



SAMHSA ★ SMVF TA CENTER
Service Members, Veterans, and their
Families Technical Assistance Center

JUNE 2020

Best Practices in Suicide Prevention for SMVF Virtual TA Series

SAMHSA's Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF) Technical Assistance (TA) Center is hosting a series of calls for all team members involved in the VA/SAMHSA Governor's and Mayor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among SMVF. From **June to August 2020**, state/community teams, and their community partners, are invited to participate in web-based, **virtual TA sessions** that will focus on current best practices in suicide prevention for SMVF, including tips for implementation, outcomes and lessons learned.

June 22, 2020
2:30-4:30 pm ET

Staying Safe Suicide Prevention Solutions for SMVF: New VA Resources to Safely Store Lethal Means

Firearms play an important role in the lives of many SMVF. The VA respects the important role firearms play in many Veterans' lives and is dedicated to educating Veterans, their families, and communities about how safe storage can prevent suicide. According to the 2019 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report, in 2017, firearms were the method of suicide in 70.7% of male Veteran suicide deaths and 43.2% of female Veteran suicide deaths. Safe storage can put time and space between an individual and a firearm and help keep Veterans and their loved ones safe during a suicidal crisis.

Storage of firearms and other lethal means to prevent suicide are key components of many Governor and Mayor's Challenge teams' comprehensive suicide prevention strategies and action items. The VA's Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention provides technical guidance related to decreasing these environmental risks. The VA has recently also released two resource tools. The first resource tool helps Veterans and their loved ones understand the potentially lifesaving benefits of safely storing firearms and other potentially dangerous household items. The second resource tool is a brochure for SMVF peers and providers, and a Safe Firearms toolkit.

This panel presentation will feature some of the Department of Veteran Affairs leading subject matter experts and key partner organizations including the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP). Together these organizations partnered to develop the [Safe Firearm Storage Toolkit](#) to guide communities through the process of building coalitions to increase firearm storage practices to prevent suicide. Recommendations for how to communicate about these important topics, which are highlighted in the [Safe Messaging Best Practices](#), will be discussed.

Please see this pre-session resource: [NSSF Joins AFSP and VA for Webcast on 'Protecting Mental Health and Preventing Suicide During COVID-19'](#)



Moderator: Aimee Johnson, L.C.S.W. | Program Analyst, Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, Veterans Health Administration

Ms. Johnson is a Program Analyst working for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention focusing on innovations and partnerships. Her clinical background includes juvenile justice, emergency department psychiatric social work, medical social work, Suicide Assessment and Follow-Up Engagement Veteran Emergency Treatment (SAFE-VET Project), a clinical demonstration project, private practice and Suicide Prevention Coordinator for the Portland VA Health Care System. She is a proud alumna of Whittier College and the University of Michigan School of Social Work. Ms. Johnson is a 2019 Scholar of the Stand-To Veteran Leadership Program, George W. Bush Presidential Center.

For more information please contact Chantel Boudreau at (518) 439-7415 ext. 5276 or cboudreau@prainc.com

Stay tuned for additional announcements on upcoming topics!



Introduction: Matthew A. Miller, Ph.D., M.P.H. | Director, Suicide Prevention Program, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

Dr. Matthew Miller is the Director, Suicide Prevention Program for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. In March 2020, Dr. Miller was sworn in as a Senior Executive and appointed officially as the Director, Suicide Prevention Program for VHA's Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (OMHSP) after serving as the Acting Director since June of 2019. Dr. Miller leads a team dedicated to the implementation and reinforcement of evidence-based community and clinical interventions addressing suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention for 19 million Veterans, nationwide and 140+ VA healthcare systems. Dr. Miller previously served as the Director of the Veterans and Military Crisis Line (VMCL). Under his leadership, the VCL became the world's largest and most efficient suicide crisis call center. Prior to joining the VMCL, as Director, Dr. Miller served at the local VA facility level as the Deputy Chief of Staff for the Saginaw (MI) VA Medical Center, as well as the Chief of Mental Health. Dr. Miller served as an Officer and Clinical Psychologist with the United States Air Force.



Presenter: Joe Bartozzi, J.D. | President and CEO, National Shooting Sports Foundation

Joe Bartozzi is the President and CEO of the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), the trade association for the firearms industry, and the Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturers' Institute (SAAMI), the standards-setting organization for industry. Until his move to NSSF, Joe spent nearly 40 years in a variety of technical and executive management roles in the manufacturing sector. Joe was a longtime member of NSSF's Board of Governors, including serving as the Foundation's Treasurer, and he served two terms as the Chairman of the Board of Directors of SAAMI. He is currently a member of the Board of Directors of the Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports and is a member of the Board of Directors of the World Forum on Shooting Activities. He currently serves on the Board of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Red Cross and as the Immediate Past Chairman of the Board of Goodwill Industries of Southern New England. Joe is an attorney and 2014 recipient of the Anthony V. DeMayo Pro Bono Award, presented by the Connecticut Bar Association, and is a member of the Bar of the United States Supreme Court.



Presenter: Megan McCarthy, Ph.D. | Vice President, Project 2025, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Megan McCarthy serves as AFSP's Vice President for Project 2025, a nationwide initiative to reduce the annual rate of suicide in the U.S. 20% by 2025. Project 2025 relies on research to determine which interventions will have the biggest impact and focuses on suicide prevention practices in four critical areas: health care systems, emergency departments, correctional settings, and firearms communities. In this new role, Dr. McCarthy will lead the implementation and evaluation of Project 2025's suicide prevention plans in each of the four areas.

Before coming to AFSP, McCarthy learned the importance of data-driven approaches to preventing suicide while serving as the National Deputy Director for Suicide Prevention at the Department of Veterans Affairs. She led the development of VA's comprehensive public health approach to preventing Veteran suicide and oversaw the VA's suicide prevention data surveillance, research, and program evaluation teams.



Presenter: Elizabeth Karras-Pilato, Ph.D. | Co-Research Director, U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs

Liz Karras-Pilato is an investigator and co-director for research at the VA Center of Excellence for Suicide Prevention (Canandaigua, NY). She holds appointments in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Rochester (NY) and the Injury Control Research Center at West Virginia University (WV). Dr. Karras-Pilato's research is largely focused on the use of communication strategies in public health approaches to suicide prevention with domains of inquiry designed to inform the development of evidence-based messaging for military and veteran populations. She currently maintains multiple research lines that examine the (a) formative process of message design and (b) summative evaluation of messaging strategies to examine the persuasive effects on attitude and behavior change. Dr. Karras-Pilato has received funding from the VA and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention to study suicide prevention messaging (e.g., crisis line promotion; firearm safety) among veterans at high risk for suicide and their broad social networks and has recently published on strategies that enhance effective risk communication using community-based approaches.

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