Suicide Prevention Project Discussion:
4/3/25, 12-1pm

Participants:

Parker Brisbee	John Bosco Chukwuroji	Chad Brown	Joan Deschamps	Randy Evans
Kara Fields	Autumn Hartpence	Ariel Hawthorne	Joan Ilardo	Matthew Leach
Danielle Lesko	Rebecca Mendoza	Kathleen Oberst	Brian Pegouske	Megan Scott
Dean Sienko	Ellen Sugrue Hyman	Richard Tooker	Lucas VanEtten	Renee Verbeke
Brian Webb	Gayle Witham			

Overview:

The goal of the brainstorming session was to identify specific projects that could benefit from additional support in achieving their objective(s). Emphasis was placed on existing initiatives, recognizing their potential for more immediate and efficient impact(s)- though new project ideas were also welcomed. Meeting participants were invited to express interest in serving as for Chair or Co-Chairs involvement as specific projects move forward. The staff of the Core Team is available to provide administrative supports as requested.

Key Repeated Themes:

- Strong need to reach isolated veterans through small community events and peer networks.
- Funding barriers need to be addressed for effective local outreach.
- Rebuilding trust with veterans who have experienced bad care or VA interactions.
- No one-size-fits-all solution — approaches must be individualized by age, era, and background.
- Digital tools like the Battle Buddy App are critical for scaling outreach.
- Engaging family and care partners is a crucial part of suicide prevention.

Next Steps:

- Let us know if you have suggestions for potential collaborators in the event we inadvertently omitted current initiatives.
- Contact the admin team at ihp.vhwc@msu.edu if you would like to serve as Chair or Co-Chair for any of the specific opportunities.
- Review and respond to project specific workplan drafts as they are published.
- Participate in project specific touch-base meetings as they are scheduled.

Major Challenges Identified	Current Initiatives and Programs	Identified Needs	VHWC Contribution Opportunities
Isolation among veterans, especially younger and transitioning veterans. • Highest suicide risk group: veterans aged 18–35 • Veterans seen as metrics rather than individuals; loss of identity and belonging is widespread Identify/address additional risk factors/behaviors for intervention • Connect to all benefits and supports	Strength in Numbers • Community haircuts, veteran resource connections. Veteran Navigators • Connect veterans to benefits including all available community resources, not just VA-specific ones. PsychArmor Institute Training Partnership • Free training for Michigan through MVAA to support veteran connection efforts. American Legion "Be The One" Campaign • Focused on reducing veteran suicide stigma and encouraging direct community action. VHWC Core Team • Reviewing veteran death certificate data to better understand risk factors.	Expand Community Engagement Opportunities • Small, local events like Veteran Breakfasts can reach isolated veterans. • Sponsor Non-Mandatory Fun Days (low-pressure community activities). • Haircut services (Strength in Numbers model) paired with VSO engagement. • Leverage gaming communities like Regiment Gaming to engage younger veterans Engage Veteran Families and Care Partners • Include family and friends in outreach and resource conversations. • Focus on building activities around veteran-care partner relationships. Normalize mental health conversations. • Train everyone (not just clinicians) to feel	Localized Outreach Events • Attend smaller community events, not just big veteran resource fairs. • Focus on reaching unconnected and isolated veterans. Education and Outreach for Veterans and/or Care Partners • Financial literacy • Quality of health and wellness • Education and career • Risk screeners Identity Restoration • Help veterans rediscover purpose after service (direction, goals, future). Design Diverse and Customized Approaches for events • Different generations, backgrounds, and experiences need customized outreach strategies.

Major Challenges Identified	Current Initiatives and Programs	Identified Needs	VHWC Contribution Opportunities
		comfortable conducting suicide risk screenings.	Education and Outreach for Providers • Cultural competency (humility) • Trauma-informed care • Unique risk factors/health conditions • Risk screeners
Funding limitations for outreach events and resource connections.	Battle Buddy App – VETLIFE • AI-driven, location-based, all-in-one resource app. From Glory Days Radio Show • Veteran-focused storytelling and outreach.	Train and Empower Civilian Veteran Connectors • Train businesses (grocery stores, dentist offices) to ask "Have you served?" and provide resource referrals. • Community hubs can become Veteran Connection Points. Expand Access to Legal Aid and Civil Services • Increase law clinic and legal aid access for veterans with criminal histories or civil legal issues.	Leverage daily tasks and interactions to foster connections • Add civilian "corp" in terms of identifying potential referrals Support dissemination of peer volunteer efforts
Trust barriers for veterans who had bad VA experiences.		Rebuild Trust Through Positive Experiences	Amplify Positive Community Narratives • Stories of support, not just services offered

Major Challenges Identified	Current Initiatives and Programs	Identified Needs	VHWC Contribution Opportunities
		• Show veterans a better VA experience if they had bad ones. • Train advocates to help navigate bureaucratic barriers.	Education and Outreach for Veterans and/or Care Partners • Relationships with care partners and supports available to them
One-size-fits-all approaches don't work; veterans have diverse needs and preferred ways to connect. • Generational gaps among veterans; Vietnam-era veterans don't always relate to post-9/11 or younger vets.	Regiment Gaming • Uniting Veterans and Service Members of the U.S. Armed Forces, through the power of gaming	Promote Digital Resources and Tools • Battle Buddy App (VETLIFE): One-stop shop for benefits, resources, with AI and geofencing Innovative Media Campaigns • Develop video campaigns welcoming veterans back to Michigan. • Celebrate service and connect them to resources through pride and positivity.	Veteran-Specific Digital Engagement • Invest in platforms veterans already use (apps, gaming, online forums).