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WDVA Secretary Scocos Announces Zero Veteran Suicide Initiative

PEWAUKEE - Wisconsin Department of Veteran Affairs (WDVA) Secretary John A. Scocos announced today the Zero Veteran Suicide Initiative, a new program to help individuals identify military veterans who may be contemplating suicide. Secretary Scocos made the announcement at the WDVA Mental Health Summit and Veterans Stakeholders Symposium.

“Veterans who have served our country deserve the best of care, including counseling or treatment for those who are considering ending their own lives,” said John A. Scocos, Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs. “This initiative will help us to train individuals to identify veterans who may be contemplating suicide. Our goal is to completely prevent the terrible tragedy that is suicide.”

Through the Zero Veteran Suicide Initiative, the WDVA will facilitate a program using QPR, a suicide prevention training module for civilians. The department will work with those who have contact veterans to connect them with training, particularly family members, non-clinical staff WDVA nursing homes and throughout the department, volunteers, and members of veterans’ organizations, among others.

According to the QPR Institute, QPR stands for “Question, Persuade, and Refer — the 3 simple steps anyone can learn to help save a life from suicide. Just as people trained in CPR and the Heimlich Maneuver help save thousands of lives each year, people trained in QPR learn how to recognize the warning signs of a suicide crisis and how to question, persuade, and refer someone to help.”

“Experts in the field believe suicide is a disease that is preventable,” Secretary Scocos said. “It makes sense to step up suicide prevention efforts for veterans, in particular. This includes training non-medical people to recognize signs of suicide, how to persuade veterans to seek help and then where to refer a veteran for assistance.”

According to a veteran suicide report from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, in 2014, an average of 20 veterans died by suicide each day. In the same year, veterans accounted for 18 percent of all deaths by suicide in the United States. There is continued evidence of the high burden of suicide among veterans who are middle-aged and older.

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According to the same report, after adjusting for differences in age, risk for suicide was 2.4 times higher among female veterans compared with U.S. civilian adult females. In 2014, rates of suicide were highest among younger veterans, ages 18 to 29, and lowest among older veterans, aged 60 plus.

In Wisconsin, 17.8 percent of all suicides were veterans in 2014.

Recent research shows that military experience is a risk factor for negative health outcomes including PTSD, intimate partner violence, substance abuse, depression and suicide.

There are currently about 413,000 military veterans living in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs operates three skilled nursing homes for veterans at King, Chippewa Falls and Union Grove. WDVA also assists veterans to connect them with government benefits.

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