New RAND report on incidence of military suicide calls out CONNECT Project for its postvention work

Best-Practice program from NAMI NH cited as among three programs for responding to military suicides and attempts

CONCORD, NH – May 3, 2011 – A new study commissioned by the United States Department of Defense calls out The Connect Project as one of three programs it cites for responding appropriately to military suicides and suicide attempts.

Released during the first Armed Forces Public Health Conference held March 21-25, 2011 in Hampton, Va., "The War Within: Suicide Prevention in the U.S. Military" was commissioned from the RAND National Defense Research Institute. Among the report’s findings was its Recommendation 14: Provide Formal Guidance to Commanders About How to Respond to Suicides and Suicide Attempts. In this recommendation, RAND cited NAMI New Hampshire’s Connect model as the only civilian program for postvention (after a suicide has occurred) currently used within the Department of Defense; other notable programs the report called out were the Air Force’s TSR and the Navy’s SPRINT and CACOs.

The Connect postvention model brings together key stakeholders, such as law enforcement, medical examiners/coroners, chaplains/faith leaders and others to carry out a coordinated response to a suicide. Its National Best-Practice approach includes written protocols that clearly define key service providers’ appropriate roles and responsibilities in the immediate and ongoing aftermath of a suicide death. This planning and training to be prepared for the repercussions of a suicide are vital, say Connect developers, to reducing the risk of contagion, to support the immediate family following a suicide, and to promote healing for all those impacted by a suicide death.

The significance of Connect postvention work among military and other at-risk populations in the United States is significant, says Connect Director Kenneth Norton, LICSW. Norton notes that the NHARNG began training all Suicide Intervention Officers (SIOs), Unit Commanders, Leadership and Family Readiness program staff in suicide postvention in 2007.

"Our work in suicide response with the New Hampshire National Guard is being recognized as a model of comprehensive postvention that has far-reaching implications for broader efforts in our nation," says Norton. "The outcomes of appropriately addressing suicide deaths can be profound, and may include enhanced help seeking among loss survivors, reduced stigma, and promotion of healing for warrior survivors, their families, military units, first responders, service providers, and military and civilian communities impacted by the suicide of a service member."

The RAND report considered what is the suicide rate in the military services and who is at risk for suicide; what is the Department of Defense doing to prevent suicides; how does the science suggest suicides can best be prevented; and how might the military benefit from this science.

The report’s findings and recommendations will be reviewed in depth at a Congressional Briefing on May 10, 2011 from 2-3 p.m. Eastern at the Rayburn House Office Building in Washington, D.C.

Connect is a designated National Best Practice suicide prevention program developed by the National Alliance on Mental Illness—New Hampshire (NAMI NH), a non-profit organization in Concord, NH. Brigadier General Loree K. Sutton, M.D., former Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, called out Connect in her February 2010 witness testimony before the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs as a civilian program that the Department of Defense considers part of “the way forward” as it addresses suicide among active-duty military.

For more information visit www.theconnectproject.org, call 1-800-242-6264, or email info@theconnectproject.org.

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