



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

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NJDMAVA and Hospital Association partner to deliver Mental Health First Aid training to Veterans, Families, Communities

As part of the *Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families*, the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (NJDMAVA) and the New Jersey Hospital Association (NJHA) announced the implementation of a statewide Mental Health First Aid training program Wednesday, August 23, 2023 at the National Guard Training Center, Sea Girt, New Jersey.

The state funding will support two individual eight-hour training sessions in each of New Jersey's 21 counties for a total of 42 Mental Health First Aid classes in the next 12 months. The training is intended for community organizations that interact with Service Members, Veterans, and their families at the local level, but is open for all interested participants.

"One Veteran lost to suicide is too many, and every minute, every second, counts," said Brig. Lisa J. Hou, D.O., Commissioner of Veterans Affairs. "From my view, that is why Mental Health First Aid training is so important. Just like on the battlefield, we do not want to leave a Service Member behind."

Described by the NJHA, Mental Health First Aid is a training program to help participants identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorder. It provides information and skills individuals can use to provide initial help and support to someone who may be experiencing a mental health problem or crisis. This particular initiative will provide targeted mental health first aid training for groups and individuals who interact with the community of Veterans, Service Members and their families.

"This new partnership with DMAVA expands our commitment to mental health first aid training throughout the State," said NJHA President and CEO Cathy Bennett. "For more than a decade, the NJHA team has included a corps of U.S. Veterans experienced in a

wealth of health services who provide our nation’s military heroes and their families with critical support. The mental health needs of our Veterans and their families is such an immensely important topic, and with our longtime partner, the Mental Health Association of New Jersey, we applaud the Governor’s Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and Families for shining a light on this issue.”

While the rate of Veterans suicides has been declining since 2019, it continues to outpace the suicide rate for the non-veteran population. In 2020, the rate for Veterans suicide was 57.3% higher than that of non-veteran adults, according to the [National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report](#) from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. In that year, the most recent data available, there were 6,146 veterans suicides documented in the United States – an average of nearly 17 suicides per day.

Established in 2020, the *Governor’s Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families* is co-chaired by NJDMAVA and the New Jersey Department of Human Services. [Partner agencies and organizations](#) meet quarterly at locations throughout the Garden State.

New Jersey’s *Governor’s Challenge* three priority areas are based on the federal Veterans Administration National Suicide Prevention Strategy.

Priority 1: Identify Service Members, Veterans and the Families & Screen for Suicide Risk

Priority 2: Promote Connectedness and Improve Care Transitions

Priority 3: Lethal Means Safety and Safety Planning

For more information on registering for a Mental Health First Aid class, please call the New Jersey Hospital Association at 1-877-4CARENJ [1-877-422-7365].

For more information on other NJDMAVA Veterans Services, including free-of-charge Post Traumatic Stress counseling, please visit <https://www.nj.gov/military/veterans/> and engage your local Veterans Service Officer.

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