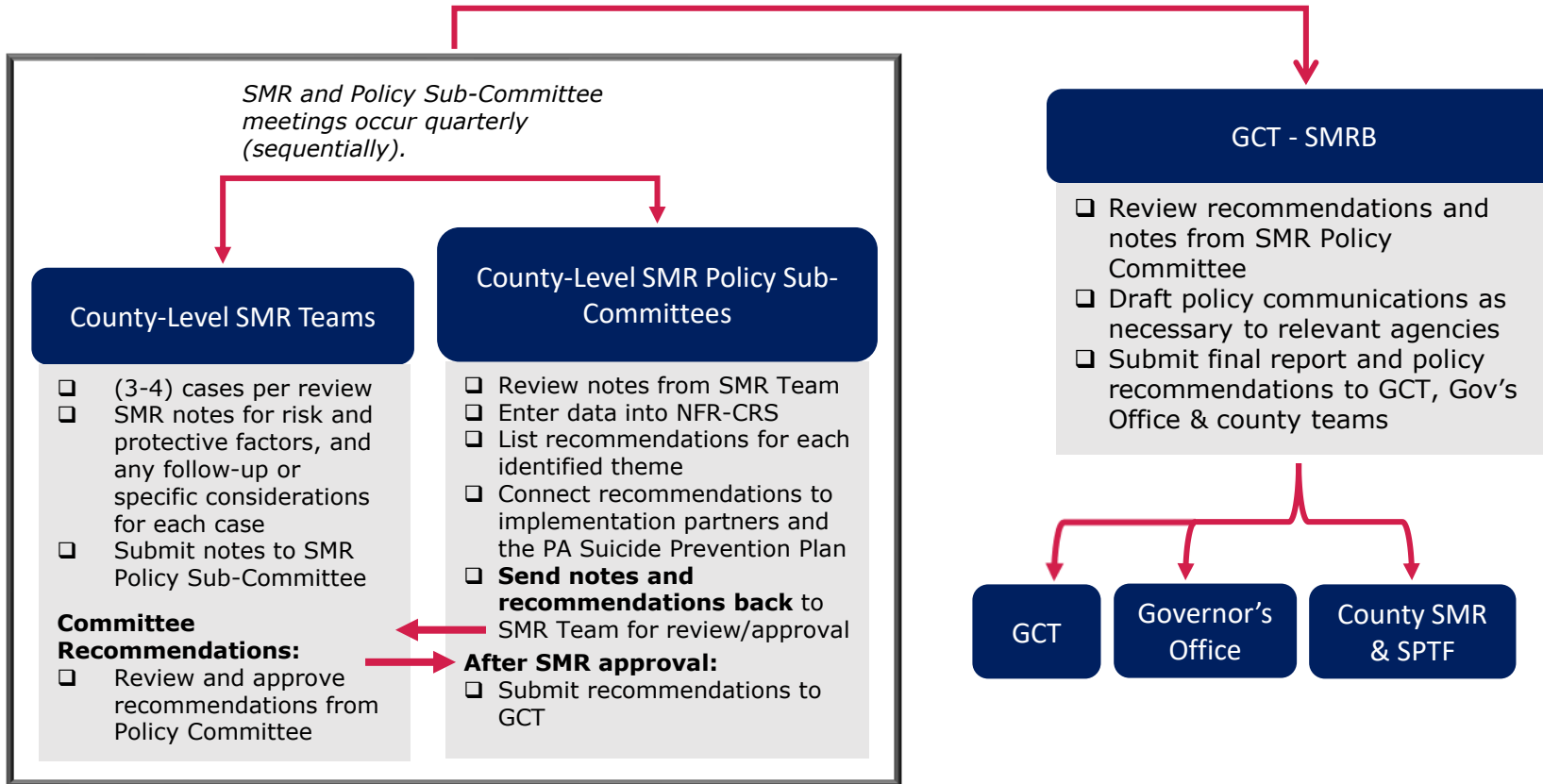
- Broader implementation of evidence-based suicide prevention strategies
- Reduced suicide rates in PA

# Suicide Mortality Review Board (SMRB)



Pennsylvania  
Department of Military  
and Veterans Affairs

*Governor's Challenge Team SMRB will receive County-Level SMR Policy Committee reports for review annually. The SMRB will prepare policy communications and submit a final report to the Governor annually.*



# Priority Area 1 Work Group



Pennsylvania  
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## 'Ask the Question' Initiative

**Goal:** To formalize Veteran Status as a standard demographic variable across PA state agencies.

**Concept:** Formalizing this change at the state-agency level will have a trickle-down effect to businesses, academia, local governments, and non-profit entities via state agency grant reporting, data reporting, and other partnership or reporting requirements (top-down approach).

**Strategy:** WG will leverage agency-level partnerships and legislative/policy actions to investigate and implement processes to formalize Veteran Status as a standard demographic variable.

**Membership Notes:** WG should include policy or executive-level staff from DOH, DMVA, the Office of Health Equity (OHE), and the AG's Office.

## Activities

- ❑ Distribute 'Ask the Question' pocket cards at all levels and thru other GCT work groups
- ❑ Recruit state agency champions for 'Ask the Question' initiative
- ❑ Develop policy to support 'Ask the Question' initiative implementation at state-agency level
- ❑ Work to pass legislation/policy to formalize

## GCT

- ❑ Regular updates on WG activities and progress
- ❑ Pocket card distribution tracking/reporting
- ❑ WG attendance reports

# Priority Area 2 Work Group



Pennsylvania  
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## Health/BH Regional CoPs

**Goal:** To develop regional Communities of Practice (CoP) among Health/BH providers, including VA.

**Concept:** By developing regional CoPs, we can help connect, educate, and support providers to better serve their SMVF patients, clients, and community members.

**Strategy:** WG will identify and develop training opportunities, educational resources, and networks that increase awareness and understanding of SMVF risks (health risks, SDOH, etc.) and opportunities (SMVF-specific services/resources, VA partnership, etc.). WG will collaborate with other WG's to distribute pocket cards/LMS materials thru CoPs.

**Membership Notes:** DMVA Comms Team member and staff from the regional VA Community Care Office.

## Activities

- ❑ Recruit health/MH providers as members for regional CoPs (*work with DMVA regional VETConnect staff*)
- ❑ Implement regional CoP meetings (2x/year/region) (*work with DMVA regional VETConnect staff*)
- ❑ Identify needs and develop education plan for regional Health/MH CoPs (*work with DMVA Veterans Programs staff*)
- ❑ Develop and implement SMVF-centric trainings for providers (*work with DMVA Veterans Programs staff*)
- ❑ Distribute 'Ask the Question' pocket cards and LMS resources thru CoPs

## GCT

- ❑ Regular updates on WG activities and progress
- ❑ Pocket card distribution tracking/reporting
- ❑ Training tracking/reporting
- ❑ WG attendance reports

# Priority Area 3 Work Group



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## Plan. Pause. Protect. LMS

**Goal:** To promote the Plan. Pause. Protect. LMS campaign across the Commonwealth.

**Concept:** By embedding MH components into firearm safety discussions and protocols, we will raise awareness of MH and suicide risk and provide resources for effective planning and safety considerations.

**Strategy:** WG will connect at the community level with groups/clubs, non-profits, businesses, etc. to educate on Plan. Pause. Protect. campaign. WG will distribute LMS resources at the community level.

**Membership Notes:** Involve gun shops, gun ranges, NSSF, Hold My Guns, CeaseFire PA, and SP/LMS staff from state agencies.

## Activities

- ❑ Distribute toolkit and materials for LMS campaign (*work with DMVA MH/BH SME, RPOCS, and Comms Team*)
- ❑ Recruit state agencies and other stakeholders for the LMS campaign (*work with DMVA MH/BH SME and Comms Team*)

## GCT

- ❑ Regular updates on WG activities and progress
- ❑ LMS resource distribution tracking/reporting
- ❑ WG attendance reports

> community > commonwealth > country

## Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale

Always ask questions 1 and 2.	Past Month	
1. Have you wished you were dead or wished you could go to sleep and not wake up?		
2. Have you actually had any thoughts about killing yourself?		
If YES to 2, ask questions 3, 4, 5, and 6. If NO to 2, skip to question 6.		
3. Have you been thinking about how you might do this?		
4. Have you had these thoughts and had some intention of acting on them?	High Risk	
5. Have you started to work out or worked out the details of how to kill yourself? Did you intend to carry out this plan?	High Risk	
Always ask question 6.	Life-time	Past 3 Months
6. Have you done anything, started to do anything, or prepared to do anything to end your life? If yes, was this within the past 3 months?		High Risk

\*For high rating refer to Call to Action on this card.



## Resources for Veterans & their Families

SCAN to find your nearest **VA Medical Center or Vet Center.**

SCAN to find your **PA VETConnect** contact. *They help you connect to resources that meet your needs.*

SCAN to learn more about **Pennsylvania Veterans benefits.**

SCAN to learn more about **Pennsylvania's 6 Veterans Homes.**

SCAN to learn about the **Veterans Crisis Line (VCL)**. Or use the following information to connect with a VCL responder anytime day or night:

- Call 988 and select 1.
- Text 838255.
- For TTY, call 711, then 988.



## PA Veterans Services Officers

Veterans Service Officers (VSOs) are available to help ALL Veterans and are accredited experts in VA benefits. VSOs can legally represent Veterans, dependents and survivors before the VA.

SCAN to find a **Veteran Service Officer** near you.

SCAN to contact your **County Director of Veterans Affairs.**

SCAN to contact your nearest **American Legion Post.**

SCAN to contact your nearest **Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post.**

SCAN to contact your nearest **Disabled Veterans of America (DAV) Office.**

SCAN to contact your nearest **AMVETS Office.**

## Ask the Question



### HAVE YOU OR A LOVED ONE EVER SERVED IN THE U.S. ARMED FORCES?

- When did you serve? Which branch?
- What did you do while in the military?
- Did you ever serve in a hostile/combat zone?
- Did you experience enemy fire, see combat, or witness casualties?
- Were you wounded, injured, or hospitalized?
- Did you participate in any experimental projects or tests?
- Were you exposed to noise, chemicals, gases, demolition of munitions, pesticides, or other hazardous substances?

If exposure or health risk is identified, use this guide to refer/connect the Veteran to available resources.



## Other Areas of Concern

- Blast Concussions/Traumatic Brain Injury**
- During your service, did you experience: heavy artillery fire, vehicular or aircraft accidents, explosions, or fragment of bullet wounds above the shoulders?
  - If yes, did you experience any loss of consciousness, being dazed, seeing stars, not remembering the event, or diagnosis of concussion or head injury?
- Military Sexual Trauma**
- During military service did you receive unwanted sexual attention like touching, pressure for sexual favors or remarks?
  - Did anyone ever use force or threat of force to have sexual contact with you against your will?
- Post-Traumatic Stress**
- Have you ever experienced a traumatic or stressful event which caused you to believe your life or the lives of those around you were in danger?
  - If yes, do you experience nightmares, vivid memories or flashbacks of the event?
  - Do you feel anxious, jittery, watchful, easily startled or a sense of panic that something bad is about to happen?
- Additional Questions**
- Are you enrolled in the Veterans Healthcare Administration?
    - Enrollment: toll-free (877) 222-8387
  - Do you have a service-connected disability or condition?
  - Do you have a safe place to go when you leave today?
  - Have you experienced discrimination because of your personal identity or military service?

## Identified Military Exposures

- Airborne Hazards & Burn Pit Exposures** (Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan): High levels of particulate matter associated with burn pits. Early symptoms often misdiagnosed as allergies, flu or colds.
- Agent Orange Exposure** (Vietnam): Tactical herbicide used to control vegetation in and around Vietnam with many associated presumptive conditions.
- Camp Lejeune Water Contamination** (Jacksonville, NC from 1957 to 1987): Stationed veterans and families exposed to chemical contaminants in the groundwater at risk for health conditions.
- Depleted Uranium** (Gulf Wars, Bosnia, Afghanistan): Inhaled or ingested microfine particles. Risk of respiratory and kidney disease.
- Gulf War - Global War on Terror** (August 1990 to present): Environmental, chemical hazards carrying health risk including respiratory conditions.
- Infectious Diseases** (Iraq, Afghanistan): Malaria, typhoid fever, viral hepatitis, leishmaniasis, tuberculosis, rabies.
- Noise Exposure** (All Eras): Harmful noise experienced during military service in combat, training, and general job duties.

### Environmental Exposure App Available

This comprehensive app helps veterans and healthcare professionals identify possible military-related environmental exposures during time in service.

## Veteran and Military Families

**VA Caregiver Support Program**  
<https://www.caregiver.va.gov/>

*Offers well-being and clinical services to caregivers of eligible and covered veterans enrolled in the VA System.*

**Questions for Families**

- Are you a part-time or full-time caregiver?
- Do you need assistance connecting to additional government or community-based resources?
- Do you have children? Do they need extra services or support?

**Additional Areas of Concerns**

- Seeking information for cancer support
- Struggling with housing
- Substance use and recovery support
- Building Family Resilience
- Engage with required resources
- Develop and share knowledge
- Positive and emotionally-safe family environment
- Maintain a vision of hope and optimism

**VA App Store**  
[mobile.va.gov/Appstore](https://mobile.va.gov/Appstore)

VA apps are available on the VA App Store through your desktop or mobile browser, on the Apple App Store or Google Play.

## Suicide Prevention

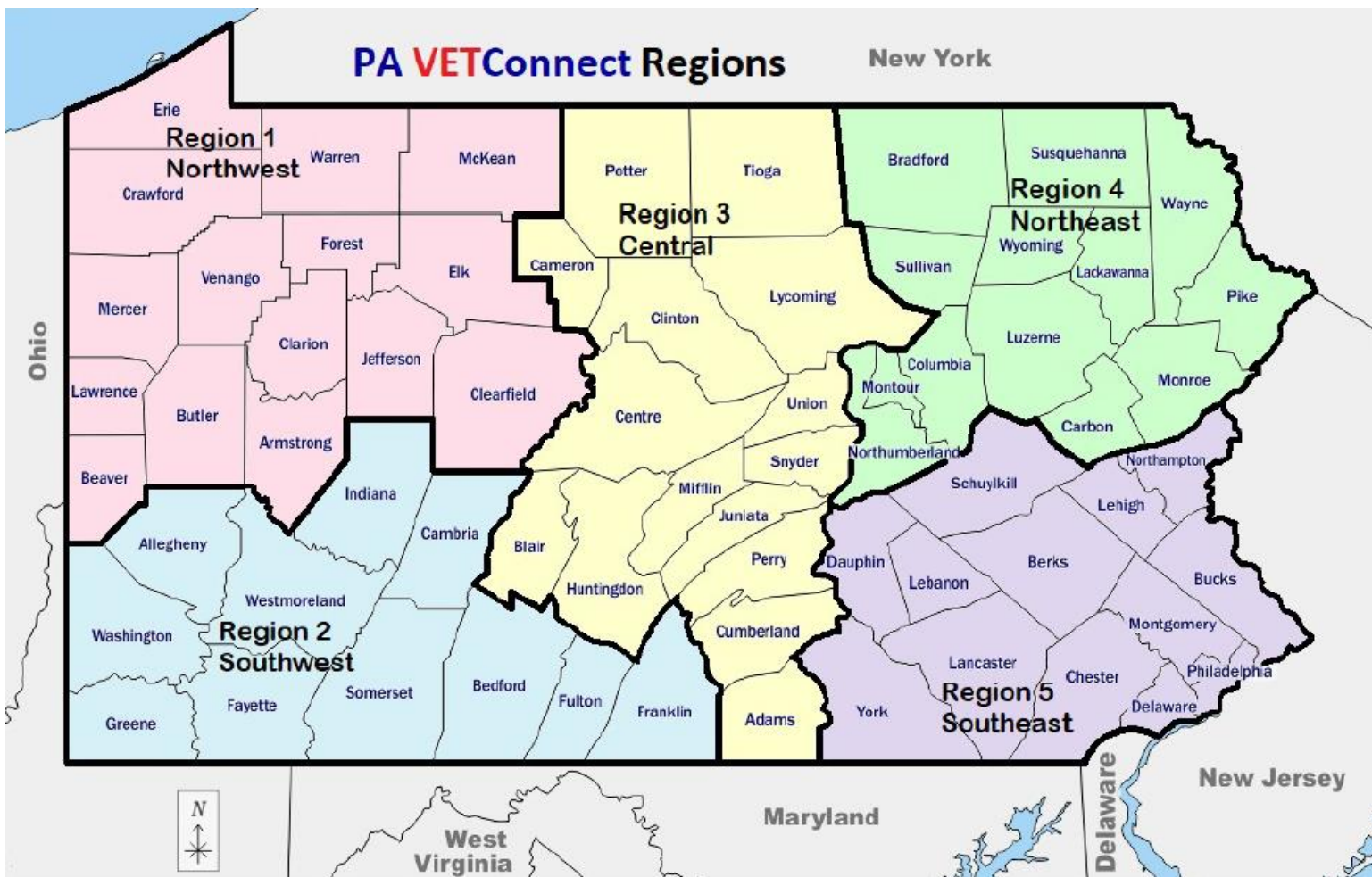
- Certain observable cues (affective and behavioral) should prompt you to remain alert to the possible presence of suicidal ideation. Protective factors play a critical role in prevention.
- Risk Factors**
- Previous suicide attempt
  - Feelings of hopelessness
  - Financial hardship
  - Mental and physical health conditions
  - History of abuse
  - Withdrawing from loved ones
  - Access to lethal means
  - Alcohol/substance use disorder
  - Transitions (separation from military service, employment, relationships, etc.)
- Protective Factors**
- Connectedness to individuals, family, and community
  - Coping skills
  - Cultural, religious, or personal beliefs that discourage suicide
  - Effective behavioral healthcare
  - Feelings of hope
  - Limited access to lethal means
  - Problem solving skills
  - Safety plan
  - Self-esteem
  - Sense of purpose or meaning

### Call to Action

See the Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale on backside of pocket card.

If YES to 2 or 3, seek behavioral healthcare for further evaluation. If the answer to 4, 5, or 6 is YES, get immediate help: Call or text 988, call 911, or go to the emergency room. **STAY WITH THEM** until they can be evaluated.

'Ask the Question' Pocket Card



### Pennsylvania VAMCs

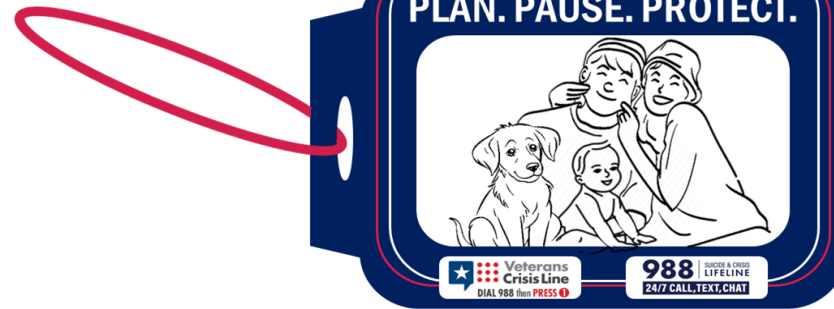
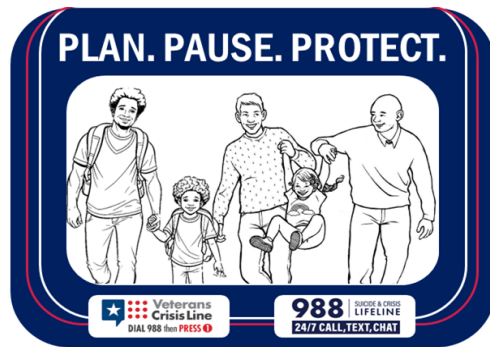
- ❑ James E. Van Zandt VAMC Altoona, Pennsylvania (Blair, **Region 3**)
- ❑ Abie Abraham VAMC Butler (**Region 1**), Pennsylvania
- ❑ Coatesville VAMC Coatesville, Pennsylvania (Chester, **Region 5**)
- ❑ Erie VAMC Erie (**Region 1**), Pennsylvania
- ❑ Lebanon VAMC Lebanon (**Region 5**), Pennsylvania
- ❑ Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VAMC Philadelphia (**Region 5**), Pennsylvania
- ❑ Pittsburgh VAMC Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (Allegheny, **Region 2**)
- ❑ H. John Heinz III VAMC Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (Allegheny, **Region 2**)
- ❑ Wilkes-Barre VAMC Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania (Luzerne, **Region 4**)

# Plan. Pause. Protect.



Pennsylvania  
Department of Military  
and Veterans Affairs

1. Plan: Complete a Gun Owner Safety Plan, Firearm Inventory Record, and Personal Safety Plan.
2. Pause: Create a reminder to pause and check-in on your mental health before accessing firearms. We offer photo magnets for gun safes and photo tags for gun lock box handles or to loop thru gun cable locks.



3. Protect: Follow safety plans and engage protective factors!

## Personal Safety Plan

A safety plan can help keep you safe when you're feeling overwhelmed and/or having suicidal thoughts. Safety planning involves the proactive development of written individualized steps that can be easily followed during moments of intense emotional distress and/or suicidal crisis, when your critical thinking and problem-solving skills are diminished (called "tunnel vision"). Safety planning is an evidence-based intervention and has been shown to significantly reduce suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and death by suicide.

\*Although the Commonwealth, and its agencies, are responsible for the production and promotion of Plan, Pause, Protect, campaign materials, the Personal Safety Plan is intended for private, personal use only.

**Step 1. List the warning signs (thoughts, mood, situation, behavior) that a crisis might be developing:**

**Step 2. List coping strategies that can be used *independently* to distract or take your mind off a problem (mindfulness or physical activity):**

**Step 3. List people or social settings that can provide a you with a distraction:**

Name:	Phone:
Name:	Phone:
Place:	Place:

**Step 4. List the people in your life who you can ask for help:**

Name:	Phone:
Name:	Phone:
Name:	Phone:

**Step 5. List professionals or agencies that you can contact during a crisis:**

Clinician Name:	Phone:	Emergency Contact #:
Clinician Name:	Phone:	Emergency Contact #:
Local Crisis Services:	Phone:	

**Suicide Prevention Lifeline: Call or text 988, 24/7/365, Veterans press 1**

**Step 6. List the steps you will take to make your environment safe (plans for removing or limiting access to lethal means, e.g. firearm, medications, household poisons, sharp or other dangerous objects):**

**Step 7. List your reason(s) for living:**

Source: Stanley, B., Brown, G. K., MacRae, F., Rotolo, C. A., Hughes, G., Mina, L., & Barry, C. N. (2022). VA Safety Planning Intervention Manual. United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

## Gun Owner Safety Plan

Owning a firearm is a right we have and with that comes **one common responsibility: to handle and store our weapons safely.** This responsibility involves thoughtful consideration about the safe operation and storage of firearms to prevent firearm-related accidents, suicides, and thefts. Another very important consideration for firearm safety is our mental health. **More than half of all gun-related deaths in the U.S. are suicides**, with roughly 55% involving self-inflicted gunshot wounds, which highlights the need for gun owners to proactively develop a plan of action, by thinking through and answering the following questions before it is ever needed.<sup>1,2</sup>

\*Although the Commonwealth, and its agencies, are responsible for the production and promotion of Plan, Pause, Protect, campaign materials, the Gun Owner Safety Plan is intended for private, personal use only.

How do I plan to safely and securely store my firearms?

How do I plan to check-in on my mental health prior to accessing my firearms?

How do I plan to temporarily remove access to my firearm if I'm experiencing a mental health crisis?

Who can be involved in pointing out that I'm in a temporary crisis? (include name and phone number)

- |    |    |
|----|----|
| 1. | 2. |
| 3. | 4. |

What is my plan to temporarily remove my access to firearms when I'm trying a new medication that might alter my mental state?

What is my plan if someone who lives with me and has access to firearms in the home is in crisis?

What is the plan if a medical or other incident changes my long-term mental health outlook? Who can help me execute this plan if I'm unable to? (include name and phone number)

- |    |    |
|----|----|
| 1. | 2. |
|----|----|

What is my plan for my firearms if I pass away?

Sources: <sup>1</sup>Wagner, K. R., et al. (2025). Gun Violence in the United States 2023: Examining the Gun Suicide Epidemic. Johns Hopkins Center for Suicide Prevention; <sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) Annual Report on Suicide in the Military CY 2023.

## Firearm Inventory Record

Protecting your inventory is not only smart, but it also proves that you are a responsible owner. As responsible owners, we take extra precautions and accountability for our inventory.

**We know exactly what we have and that it's secure.**

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Manufacturer:	Caliber/Gauge:
Model:	Storage Location:
Serial No.:	Acquired From:
Type:	Acquired Date:
Finish:	Value:

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Manufacturer:	Caliber/Gauge:
Model:	Storage Location:
Serial No.:	Acquired From:
Type:	Acquired Date:
Finish:	Value:

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Manufacturer:	Caliber/Gauge:
Model:	Storage Location:
Serial No.:	Acquired From:
Type:	Acquired Date:
Finish:	Value:

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