MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



Minneapolis VA Health Care System Suicide Prevention Efforts

Pat Kelly
Director
Minneapolis VA Health Care System



MN Veteran Suicide Prevention Summit

September 30, 2026

The Minneapolis VA Health Care System

Agenda

- Introduction to Minneapolis VA
- 2025 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report
- VA National & Local initiatives
- Suicide behavior Stats Minneapolis VA catchment area
- Resources

Mission

- Healthcare: 110,000 Veterans
- Research: 4 Centers of Excellence
- Education: 1,400 Trainees; 90 Affiliates
- Fourth Mission: National Preparedness



Facilities within MVAHCS



- Minneapolis VA Medical Center
- 13 Community Based Outpatient clinics
- Community Resource & Referral Center

Catchment area in Minnesota and western Wisconsin

2025 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report (Feb. 2026)

- Suicides among Veterans declinedin2023,but the rate ofsuicide increased.
- In 2023, 6,398 Veterans died by suicide, which was 44 fewer deaths than in 2022. The 2023 total was lower than 14 of the previous 15 years.
  - The suicide rate per 100,000 Veterans **rose** for both male and female Veterans in 2023. For women, the rate **rose** from 13.7 to 13.9, and for men, it **rose** from 37.3 to 37.8.
- Suicide rates are elevated for Veterans aged 18 to 34, the most frequently identified risk factor was pain.
- **61%of Veterans who died by suicidein2023werenotreceivingVA health careinthe last year of theirlife.**

National Program Response FY26

01

NaloxoneExpansion

- *Available at all Vets Centers*
- *Expanding to community programs*

02

Eligibility

- *Outreached to 6.1 million Veterans not enrolled in VHA Care.*
- *Enrolled over 33,000 new Veterans from cohort*
  - *Goal is 100,000 new veterans*

03

Focus on Sleep, Pain & Oncology

- *Expanding Virtual Reality programs*
- *SPC Staff dedicated to support clinics (local)*

04

ExpansionofSgtGordonFox Grants

- *$111 million in grants for 2026*
- *Expansion to rural areas*

Mpls VA Program Response FY26

01

FirearmLockbox

- *Continue Distribution Program*

02

DebtManagement

- *Continued Expansion of resolving VA Debt for veterans with HRF.*

03

Gun Lock Distribution

- *128,500 gun locks distributed in FY26*

04

COMPACT Act

- *Significant Collaboration with CITC to ensure veterans are connected, or stay connected, with VA care*
- *1659 Enrolled Veterans to date*

05

ExpandedCommunityPartnerships

- *MH Summit – Dunn County, WI 4/9/26*
- *Olmstead County Criminal Justice Collaboration*
- *Mental Health Campaign in Chippewa County, WI*

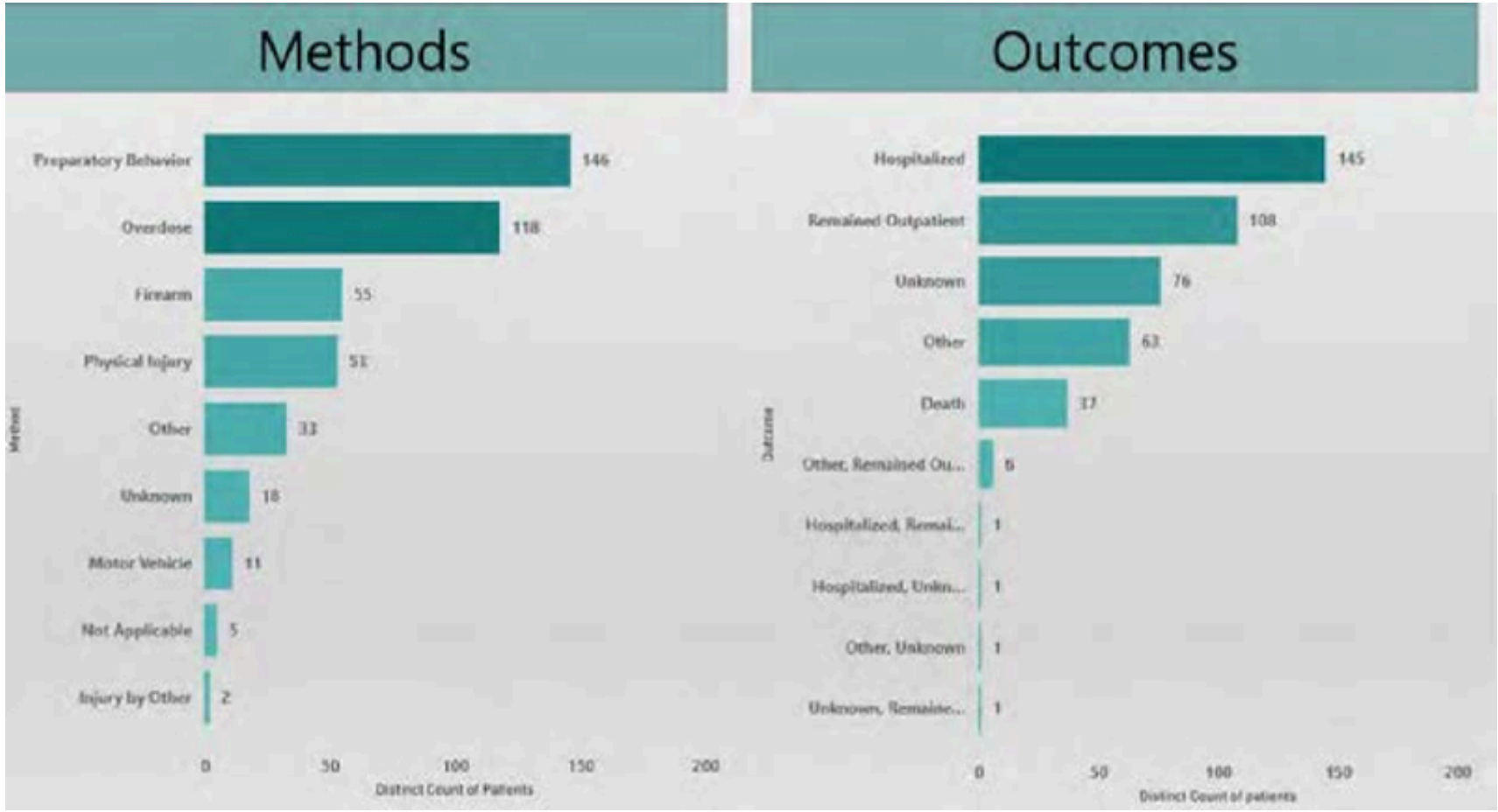
06

MN GunStorageMapProject

- *St. Louis County expanding participation*
- *Expanding Statewide Access*
- *Currently 30 sites statewide*

Suicide Behavior in MVAHCS Catchment

Fatal Event	Non-Fatal Event	Unique Patients
37	455	377



988 line

- National:
  - In fiscal year 2025, VA offered 1.3 million calls, chats and texts to Veterans in need through the Veterans Crisis Line.
  - A 39% increase over the prior year, with a Veteran satisfaction rate of 97%



- Local stats:
  - 1,989 calls, 506 EMS dispatches, 77 transported to the emergency room
  - We support on average 81 veterans a week who are actively flagged.
  - 99.70% of 988 calls receive action from the Minneapolis VA team within 1 day. Typically, we close calls in 1.43 days.

Local Outreach



Focus on outreach, meeting Veterans where they are in the community. In FY 2026 more than 100 events.

We conduct lethal means safety training, training for first responders & law enforcement and VA S.A.V.E. Training.

We have strong collaborations with MDVA and a variety of other local parters.

Compact Act

•FreeERCare: Treatment at any VA or non-VA emergency room

•No Enrollment Needed: You do not need to sign up for VA healthcare beforehand

• Inpatient Care: Up to 30 days of hospital or residential care

•Outpatient Care: Up to 90 days of follow-up care

•Transport Costs: Emergency transportation and ambulance fees are covered

• Eligibility:

- **Must be in an acute suicidal crisis**
- Those who were discharged or released from active duty after more than **24 months** of active service under conditions **other than dishonorable**
- Former members of the armed forces, including reserve service members, who served **more than 100 days under a combat exclusion or in support of a contingency operation**
- Formermembersofthearmedforceswhowerethe **victim of a physical assault of a sexual nature or sexual harassment while serving in the armed forces**

Resources for Veterans and their loved ones available 24/7

- Veterans Crisis Line:dial 988 then Press 1, chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat, or text 838255
- The VA Safety Plan App
- Don’t Wait. Reach Out
- The Crisis Conversation Handout
- VA S.A.V.E. Training

VA Health Care Enrollment

Apply one of the following four ways:

1. Online: https://www.va.gov/health-care/apply/application/introduction

2. Calling the toll-free hotline: 877-222-8387 (VETS)

3. Mailing VA Form 10-10EZ to:
   Health Eligibility Center
   PO Box 5207
   Janesville, WI 53547-52074

4. In person at the nearest VA medical center

If a Veteran is currently enrolled and would like to update their information over the telephone, call 877-222-8387.

See Your County Veteran Service Officer (CVSO) for assistance.

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Panel Discussion: Veteran Identification with Non-VA Healthcare Systems

Facilitated with:

Eric Meittunen
Deputy Commissioner
MDVA Healthcare

Veteran Identification Panel



Jessie Rae Rayle

HeroCare Advocate Lead

Regions Hospital



Lea Buckridge

Nurse Supervisor Care Innovation Referrals & Military & Veteran Services

Sanford Health Marshfield Clinic



Amy Weise

Community Health Supervisor

Lakewood Health System



John Marshall

Vice President, Enterprise Pharmacy Services

Fairview Health Services



Afternoon Break

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Support Our Troops Grant Program

Heather Darby
Grant Coordinator
MDVA



SUPPORT OUR TROOPS

Heather Darby| Grant Coordinator, MDVA

What is Support Our Troops?

Minnesota Statute 190.19 MINNESOTA "SUPPORT OUR TROOPS" ACCOUNT.

The Minnesota "Support Our Troops" account is established in the special revenue fund. The account shall consist of contributions from private sources and appropriations. Money in the account is appropriated in equal shares to the Department of Military Affairs and the Department of Veterans Affairs. *MDVA receives $15 of every $30 per license plate*

What can the money be used for?

1. Outreach to underserved Veterans
2. Providing services and programs to Veterans and their families
3. Grants of up to $100,000 to any organization approved by the commissioner of Veterans Affairs for the purpose of supporting and improving the lives of veterans and their families
4. Grants to Veteran Service Organization (VSO), i.e., Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), American Legion,
5. Disabled American Veterans (DVA) and Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA)

Grants to eligible foundations

1. Tax exempt under section 501 (c) of the IRS code
2. A nonprofit corporation under chapter 317A and the organization's articles of incorporation specify that a purpose of the organization includes: (i) providing assistance to veterans and their families; or (ii) enhancing the lives of veterans and their families.

What type of grants has MDVA administered?

- *Outdoor adventures*
  - *Fishing, camping, horse back riding, equine therapy*
- *Legal services*
  - *Veterans receive free legal services*
- *Emergency Services*
  - *Rent, utilities, dental work, car repairs*
- *Service animals*
  - *Train and provide service dogs to Veterans free of charge*



Grant Application Process

Step 1 – Grant period is "open" and prospective grantees can submit an application

Step 2 – Applicants must upload their application and supporting documentation

Step 3 – All documentation is reviewed by MDVA Finance department and a determination of which applicants will move forward to the VFAC review committee

Step 4 – The Veteran Future Action Committee (VFAC) reviews the applicants and moves the final few on for review with MDVA Leadership and the Commissioner

Step 5 – The final applicants must provide an in-person presentation of their program and how they will use the grant funds

Step 6 – The MDVA Commissioner makes the final decision

Veteran Definition Criteria

Minnesota Statute 197.447 VETERAN DEFINED
*The word "veteran" as used in Minnesota Statutes, means a citizen of the United States or a resident alien who has been separated under **honorable conditions** from any branch of the armed forces of the United States after having served on **active duty for 181 consecutive days** or by reason of disability incurred while serving on active duty, or who has met the minimum active duty requirement as defined by Code of Federal Regulations, title 38, section 3.12a.*

For Support Our Troops grant purposes, must also be a Minnesota resident

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- Drivers license, ID card, passport, rental agreement or mortgage statement

MDVA Funded Organizations



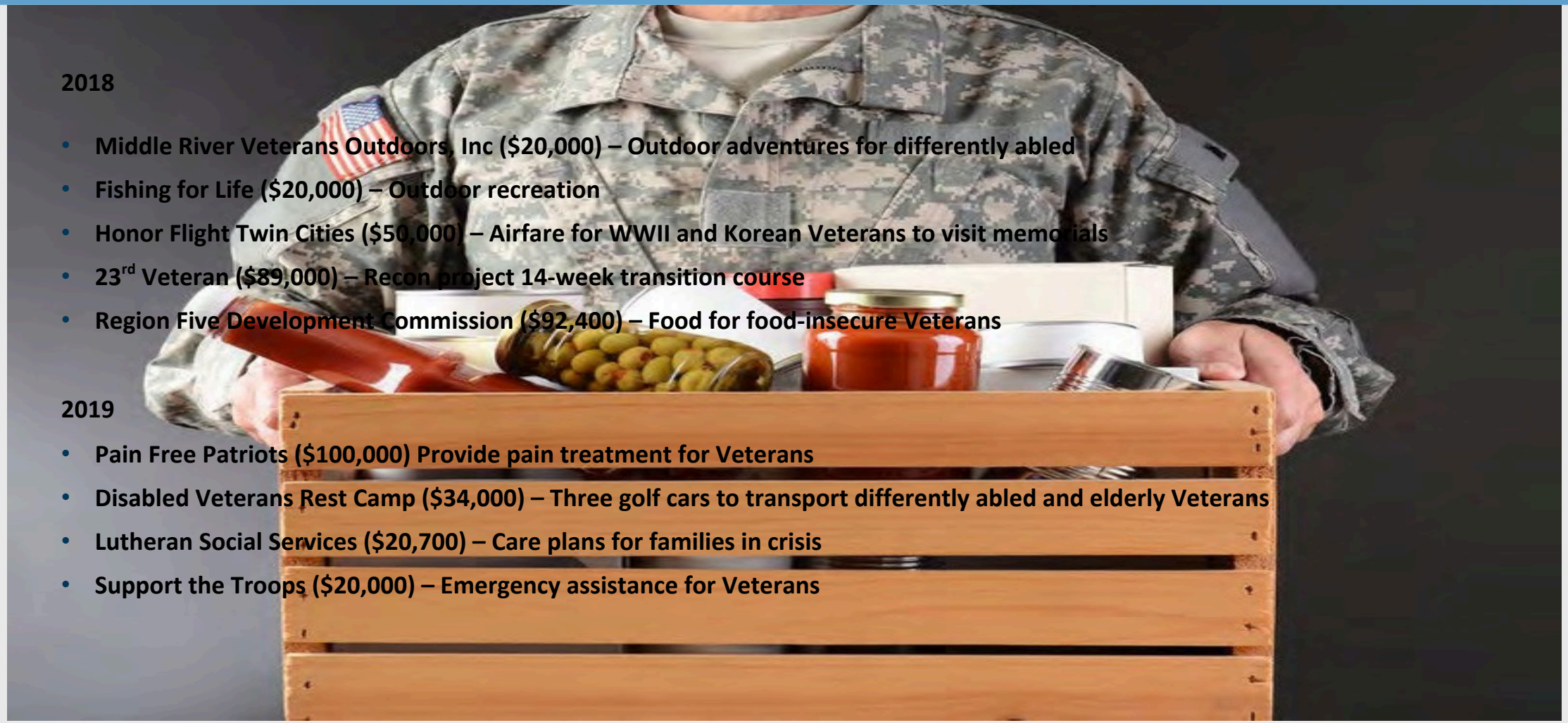
2016

- Lutheran Social Services ($45,000) – In-home counseling
- Fishing for Life ($20,000) – Outdoor recreation
- Ars Bellum Foundation ($18,515) – 8-week therapy sessions
- Pets Loyal 2 Vets ($65,000) – Provide service and therapy dogs for PTSD

2017

- Community Action Partnership of Hennepin County ($90,000) – Case management assistance
- Every Third Saturday, Inc. ($50,000) – Emergency assistance and substance abuse program
- Freedom Flight ($37,500) – Mobility accessible hot air balloon basket and equipment
- Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe ($100,000) – handicapped accessible van for wheelchair bound Veterans

MDVA Funded Organizations



2018

- **Middle River Veterans Outdoors, Inc ($20,000) – Outdoor adventures for differently abled**
- **Fishing for Life ($20,000) – Outdoor recreation**
- **Honor Flight Twin Cities ($50,000) – Airfare for WWII and Korean Veterans to visit memorials**
- **23rd Veteran ($89,000) – Recon project 14-week transition course**
- **Region Five Development Commission ($92,400) – Food for food-insecure Veterans**

2019

- **Pain Free Patriots ($100,000) Provide pain treatment for Veterans**
- **Disabled Veterans Rest Camp ($34,000) – Three golf cars to transport differently abled and elderly Veterans**
- **Lutheran Social Services ($20,700) – Care plans for families in crisis**
- **Support the Troops ($20,000) – Emergency assistance for Veterans**

MDVA Funded Organizations



2020 – No grants (COVID)

2021

- **Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe ($93,767) – Homeless Veteran assistance**
- **LegalCORPS ($70,000) – Legal service to Veterans**
- **American Heroes Outdoors ($60,000) – Therapeutic outdoor adventures for Veterans**
- **Prairie Five Community Action ($80,000) – Wheelchair accessible van and transportation for Veterans**
- **Mandatory Fun Outdoors ($30,000) – Fish house to serve as a mobile claims office for Veterans**

2022

- **Magnus Veteran Foundation ($72,000) – Medical care, mental health/psychological, physical and spiritual care**
- **Patriot Assistance Dogs ($45,000) – Provide trained service dogs to Veterans**
- **Recovery Community Network ($11,640) – Provide resource guides to Veterans and their families**

MDVA Funded Organizations



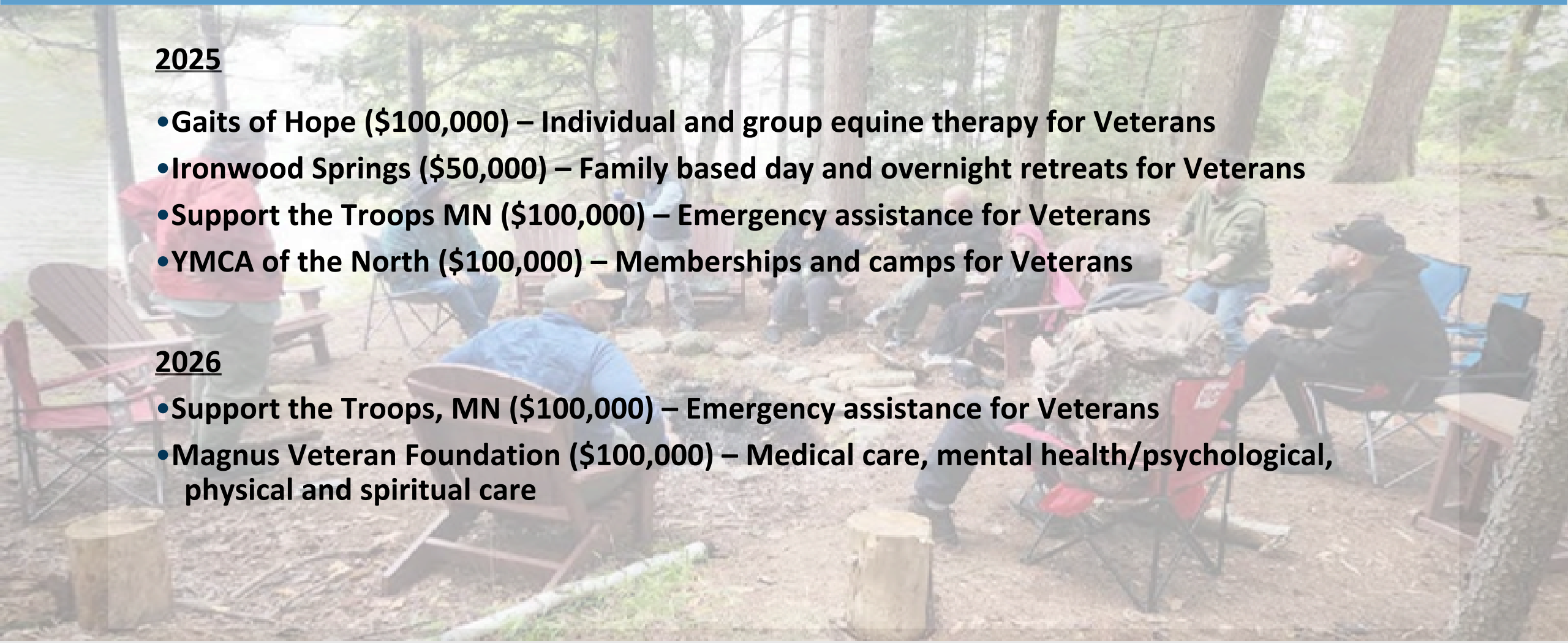
2023

- **Believet Canine Service Partners ($25,000) – Provide service dogs to Veterans**
- **Support the Troops, MN ($50,000) – Provide rapid response emergency services to Veterans**
- **The Landing ($52,000) – Purchase a van for Veteran transport**

2024

- **Blue Star Mothers of America ($9,720) – Provide meals to Veterans and families at Fischer House**
- **Prairie Five Community Action Council, Inc. ($20,000) – Veteran ride services**

MDVA Funded Organizations



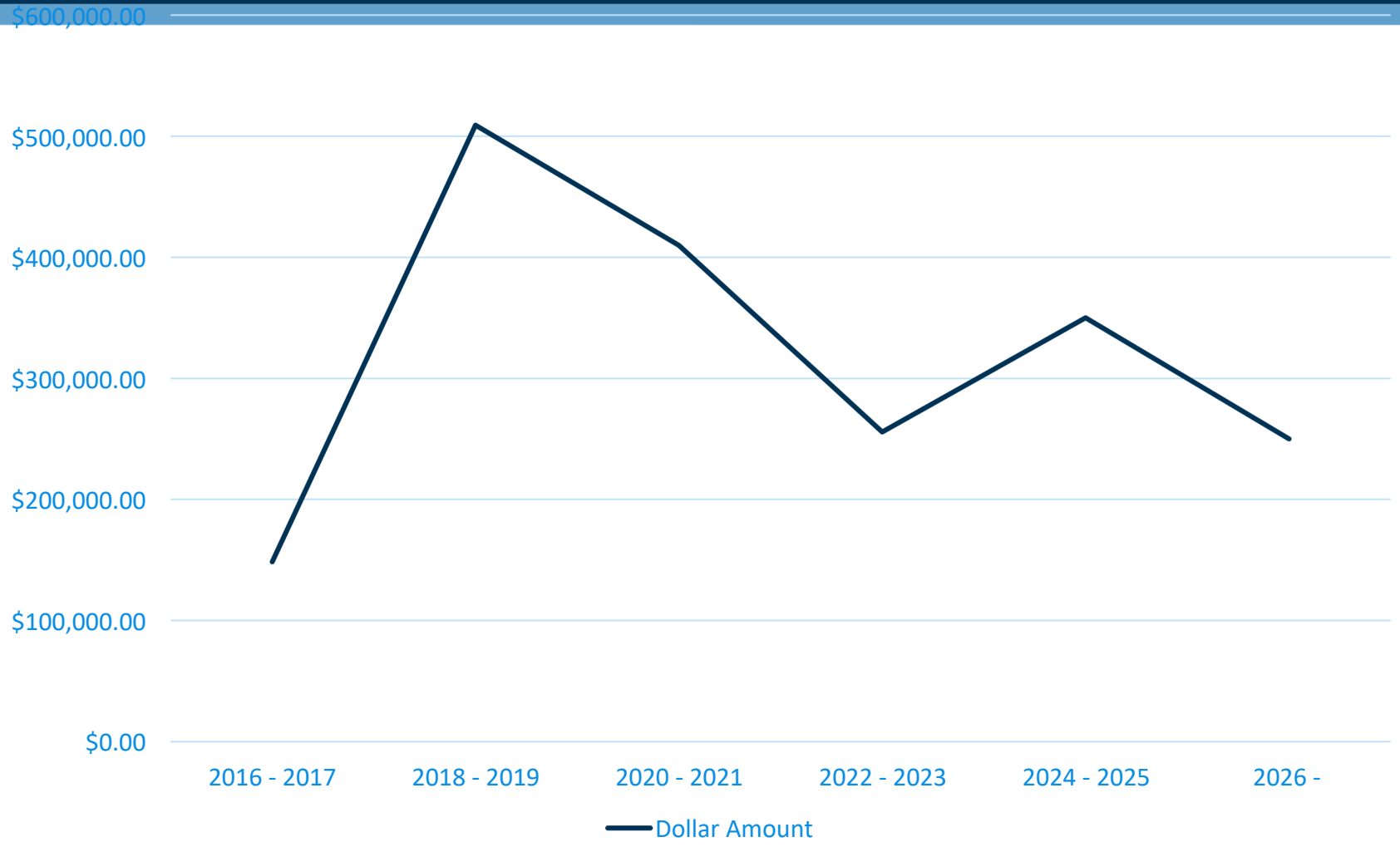
2025

- **Gaits of Hope ($100,000) – Individual and group equine therapy for Veterans**
- **Ironwood Springs ($50,000) – Family based day and overnight retreats for Veterans**
- **Support the Troops MN ($100,000) – Emergency assistance for Veterans**
- **YMCA of the North ($100,000) – Memberships and camps for Veterans**

2026

- **Support the Troops, MN ($100,000) – Emergency assistance for Veterans**
- **Magnus Veteran Foundation ($100,000) – Medical care, mental health/psychological, physical and spiritual care**

MDVA Funded To Date





MDVA's Goal:

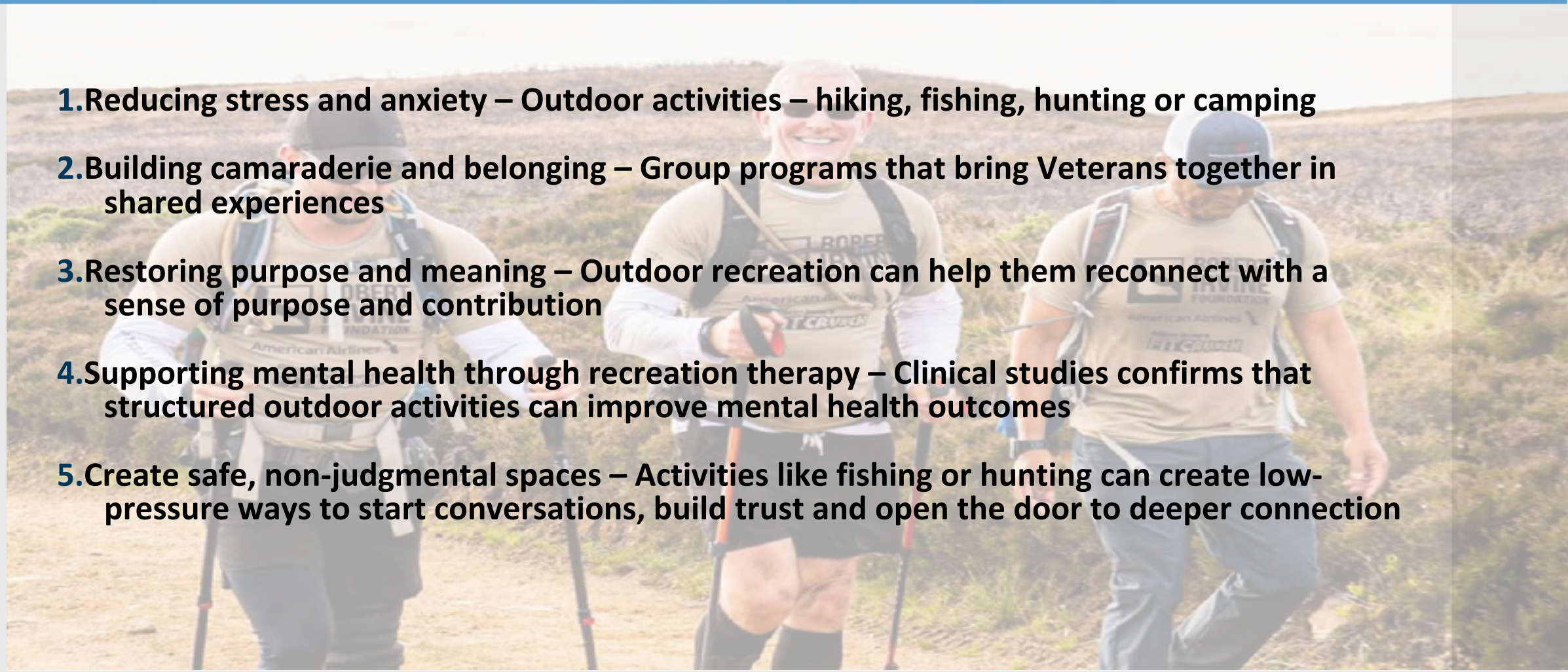
Serve Veterans in ALL 87 Counties

How Does Nature Benefit Mental Health?

Outdoor activities improve mental health in Veterans

- "Nature, can help reconnect Veterans with the experience of positive emotion and develop a renewed sense of awe and appreciation for the outdoors." – Jennifer Romesser, clinical psychologist with the Salt Lake City VA Health Care System in Utah. [From VA Research Currents, February 19, 2014]
- "Time spent outdoors and exposure to green space results in mental restoration, increases positive emotions and decreased anxiety." – Heather Eliassen, Harvard Professor.
- Increasing access to nature can help people heal from trauma and improve overall health, education and wellbeing. – Minnesota Department of Health (MDH)

Helping Prevent Suicide in Veterans



1. Reducing stress and anxiety – Outdoor activities – hiking, fishing, hunting or camping
2. Building camaraderie and belonging – Group programs that bring Veterans together in shared experiences
3. Restoring purpose and meaning – Outdoor recreation can help them reconnect with a sense of purpose and contribution
4. Supporting mental health through recreation therapy – Clinical studies confirms that structured outdoor activities can improve mental health outcomes
5. Create safe, non-judgmental spaces – Activities like fishing or hunting can create low-pressure ways to start conversations, build trust and open the door to deeper connection

How Can I Help?



How Can I Help?

Visit the Minnesota Department of Veteran Affairs website and sign up to receive alerts for upcoming grant cycles

https://mn.gov/mdva/resources/federalresources/grants/

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Questions?

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Thank You!

Heather Darby

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Every Third Saturday: Staying in the Fight

Tom McKenna
Co-Founder and Veterans Advocate



5402 43rd Avenue S
Minneapolis, MN 55417
952-356-5116

ever ythirdsaturday.org



Veterans Crisis Line

DIAL 988 then PRESS 1

Loneliness is prevalent and clinically significant among US military veterans.

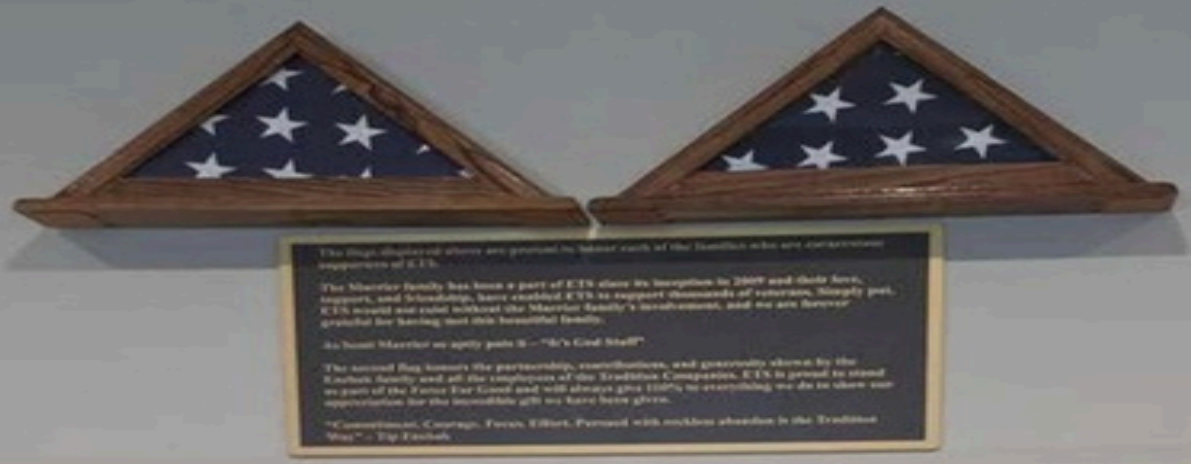
Loneliness remains highly prevalent among US veterans, with nearly 6 in 10 reporting at least moderate loneliness and more than 1 in 5 reporting frequent loneliness. The prevalence of frequent loneliness increased from 19.7% in 2019–20201 to 22.4% in 2025–2026, representing an estimated additional 460,000 affected veterans based on population benchmarks.

A clear dose-response association was observed between loneliness and mental health measures, with higher loneliness levels associated with greater odds of psychiatric disorders and suicidality. For example, the prevalence of suicidal ideation increased systematically as a function of loneliness levels (3.8% vs 14.8% vs 32.3%), even after adjusting for sociodemographic, military, trauma, and health factors.

A Growing Epidemic of Loneliness Among US Military Veterans: National Trends, Psychiatric Burden, and Suicide Risk

Robert H. Pietrzak, PhD, MPH; Ian C. Fischer, PhD; Peter J. Na, MD, MPH
J Clin Psychiatry 2026;87(3):26br16494





We believe there is no better medicine

than being in community with other veterans and their families,

rediscovering purpose,

and serving a cause which is greater than ourselves.

Left of Bang

Relationship
ends
Loss of support
network
Financial crisis



How do we stay left of bang?

Clinical

- Mental Health treatment
- SUD Treatment
- Lethal means prevention

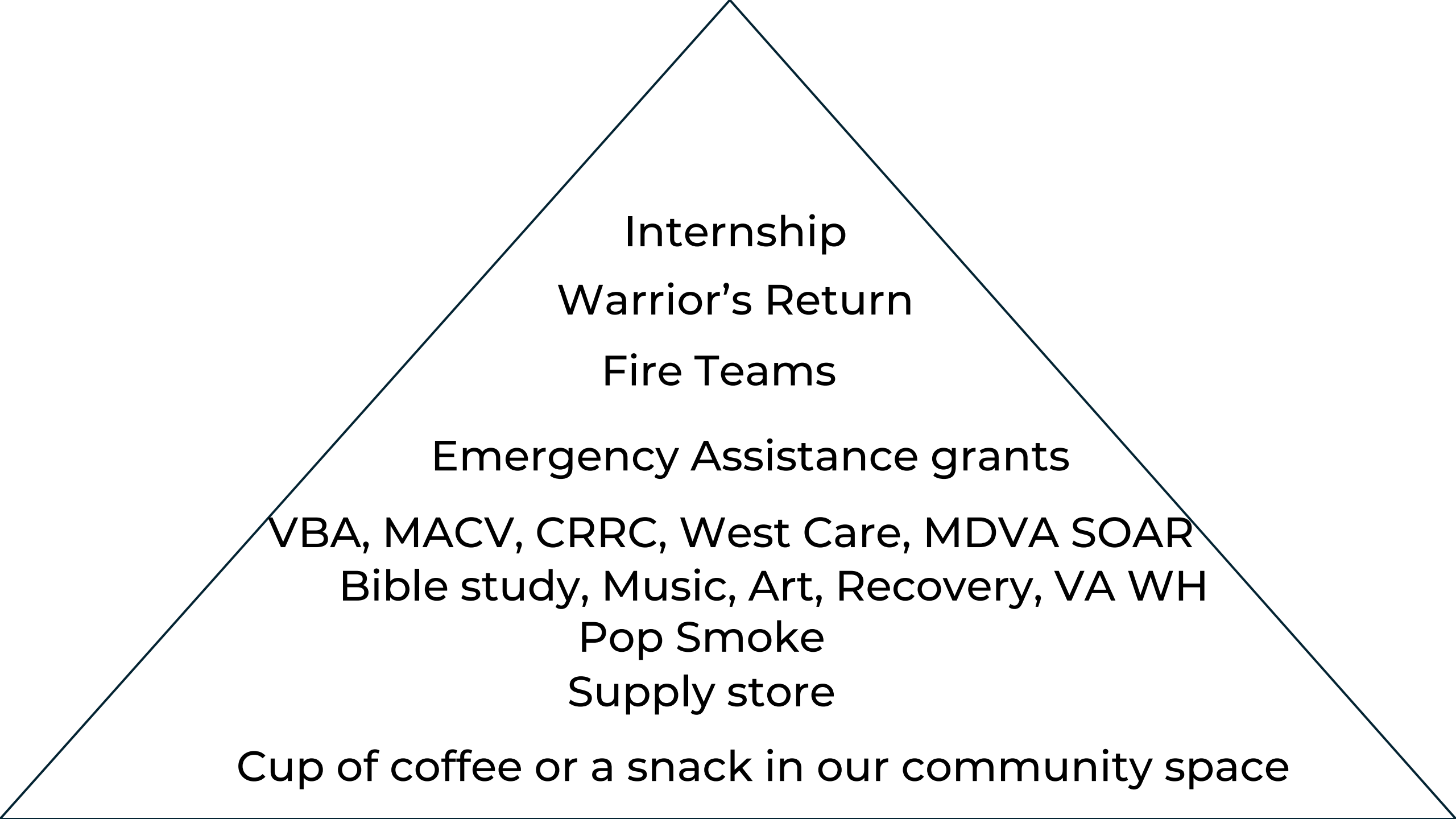
Organic

- Community of support
- Engagement with others
- Communication


LOVE THAT
CRUNCH
How you doin?

How does Every Third Saturday fit in?

- ETS creates opportunities for veterans to connect with resources, benefits, and other veterans
- We are building trust with each interaction
- A Hierarchy of Engagement allows veterans to plug in where they feel comfortable which creates higher rates of return and continued interaction


Internship
Warrior’s Return
Fire Teams
Emergency Assistance grants
VBA, MACV, CRRC, West Care, MDVA SOAR
Bible study, Music, Art, Recovery, VA WH
Pop Smoke
Supply store
Cup of coffee or a snack in our community space

Rick's
COFFEE BAR



POP SMOKE
EMPOWERED BY ET

SUPPLY
STORE
EMPOWERED BY ET

WARRIOR'S RETURN

tom@everythirdsaturday.org





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MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS





Magnus Foundation

Christine Portillo
Board Member for Program Development

Bob Jaskowiak
Vice President & Board Member

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Closing & Call to Action

Kristi Stites, Veterans Suicide Prevention & Program Development
MDVA Healthcare: Veterans Community Health

SAVE THE DATE

2027 Minnesota Veteran Suicide Prevention Summit

Pathways to Care: Navigating Transitions Together

Wednesday, September 29, 2027

General John W. Vessey Readiness Center
4800 Hamline Avenue North
Arden Hills, MN 55126

Your Feedback is Needed!





MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

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