



## The Nebraska Association of Local Health Directors (NALHD)

a 501c3 professional association

## A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO SUPPORTING VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

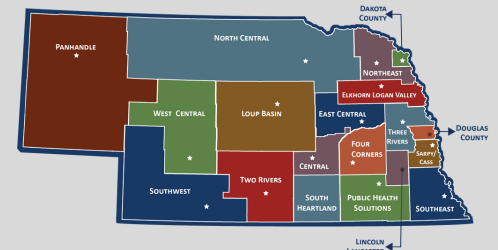
Veterans and their families are often invisible and disconnected from support that recognizes and understands how military experiences can impact health, and wellbeing. While the Veterans Administration (VA) in Nebraska enjoys well-earned respect, many Veterans are not enrolled. Others, including almost all family members, are not eligible for VA Services or benefits.

The alarming statistics regarding depression, suicide, and other negative health outcomes among Service Members and Veterans are well known. However, family members—who are often the first responders when Veterans and Service Members are in crisis—deserve and need the attention of the public health system. In Nebraska, recent data show that Veteran spouses and partners have more poor mental health days and are more likely to have been told that they have depression than the population as a whole. Also, Nebraska students with a military connection (through their parent or guardian) are significantly more likely to report that they considered attempting suicide, attempted suicide, and engaged in self-harm. They are also more likely to use alcohol, tobacco, and prescription drugs.

To address these concerning statistics, **Veterans and their families need to be surrounded by whole communities of cross-sector organizations that are broadly aware of and working to address their challenges.**

### Learn more at

[www.nalhd.org/our-work/vetset](http://www.nalhd.org/our-work/vetset)



By enabling local health departments to collaborate to address statewide problems, NALHD amplifies their impact.

The jurisdictions of NALHD's 21 member organizations include all of Nebraska's 93 counties and the Winnebago Tribal Health Department.

**NALHD launched VetSET Nebraska in 2013 to leverage the unique position and expertise of local health departments (LHDs) to support connection, resiliency, and wellbeing of Veterans and their families.** VetSET's nationally recognized work is propelled by NALHD's relationships with Veterans and families and our partnerships with local, state, and federal entities in the public health and Veteran spaces.



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# A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO SUPPORTING VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

## How has VetSET increased statewide capacity to serve Veterans across sectors?

- **Coordinating the Nebraska Veteran and Families Task Force (NVFTF)** – a state-level forum for cross-sector partnership and collaboration for strategic impact. NVFTF is the Nebraska/Western Iowa Veteran Administrations' (VA) Community Veteran Engagement Board (CVEB).
- **Improving the military cultural competence** of over 1,000 LHD staff and partners in health care, education, law enforcement, community development, faith-based organizations, local and state government by way of No Wrong Door trainings across Nebraska. VetSET's No Wrong Door builds military cultural competence while also incorporating targeted networking between participants. These events have been the genesis of relationships—including local work groups and task forces—that advocate for Veterans and their families.
- **Building the suicide prevention skills of over 700 rural and suburban community members** through Veteran-focused workshops that include QPR (Question. Persuade. Refer.) Gatekeeper training. Military-focused QPR Gatekeeper suicide prevention training raises local awareness and contributes to Veteran-focused tactics in several Community Health Improvement Plans—the cornerstone of local public health strategy.
- **Formalizing military cultural competence and awareness training as part of LHD staff onboarding and professional development.** This ensures ongoing, statewide capacity for our public health system to work effectively in the Veteran space.
- **Initiating systems to better-monitor the health status of Veterans and their families.** NALHD led efforts to add military connection screeners to the Nebraska Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) survey and to the Nebraska Risk and Protective Factors Student Survey (NRPFS). These screeners are providing ongoing insight into the health and wellbeing of military-connected families in Nebraska.

### Funding Partners

- VA Office of Rural Health (2014-2016)
- Prevention Institute/ Movember Foundation's Making Connections initiative (2015-2020)
- Behavioral Health Education Center of Nebraska [BHECN] (2019-2021)
- CDC Foundation (2020)
- National Veterans Intermediary (2019, 2020)



### LHD Partners

VetSET has armed Nebraska's local health departments (LHDs) with skills, partnerships, and population-level data. LHDs are able to better monitor the health status of Veterans and their families by marshaling resources and leveraging cross-sector relationships that are needed to respond to the unique needs of this population.