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Arizona joins Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Veterans, Service Members, Families

PHOENIX – Arizona is one of seven states participating in the inaugural Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide among Service Members, Veterans and their Families. The challenge is hosted by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Arizona's interagency team will provide framework for identifying priorities, organizing efforts and contributing to a national focus on veteran suicide prevention. Arizona was invited due to efforts of the State's suicide prevention initiative, [Be Connected](#).

"The main goal of Be Connected is to connect someone to the right resource at the right time," Retired Air Force Col. Wanda Wright, Arizona Department of Veterans' Services Director, says. "This program focuses on providing veterans with the services they need early enough to prevent them from feeling isolated and having suicidal ideations."

According to a [2017 report](#) by the Arizona Violent Death Reporting System, Mohave, Graham, Navajo and Yavapai counties have suicide rates well above the Arizona average rate. Statewide, veterans are three times more likely to die by suicide than non-veterans. Be Connected brings together partners from across different sectors to focus on statewide suicide prevention and intervention.

"Arizona has always fought to provide our veterans with the care they need," Governor Doug Ducey says. "That is why my budget includes \$1.2 million to ensure ongoing support for Arizona's military and veteran families. It is our responsibility as Arizonans and Americans to take care of the people that have laid their life and family on the line for our freedom. I want to thank everyone who is participating in this challenge and appreciate the support."

The goal of the Governor's Challenge is to incorporate existing community strategic plans and support the initiative using state-level influences and resources. This challenge is modeled after the Mayor's challenge to prevent suicide among the military and veteran population. Phoenix is one of eight cities that began the challenge last year.

"Nationally, 20 veterans die by suicide every day, but only six of those use the VA Health Care System," Col. Wright adds. "The community must take care of the rest and Be Connected is Arizona's way to do that."

The Arizona Governor's Challenge team is co-lead by Col. Wright and Thomas Winkel, Arizona Coalition for Military Families Director. The team consists of representatives from Governor Ducey's office, the Governor's Office of Youth, Faith and Family, Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS), Arizona National Guard, Arizona Department of Health Services, La Frontera EMPACT, Crisis Response Network, TriWest Healthcare Alliance, Arizona Center for Rural Health, the Phoenix VA Regional Office, each VA Health Care System in Arizona and more.

Other participating states include Colorado, Kansas, Montana, New Hampshire, Texas and Virginia.

Veterans needing resources – and those who know of a veteran who needs help – can call 1-866-4AZ-VETS or learn more online at www.BeConnectedAZ.org.

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