



PA Governor's Challenge – Plan. Pause. Protect.

What is the Governor's Challenge?

Since 2020, DMVA has proudly served as Pennsylvania's lead agency for the VA/SAMHSA Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and Their Families (SMVF). Under this program, DMVA works with a wide array of community, county, regional, state, and federal partners to spearhead efforts, such as firearm safe storage, lethal means safety (LMS), educating community members and providers, addressing barriers to mental health and substance use treatment, and raising awareness of available local, statewide and federal resources for our SMVF population.

DMVA and the Governor's Challenge Team are taking a lead role in reframing the conversation around SMVF mental health and suicide in PA, by prioritizing trauma-informed strategies that empower individual agency and reinforce human dignity. Our work emphasizes building connections and collaborative efforts across military, veteran, and civilian communities to strengthen individual knowledge and skills, and develop healthcare frameworks that meet the specific needs of the SMVF community.



What is the Plan. Pause. Protect. Campaign?

The Plan. Pause. Protect. Campaign focuses on embedding mental health (MH) and lethal means safety (LMS) components into firearm safety discussions and protocols. Led by the PA DMVA and Governor's Challenge Team, this campaign works to raise awareness of suicide risk and provide resources for effective planning and safety considerations. Our team encourages a **proactive approach** to suicide prevention by inviting **everyone** to utilize the Plan. Pause. Protect. framework and safety planning resources outlined below, so that they can protect life if/when a mental health crisis occurs.

CAMPAIGN ETHOS: Given the right set of circumstances, **anyone** can struggle with thoughts of suicide.

- 1. Plan:** Complete a Gun Owner Safety Plan, Personal Safety Plan, and Firearm Inventory Record. **Plan for safety.**
- 2. Pause:** Create a reminder to pause and check-in on your mental health (reason for living) before accessing firearms. **Pause to reflect.**
- 3. Protect:** Follow safety plans and engage protective factors! **Protect life.**



Scan the QR Code to access FREE printable copies of the Gun Owner Safety Plan, Personal Safety Plan, and Firearm Inventory Record.

Why the focus on firearms?

In 2022, **74% of veteran suicides involved firearms**. Since 2001, the veteran firearm suicide rate has increased by 65%⁴. **Firearms are also the most lethal means for suicide**, with a 90% death rate compared to ~10% for other means¹.

National Suicides Involving Firearms, Veteran and Non-Veteran U.S. Adults by sex, 2021 and Change From 2001

	Non-Veteran Men		Veteran Men		Non-Veteran Women		Veteran Women	
	2021	Change from 2001	2021	Change from 2001	2021	Change from 2001	2021	Change from 2001
Suicides involving firearms	57.2%	-0.8%	73.4%	+6.1%	34.6%	-0.9%	51.7%	+14.7%

Additionally, the rate of firearm ownership is much higher among veterans than the general population. And, since **firearm access is an independent risk factor for suicide**, we decided to make this a focus of our efforts^{2,3}.



1 in 2 Veterans owns at least one firearm



1 in 3 Veterans stores a firearm loaded & unlocked

(¹Department of Veterans Affairs, 2024; ²Miller et al., 2013; ³Simonetti et al., 2018; ⁴RAND, 2025)



Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs