



Operation Deep Dive[™]

Annual Report | 2025



AmericasWarriorPartnership.org



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INTRODUCTION

WELCOME MESSAGE

Operation Deep Dive™ (OpDD™) was created from a simple but urgent belief: veteran suicide and deaths of despair cannot be understood through numbers alone. Behind every statistic is a life, a family, a community, and often a story of transition, struggle, resilience, and missed opportunities for connection and support.

Since launching Operation Deep Dive (OpDD) in 2017, America's Warrior Partnership has remained committed to listening deeply, examining data rigorously, and building a stronger understanding of the factors contributing to suicide and deaths of despair among former service members (FSMs). The 2025 OpDD Annual Report reflects another year of meaningful progress in this mission, made possible through the vital partnership with the Duke University Department of Family Medicine and Community Health.

OpDD continues to amplify the voices of loss survivors whose experiences provide invaluable insight into the realities surrounding suicide, transition challenges, access to care, social connection, and community support. Their willingness to share deeply personal experiences is helping shape a more informed and compassionate approach to prevention efforts nationwide.

Sincerely,

Cheree Tham

Cheree M. Tham
Co-founder Chief of Programs & Initiatives
America's Warrior Partnership





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OpDD's partnerships have secured quantitative analysis of state death certificates and military personnel data, paired with in-depth qualitative interviews with loss survivors. OpDD continues to uncover critical insights into the demographic, military, geographic, socioeconomic, and psychosocial factors influencing deaths of despair among former service members. The term FSM is used throughout OpDD to be inclusive of all who have served, regardless of time served, role, branch, and character of discharge. It includes members who served in the Coast Guard, the National Guard, and the Reserves.

This year, the project completed 35 interviews across 15 states, expanded representation among participating FSMs* and families, advanced multiple state-level analyses, and submitted scientific manuscripts that will contribute to the growing national conversation surrounding veteran suicide prevention. The development of draft state reports for Massachusetts and Minnesota, along with continued advancement of a data harmonization pipeline and interactive dashboard, positions OpDD to accelerate future findings and improve accessibility of data for stakeholders and communities alike.

While challenges remain, the commitment of our partners, researchers, advocates, and survivor families continues to drive this work forward. Together, we are building one of the most comprehensive community-based efforts to better understand and prevent veteran suicide and deaths of despair.

*We use the term former service member (FSM) to be inclusive of all who have served, regardless of time served, role, branch, and character of separation. It includes members who served in the National Guard and Reserves.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Operation Deep Dive's success would not be possible without the commitment of our national, state, and local partners or our funders. AWP and Duke University Department of Family Medicine and Community Health would like to offer our sincerest "thank you" to the many partners across the country who are committed to supporting this effort. Thank you for your support!





AIMS OF OPDD

QUANTITATIVE COMPONENT

- **Aim 1.1:** Obtain death certificates from participating states and link these to military personnel files to more fully understand each former service member's life and death.



- **Aim 1.2:** Identify what demographic, socioeconomic, military, and geographic characteristics contribute to deaths of despair among (including alcohol-related deaths, drug-related deaths, and suicide) among FSMs.



QUALITATIVE COMPONENT

- **Aim 2.1:** To investigate the influence of life situation and psychosocial environment on death by suicide for former U.S. military service members through qualitative interviews with loss survivors.





2025 MILESTONES

January 2025

- Dr. Laura Fish and Dr. Katelyn Holliday presented an overview of OpDD™'s qualitative and quantitative research efforts to the Duke University Family Medicine and Community Health Department

March 2025

- Began coding the main contributors and suggested resources for support
- Drafted state report for FSM and non-military populations in Minnesota, describing characteristics of individuals who died from deaths of despair

May 2025

- Submitted manuscript to a leading peer-reviewed journal examining the accuracy of death certificates in capturing prior military service across five states

September 2025

- Completed recruitment of loss survivors for qualitative interviews across the study through partnership and support from Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)

November 2025

- Dr. Laura Fish presented preliminary qualitative findings during the Alabama Governor's Challenge Meeting, highlighting emerging themes related to suicide and loss among former service members

February 2025

- Developed and shared state report for FSM and non-military populations in Massachusetts describing characteristics of individuals who died from deaths of despair
- Developed codebook for analysis of the main contributors and suggested resources for support

April 2025

- Dr. Katelyn Holliday presented preliminary findings from the Massachusetts State Report to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Veterans Services
- Dr. Katelyn Holliday presented preliminary findings on geographic and military risk factors associated with deaths of despair among former service members at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Environmental and Occupational Epidemiology Seminar

July 2025

- Dr. Katelyn Holliday presented preliminary findings from the Massachusetts State Report to the Massachusetts Office of the Veteran Advocate

October 2025

- Developed codebook for full qualitative interview dataset analysis
- Began coding of the full qualitative analysis to yield a fully coded qualitative dataset that can be used for multiple analyses that informs our understanding of the influence of life situation and psychosocial environment on death by suicide for FSM

“

Most importantly, this work continues to demonstrate what is possible when rigorous data, lived experience, and sustained collaboration come together. Each milestone brings us closer to a clearer understanding and a stronger foundation for prevention, connection, and hope for future generations of former service members and their families.

- Jim Lorraine, President & CEO of America's Warrior Partnership

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TAKE 10 FOR RESEARCH: OPDD PRESENTATIONS



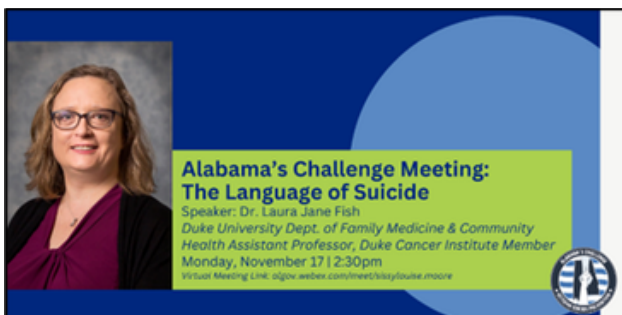
Topic: Briefly describe the Operation Deep Dive qualitative and quantitative arms of the project



Topic: Briefly describe the Operation Deep Dive qualitative and quantitative arms of the project



Topic: Geographic and Military Risk Factors for Deaths of Despair Among Former Military Service Members



Topic: Alabama's Challenge Meeting: The Language of Suicide



OPERATION DEEP DIVE PARTICIPATION

STATE DEATH CERTIFICATE DATA RECEIVED

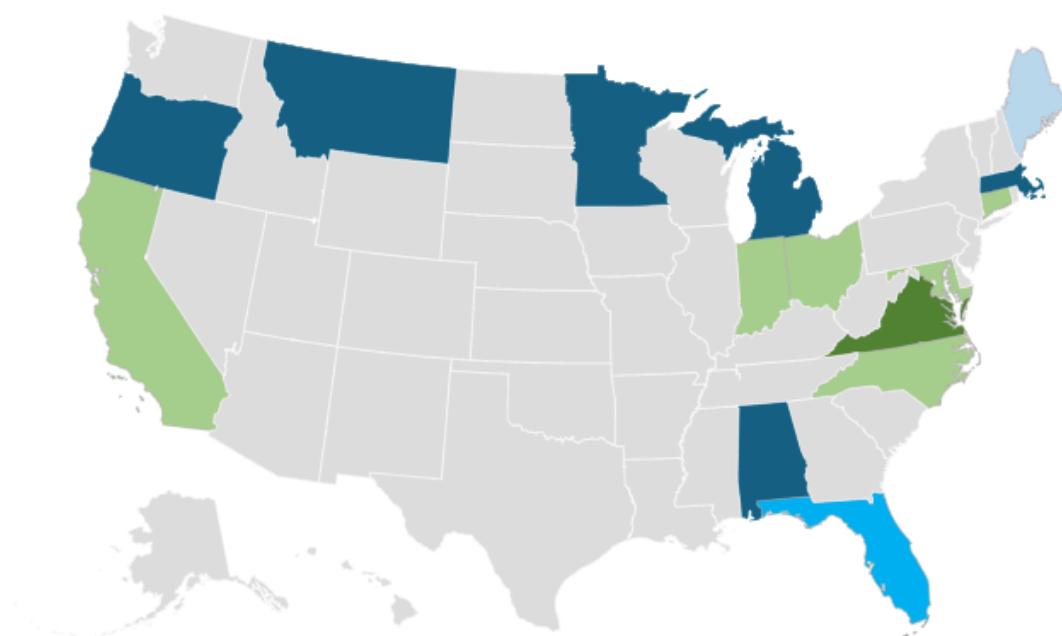
- In total, state death certificate data has been received under approved data agreements with eight states (dark, medium, and light blue on the map; Figure 1). (AL, FL MA, MI, MN, MT, OR, ME)
- Six states (AL, MA, MI, MN, MT, and OR) have been linked with DMDC military personnel files and analyzed in at least one scientific paper or report (**dark blue**)
- (FL) has been linked to Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), Department of War (DOW) files, but has not been analyzed in a formal paper or report (**medium blue**)
- (ME) data has been received but not yet linked or analyzed (**light blue**)

STATE DEATH CERTIFICATE DATA IN PROGRESS

- One agreement (VA) is actively being refined (**dark green**)
- Potential data agreements for six others (CA, IN, NC, OH, CT, and MD) are in the exploration phase (**light green**).

Figure 1. Map of State Death Certificate Status

■ Analyzed ■ Linked with DMDC ■ Received ■ Refining Agreement ■ Reviewing for Potential





SOCIOCULTURAL DEATH INVESTIGATION (SDI) INTERVIEWS (FIGURE 2)

- Light Blue SDI interviews conducted with at least one FSM represented:

Figure 2. Map of FSM Represented in SDI Interviews

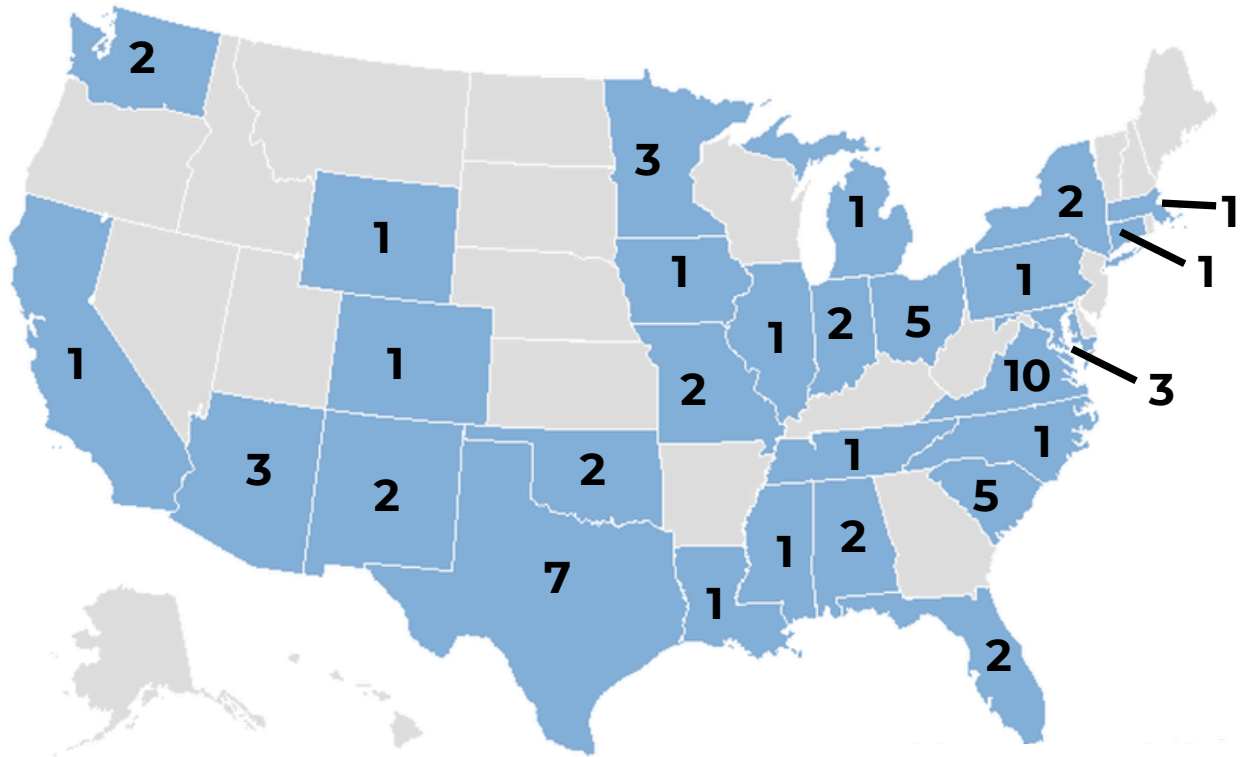


Figure 3. Branch of Former Service Member Represented by Interviewees Consented in 2025

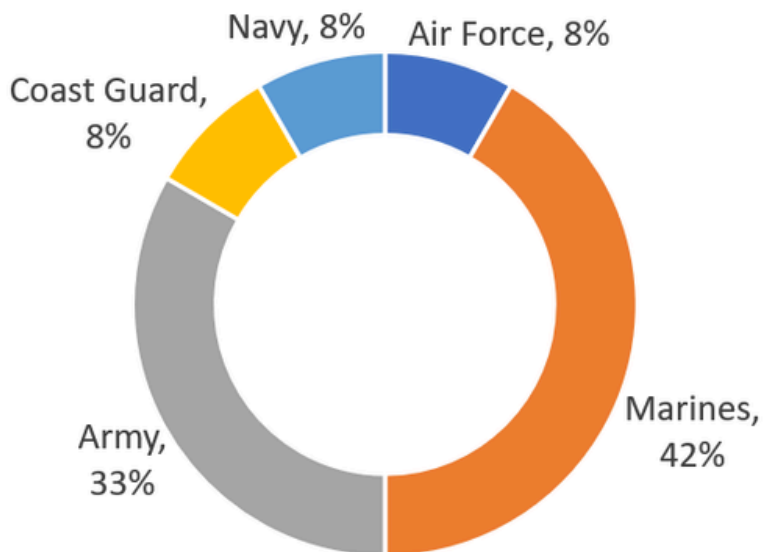
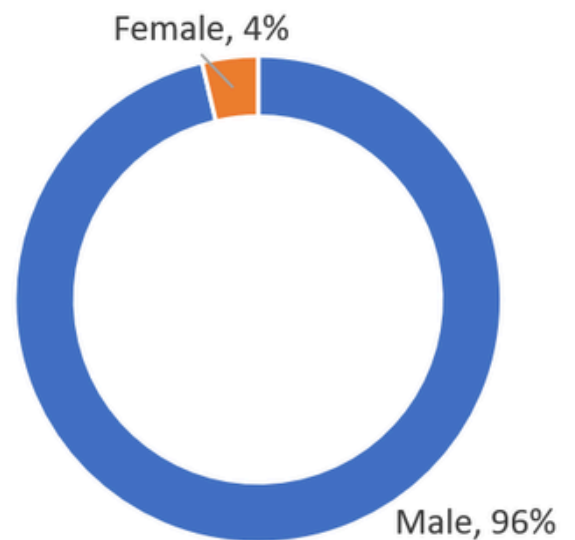


Figure 4. Sex of Former Service Member Represented by Interviewees Consented in 2025





OPERATION DEEP DIVE CHALLENGES

QUANTITATIVE CHALLENGES

- Delays in acquiring additional state death certificate data due to conflicts between state regulations and Duke University policies.
- Extended legal negotiations with participating states regarding data-sharing agreements.
- Complex harmonization of state and military datasets requiring extensive programming and manual quality control.
- Ongoing efforts to obtain additional matched personnel data from the DMDC to improve the accuracy of FSM military history data.

QUALITATIVE CHALLENGES

- Integrating data collected across Phase I (OpDD™ 2017-2022) and Phase II (OpDD™ 2023-2025) due to differences in interview and survey methodologies.
- The transition of closed-ended questions from an interviewer-administered format to independently completed surveys required additional standardization processes.
- Efforts were undertaken to ensure data consistency across both study phases.
- Limited access to official death certificates and DD214 forms for some FSMs created gaps in available information.
- Multiple alternative strategies were explored to reduce missing data related to cause of death, deployments, and character of separation.





OPERATION DEEP DIVE SUCCESSES

QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS SUCCESSES

- Developed draft state reports for Minnesota and Massachusetts for external dissemination.
- Initiated a scientific manuscript outlining methodology and key findings.
- Published a peer-reviewed journal article evaluating the accuracy of death certificate data in identifying prior military service.
- Began development of a data harmonization and report-generation pipeline to accelerate future analyses.
- Initiated development of an interactive dashboard to enhance access to state-level findings and stakeholder engagement.

QUALITATIVE RECRUITMENT SUCCESSES

- Expanded recruitment efforts to increase representation across military branches, race, and gender.
- Established a partnership with the [Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors \(TAPS\)](#) to support outreach and engagement.
- Presented OpDD™ recruitment information during a TAPS community webinar.
- Distributed study information through TAPS networks to potential participants.
- Successfully completed the qualitative recruitment phase in 2025.

UPDATES & NEXT STEPS

Operation Deep Dive™ (OpDD™) continues to expand its impact in 2026 through ongoing research, analysis, and collaboration led by Duke University and [America's Warrior Partnership](#).

QUANTITATIVE PRIORITIES

- Develop reports for three additional states
- Expand the OpDD™ interactive data dashboard
- Submit epidemiological findings from Minnesota and Massachusetts analyses
- Advance research on predictors and risk factors for deaths of despair among FSMs

QUALITATIVE PRIORITIES

- Complete coding and analysis of loss survivor interviews
- Identify key contributors and potential protective resources related to suicide
- Finalize the full qualitative dataset to support future research on transition, wellbeing, and access to care



LOOKING AHEAD

OpDD is positioned for continued growth, deeper analysis, and expanded dissemination. With a strong and growing network of federal, state, and community partners, the study is steadily building the evidence base needed to inform more proactive, coordinated, and community-centered approaches to suicide and deaths of despair prevention.

In 2026, OpDD findings will continue to be shared through publications, presentations, state reports, and stakeholder engagement nationwide. The project remains focused on turning research into action to better inform suicide prevention efforts for former service members and their families.

To stay updated on OpDD, visit: AmericasWarriorPartnership.org/opdd

CONCLUSION

The 2025 findings from Operation Deep Dive™ reflect meaningful momentum and steady progress across both the quantitative and qualitative arms of the study. By integrating state death certificate data with military records from the Department of War (DoW), OpDD™ continues to build a clearer understanding of the demographic, socioeconomic, military, and geographic factors associated with premature death among former service members (FSMs). At the same time, the voices of loved ones through qualitative interviews add critical context, depth, and humanity to the data helping to translate patterns into lived experience.

This year's progress included expanding data collection across multiple states, completion of 35 loss survivor interviews spanning 15 states, advancement of multiple state reports, and submission of peer-reviewed scientific work. Even in the face of challenges related to data access and representation, the study continued to move forward strengthening partnerships, improving methods, and broadening the reach of participant engagement.



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Empowering Veterans. Empowering Communities.
Improving & Saving Lives

