

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR KATHRYN BARGER
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May 4, 2021

IMPLEMENTING THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY VETERAN SUICIDE REVIEW TEAM

On September 29, 2020, the Board of Supervisors (Board) directed the Department of Medical Examiner-Coroner (DMEC) and Chief Executive Office (CEO), in coordination with the Department of Mental Health (DMH), the Department of Public Health (DPH), County Counsel, the Suicide Prevention Office at the Greater Los Angeles Veteran Affairs (VA) Healthcare System, the VA Central Office and other pertinent stakeholders to:

1. Develop an implementation plan and timeline for the collection of veteran suicide decedent data, linking data sharing agreements to include connections with the Los Angeles County Violent Death Reporting System and establishing a data sharing agreement between the Medical Examiner-Coroner and the Chief of Suicide Prevention at the Veteran Affairs (VA) Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System to be included in the annual Medical Examiner-Coroner reports for surveillance of veteran suicide rates in Los Angeles County and to ensure the definition of veteran is clearly defined with data collection efforts across jurisdictions; and
2. Report back in 90 days with a feasibility analysis on the creation of a Los Angeles County Veteran Suicide Review Team (VSRT) and include recommendations on the composition of the proposed team, team member selection, which department should house the team, and ways the team can work with the California Department of Public Health’s initiative on suicide prevention. The report should include participation and feedback from the following entities and organizations:
 - a. Suicide Prevention Office at the Greater Los Angeles VA Healthcare System, DMH, DPH’s Office of Violence Prevention (OVP), Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, Sheriff’s Department Veteran Mental Evaluation Team (VMET), California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet), Probation Department, Los Angeles Police Department and other relevant stakeholders.

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Implementation Plan and Timeline for Collection of Veteran Data

In response to the Board motion's first directive DMEC is formalizing a process to match DMEC case information to Veteran Health Administration (VHA) and Department of Defense electronic medical records to verify veteran deaths by suicide by establishing a data sharing agreement with the Suicide Prevention Office at the Greater Los Angeles VA. This will allow DMEC to identify veteran deaths by suicide on an ongoing basis, which will be compiled and included in DMEC annual reports for surveillance of veteran suicide rates.

Additionally, the Board directive also requested that all data sharing agreements include a connection with the Los Angeles County Violent Death Reporting System (LAC-VDRS). DMEC is working with DPH and County Counsel to amend an existing MOU to ensure "veteran" status data is included within the MOU. To ensure consistency with State data collection practices and reporting and in response to the Board directive, "veteran" status is defined as any individual who has known service in the United States Armed Forces, regardless of their active/reserve duty status, the duration of their service, or the nature of separation or discharge.

Creation of A Veteran's Suicide Review Team

The DMEC and CEO convened a VSRT Working Group (VSRT WG) in response to the Board's request for a feasibility analysis on the creation of a VSRT. The VSRT WG reviewed available data and several mortality review team models and determined that implementing a Veteran Suicide Review Team in Los Angeles County is feasible. It will enable a coordinated response that addresses systemic concerns and provides recommendations for intervention and prevention efforts to minimize risk for suicidal behavior for veterans and increase protective supports including help-seeking behaviors for veterans and their families.

In addition, the VSRT WG determined that DMH, in close partnership and collaboration with DPH's Office of Violence Prevention (OVP), Department of Health Services (DHS), DMEC, DMVA and the Suicide Prevention Office at the Greater Los Angeles VA and other County and community partners, has been identified as the lead County agency responsible for coordinating and implementing the VSRT.

DMH supports providing the administrative and project management oversight for the VSRT, however, early implementation efforts will be incremental and focused on specified areas of immediate need.

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WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors implement the following next steps:

1. Adopt the VSRT Guiding Document (Attachment IV in the 3/31/2021 report back), which includes recommendations on a “veteran” definition, VSRT purpose, objectives, goals, team composition, and case review criteria and process.
2. Designate DMH as the administrative lead agency, to work in close partnership with DPH’s OVP, DHS, DMEC, DMVA, and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Desert Pacific Healthcare (VISN22) Network, and other County and community partners, responsible for implementing the VSRT. This designation will begin as a pilot period of one year with option to extend based on the plans and timelines to reach implementation.
3. Direct DMH, in close coordination with the VSRT WG and other identified County departments and community stakeholders, to develop a VSRT implementation plan with timelines and report back to the Board at the end of calendar year 2021. The implementation plan should include:
 - a. Clear descriptions of roles and responsibilities of County departments and the VA VISN22, the development of VSRT protocols and guidelines, including confidentiality and data sharing protocols, and a data collection guide for reviewed and non-reviewed cases.
 - b. The plan should also include process for annual reporting to the Board and public with a comprehensive data set of County veterans who died by suicide in order to better identify behaviors and trends. The annual report should include specific findings and recommendations.
4. Direct the Director of DMH to execute a Memorandum of Agreement between DMH and VISN22 to increase interagency collaboration and coordination in an effort to advance and improve the mental health and wellbeing of veterans in Los Angeles County.
5. Given the delay in VSRT implementation, direct the CEO-CIO, in coordination with the VSRT WG, to explore conducting a data analysis of the identified veteran suicides from 2015-2019, using the County’s Enterprise Information Hub and report back in 90 days with plans.

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