

Nebraska introduces Initiative to aid Veterans and their families

(Lincoln) -- Governor Pete Ricketts announced Nebraska's participation in the *Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide among Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families*. Nebraska is one of 35 states taking part in the initiative from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs (NDVA) and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) will be the lead agencies on the program. The two-year initiative will identify gaps in care and drive enhancements to the state's mental health services.

In discussing the initiative, the Governor highlighted the sacrifices made by service members to protect and defend America. In particular, he cited the time spent away from family while on deployment, frequent relocations, and the physical and psychological impact of combat. Gov. Ricketts credited the Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs for its great work to care for veterans and their families across the state, and he noted that improving access to mental health care will further the State's goal of becoming the best state in America for military families and veterans.

DHHS Behavioral Health Director Sheri Dawson expressed her excitement at the opportunity to coordinate veterans' and mental health resources through the initiative. She discussed the State's intent to overcome the stigma of discussing mental health and to remove obstacles for those seeking mental healthcare.

NDVA Director John Hilgert highlighted three main ways his department supports veterans in crisis: 1) emergency financial support through the Veterans Aid Fund; 2) NDVA's state service office which does over 100 outreach events each year to help veterans get the support they're eligible to receive; and 3) the NDVA website at veterans.nebraska.gov, which includes a live chat option and a map to mental health resources across the state.

The Suicide Prevention Lifeline phone number is 1-800-273-8255. By pressing "1" when the call connects, callers will be transferred to the Veterans Crisis Line, which offers support specifically for veterans and their loved ones. There's no need to be enrolled in VA benefits or healthcare to make use of the service.