



**AMERICA'S
WARRIOR
PARTNERSHIP**
PARTNERING WITH COMMUNITIES
TO PREVENT VETERAN SUICIDE

THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA[®]

 Bristol Myers Squibb[™]
Foundation

ANNUAL REPORT | 2021

Operation Deep Dive



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

Our mission at America's Warrior Partnership is to *partner with communities to prevent veteran suicide*. In alignment with our mission, we implemented Operation Deep Dive (OpDD) a community-based, former service member suicide (FSM) and self-injury mortality (SIM) prevention study in partnership with researchers from The University of Alabama. This study commenced in 2017 with generous funding from the Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation.

The goal of OpDD is to identify risk factors associated with suicides and SIM among FSMs—particularly across communities. Key findings will be used to develop an upstream approach to enhancing programs that aim to reduce risk factors as a means of improving FSMs' quality of life.

Retrospective Data

Operation Deep Dive consists of two key data components: retrospective (quantitative) and prospective (qualitative) data. For the retrospective component, we are requesting death data from every state to perform a comprehensive analysis of FSMs who died by suicide or SIM from 2014 and beyond.

Prospective Data

The prospective component consists of utilizing the sociocultural death investigation (SDI) tool to interview the relatives, loved ones, friends, or colleagues of FSMs who died by suicide or SIM. The goal of the SDI interview to examine how FSMs were engaged within their communities and to identify factors that may have impacted their quality of life and contributed to them dying by suicide or SIM. Importantly, to align with the goals of this study, we operationally define veteran/former service member as any individual who has served in the United States Armed Forces regardless of time served and character of discharge.

CHALLENGES & SUCCESSES

In 2021, we were met with many challenges—some requiring us to think critically while others were matter of making minor adjustments. Nevertheless, we addressed these challenges head-on, which made us appreciate our successes even more.

CHALLENGES

Retrospective Data | In our efforts to acquire death data from states, we encountered states with restrictive regulations that conflicted with the terms of our requests. For example, some states were unable to provide SSNs which were needed to verify FSM status through the Department of Defense (DoD). Some states were prohibited from participating; therefore, they denied our initial request.

Prospective Data | We were unable to enroll some individuals who expressed interest in participating in an SDI Interview as they often did not meet the following eligibility criteria: *deceased FSM and prospective participant must have lived in the same community prior to the FSM's death.*

SUCCESSES

Changed Interview Eligibility Criteria | We re-evaluated the eligibility criteria for the SDI interview. We recognized that FSMs are likely to have close relationships with individuals who reside in different states and communities and relocate frequently. Therefore, we decided to remove the following criterion: *deceased FSM and prospective participant must have lived in the same community prior to the FSM's death.* Participation increased after this modification.

Subscription Platform | At the end of 2021, we had a total of 643 subscribers/partners who signed up to receive monthly updates about OpDD. Each month we highlighted key findings from the retrospective analysis, past and upcoming events, and provide a link for community service provider seeking access to national resources to support FSMs, their families, and caregivers.

Individual & Combined State Reports | We worked diligently to prepare individual state reports as well as a five-state report to consolidate key findings from analyzing death data acquired from Florida, Minnesota, Massachusetts, Alabama, and Montana.

MILESTONES

▪ **State Death Data**

To date, we have acquired death data from eight states: Alabama, Florida, Massachusetts, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana & Oregon. At the end of 2021, we had at least 10 applications pending review by their respective state.

▪ **Total # of SDI Interviews & Cases**

To date, we have conducted 42 SDI Interviews across 27 FSM cases.

▪ **Incorporating Self-Injury Mortality**

In November 2021, we began using the term *self-injury mortality*.

LOOKING AHEAD

Here's what we have planned for 2022:

- We will continue to contact states to acquire additional death data and will revisit data applications that are pending review as well those that have been denied (to possibly to negotiate terms or request exceptions).
- We will continue to collaborate with the DoD and DMCD to differentiate FSMs from the civilians and provide service history and personnel data elements for the decedents with verified FSM status.
- We will dive deeper into state death data and consult with stakeholders to discuss best practices for analyzing and disseminating key findings; constructive feedback received this year will be incorporated into individual and combined state reports prepared in 2022.
- Most importantly, we plan to share key findings from OpDD as they arise with our partners across the country and amplify our promotion strategies around our call for interviews. Subscribe to receive updates with key findings on our website.

THANK YOU

Operation Deep Dive's success would not be possible without the commitment of our national, state, and local partners and generous funding from the Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation. We would like to express our utmost gratitude to all of you. With the commitment of our partners, we aim to change the trajectory of former service member suicide and self-injury mortality prevention efforts and to truly be of service in preserving the lives of service members across the country.

To stay updated on all things OpDD or to see if you are eligible to participate in an interview, please visit: www.americaswarriorpartnership.org/deep-dive/

Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.

- Helen Keller



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