

116TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 3495

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide financial assistance to eligible entities to provide and coordinate the provision of suicide prevention services for veterans at risk of suicide and veteran families through the award of grants to such entities, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JUNE 26, 2019

Mr. BERGMAN (for himself and Ms. HOULAHAN) introduced the following bill;
which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide financial assistance to eligible entities to provide and coordinate the provision of suicide prevention services for veterans at risk of suicide and veteran families through the award of grants to such entities, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Improve Well-Being
5 for Veterans Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO CERTAIN ENTITIES TO**
2 **PROVIDE AND COORDINATE THE PROVISION**
3 **OF SUICIDE PREVENTION SERVICES FOR**
4 **VETERANS AT RISK OF SUICIDE AND VET-**
5 **ERAN FAMILIES.**

6 (a) DISTRIBUTION OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE.—The
7 Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall provide financial as-
8 sistance to eligible entities approved under this section
9 through the award of grants to such entities to provide
10 and coordinate the provision services to veterans and vet-
11 eran families to reduce the risk of suicide.

12 (b) AWARD OF GRANTS.—

13 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall award a
14 grant to each eligible entity for which the Secretary
15 has approved an application under subsection (e) to
16 provide or coordinate the provision of suicide preven-
17 tion services under this section.

18 (2) GRANT AMOUNTS, INTERVALS OF PAYMENT,
19 AND MATCHING FUNDS.—In accordance with the
20 services being provided under a grant under this sec-
21 tion and the duration of those services, the Secretary
22 may establish—

23 (A) a maximum amount to be awarded
24 under the grant;

25 (B) intervals of payment for the adminis-
26 tration of the grant; and

1 (C) a requirement for the recipient of the
2 grant to provide matching funds in a specified
3 percentage.

4 (c) DISTRIBUTION OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AND
5 PREFERENCE.—

6 (1) DISTRIBUTION.—

7 (A) GEOGRAPHIC.—The Secretary shall
8 ensure that, to the extent practicable and in
9 compliance with subparagraph (B), financial as-
10 sistance under this section is equitably distrib-
11 uted across geographic regions, including rural
12 communities and Tribal land.

13 (B) AREAS WITH NEED.—The Secretary
14 shall ensure that, to the extent practicable, fi-
15 nancial assistance under this section is distrib-
16 uted—

17 (i) to provide services in areas of the
18 United States that have experienced high
19 rates or a high burden of veteran suicide;
20 and

21 (ii) to eligible entities that can assist
22 veterans at risk of suicide that are not cur-
23 rently receiving health care furnished by
24 the Department of Veterans Affairs.

1 (2) PREFERENCE.—The Secretary shall give
2 preference in the provision of financial assistance
3 under this section to eligible entities providing or co-
4 ordinating, or who have demonstrated the ability to
5 provide or coordinate, suicide prevention services or
6 other services that improve the quality of life of vet-
7 erans and their families and reduce the factors that
8 contribute to veteran suicide.

9 (d) REQUIREMENTS FOR RECEIPTS OF FINANCIAL
10 ASSISTANCE.—

11 (1) NOTIFICATION THAT SERVICES ARE FROM
12 DEPARTMENT.—Each entity receiving financial as-
13 sistance under this section to provide suicide preven-
14 tion services to veterans at risk of suicide and vet-
15 eran families shall notify the recipients of such serv-
16 ices that such services are being paid for, in whole
17 or in part, by the Department.

18 (2) DEVELOPMENT OF PLAN WITH BENE-
19 FICIARIES.—

20 (A) IN GENERAL.—If an entity receiving
21 financial assistance under this section provides
22 temporary cash assistance under subsection
23 (k)(5)(K), the entity shall develop a plan to en-
24 sure that any beneficiary of such temporary
25 cash assistance is self-sustaining at the end of

1 the period of eligibility for such temporary cash
2 assistance.

3 (B) CONSULTATION WITH BENEFICIARY.—

4 Any plan developed under subparagraph (A)
5 with respect to a beneficiary shall be developed
6 in consultation with the beneficiary.

7 (3) REPORTS.—The Secretary—

8 (A) shall require each entity receiving fi-
9 nancial assistance under this section to submit
10 to the Secretary an annual report that describes
11 the projects carried out with such financial as-
12 sistance during the year covered by the report;

13 (B) shall specify to each such entity the
14 evaluation criteria and data and information,
15 which shall include a mental health measure-
16 ment of each veteran served, to be submitted in
17 such report; and

18 (C) may require such entities to submit to
19 the Secretary such additional reports as the
20 Secretary considers appropriate.

21 (e) APPLICATION FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE.—

22 (1) IN GENERAL.—An eligible entity seeking fi-
23 nancial assistance under this section shall submit to
24 the Secretary an application therefor in such form,
25 in such manner, and containing such commitments

1 and information as the Secretary considers nec-
2 essary to carry out this section.

3 (2) MATTERS TO BE INCLUDED.—Each applica-
4 tion submitted by an eligible entity under paragraph
5 (1) shall contain the following:

6 (A) A description of the suicide prevention
7 services proposed to be provided by the eligible
8 entity and the identified need for those services.

9 (B) A detailed plan describing how the eli-
10 gible entity proposes to coordinate and deliver
11 suicide prevention services to veterans not cur-
12 rently receiving care furnished by the Depart-
13 ment, including—

14 (i) an identification of the community
15 partners with which the eligible entity pro-
16 poses to work in delivering such services;

17 (ii) a description of the arrangements
18 currently in place between the eligible enti-
19 ty and such partners; and

20 (iii) an identification of how long such
21 arrangements have been in place.

22 (C) A description of the types of veterans
23 at risk of suicide and veteran families proposed
24 to be provided suicide prevention services.

1 (D) An estimate of the number of veterans
2 at risk of suicide and veteran families proposed
3 to be provided suicide prevention services and
4 the basis for such estimate, including the per-
5 centage of those veterans who are not currently
6 receiving care furnished by the Department.

7 (E) Evidence of the experience of the eligi-
8 ble entity (and the proposed partners of the en-
9 tity) in providing suicide prevention services to
10 individuals at risk of suicide, particularly to vet-
11 erans at risk of suicide and veteran families.

12 (F) A description of the managerial and
13 technological capacity of the eligible entity—

14 (i) to coordinate the provision of sui-
15 cide prevention services with the provision
16 of other services;

17 (ii) to assess continuously the needs of
18 veterans at risk of suicide and veteran
19 families for suicide prevention services;

20 (iii) to coordinate the provision of sui-
21 cide prevention services with the services of
22 the Department for which the beneficiaries
23 are eligible;

1 (iv) to tailor suicide prevention serv-
2 ices to the needs of veterans at risk of sui-
3 cide and veteran families;

4 (v) to continuously seek new sources
5 of assistance to ensure the continuity of
6 suicide prevention services for veterans at
7 risk of suicide and veteran families as long
8 as the veteran is determined to be at risk
9 of suicide; and

10 (vi) to measure, over a long-term pe-
11 riod, the improved mental resiliency and
12 mental outlook of the veteran served.

13 (G) Such additional application criteria as
14 the Secretary considers appropriate.

15 (f) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—

16 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall provide
17 training and technical assistance to eligible entities
18 in receipt of financial assistance under this section
19 regarding—

20 (A) the data required to be collected and
21 shared with the Department;

22 (B) the means of data collection and shar-
23 ing;

24 (C) familiarization with and appropriate
25 use of any tool to be used to measure the effec-

1 tiveness of the use of the financial assistance
2 provided; and

3 (D) the requirements for reporting under
4 subsection (d)(3) on services provided via such
5 financial assistance.

6 (2) PROVISION OF TRAINING AND TECHNICAL
7 ASSISTANCE.—The Secretary may provide the train-
8 ing and technical assistance described in paragraph
9 (1) directly or through grants or contracts with ap-
10 propriate public or nonprofit entities.

11 (g) ADMINISTRATION OF GRANT PROGRAM.—

12 (1) SELECTION CRITERIA.—The Secretary, in
13 consultation with entities specified in paragraph (3),
14 shall establish criteria for the selection of eligible en-
15 tities that have submitted applications under sub-
16 section (e).

17 (2) DEVELOPMENT OF MEASURES AND
18 METRICS.—The Secretary shall develop, in consulta-
19 tion with entities specified in paragraph (3), the fol-
20 lowing:

21 (A) A framework for collecting and sharing
22 information about entities in receipt of financial
23 assistance under this section for purposes of
24 improving the discovery of services available for
25 veterans at risk of suicide and veteran families,

1 set forth by service type, locality, and eligibility
2 criteria.

3 (B) The measures to be used by each enti-
4 ty in receipt of financial assistance under this
5 section to determine the effectiveness of the
6 programming being provided by such entity in
7 improving mental resiliency and mental outlook
8 of veterans at risk of suicide and veteran fami-
9 lies.

10 (C) Metrics for measuring the effectiveness
11 of the provision of financial assistance under
12 this section.

13 (3) COORDINATION.—In developing a plan for
14 the design and implementation of the provision of fi-
15 nancial assistance under this section, including cri-
16 teria for the award of grants, the Secretary shall
17 consult with the following:

18 (A) Veterans service organizations.

19 (B) National organizations representing
20 potential community partners of eligible entities
21 in providing supportive services to address the
22 needs of veterans at risk of suicide and their
23 families, including national organizations that—

1 (i) advocate for the needs of individ-
2 uals with or at risk of behavioral health
3 conditions;

4 (ii) represent mayors;

5 (iii) represent first responders; or

6 (iv) represent chiefs of police and
7 sheriffs.

8 (C) Organizations with which the Depart-
9 ment has a current memoranda of agreement or
10 understanding related to mental health or sui-
11 cide prevention.

12 (D) State departments of veterans affairs.

13 (E) National organizations representing
14 members of the reserve components of the
15 Armed Forces.

16 (F) Vet Centers.

17 (G) Organizations with experience in cre-
18 ating measurement tools for purposes of deter-
19 mining programmatic effectiveness.

20 (H) Such other organizations as the Sec-
21 retary considers appropriate.

22 (4) REPORT ON GRANT CRITERIA.—Before noti-
23 fying eligible entities of the availability of funding
24 under this section, the Secretary shall submit to
25 Congress a report containing—

1 (A) criteria for the award of a grant under
2 this section;

3 (B) the tool to be used by the Department
4 to measure the effectiveness of the use of finan-
5 cial assistance provided under this section; and

6 (C) a framework for the sharing of infor-
7 mation about entities in receipt of financial as-
8 sistance under this section.

9 (h) INFORMATION ON POTENTIAL BENEFICIARIES.—

10 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may make
11 available to recipients of financial assistance under
12 this section certain information regarding potential
13 beneficiaries of services for which such financial as-
14 sistance is provided.

15 (2) INFORMATION INCLUDED.—The information
16 made available under paragraph (1) with respect to
17 potential beneficiaries may include the following:

18 (A) Confirmation of the status of a poten-
19 tial beneficiary as a veteran.

20 (B) Confirmation of whether a potential
21 beneficiary is currently receiving care furnished
22 by the Department or has recently received
23 such care.

24 (i) DURATION.—The authority of the Secretary to
25 provide financial assistance under this section shall termi-

1 nate on the date that is three years after the date on which
2 the first grant is awarded under this section.

3 (j) REPORTING.—

4 (1) INTERIM REPORT.—

5 (A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 18
6 months after the date on which the first grant
7 is awarded under this section, the Secretary
8 shall submit to the appropriate committees of
9 Congress a report on the provision of financial
10 assistance under this section.

11 (B) ELEMENTS.—The report submitted
12 under subparagraph (A) shall include the fol-
13 lowing:

14 (i) An assessment of the effectiveness
15 of the provision of financial assistance
16 under this section, including the effective-
17 ness of community partners in conducting
18 outreach to veterans at risk of suicide and
19 veteran families.

20 (ii) A list of grant recipients and their
21 partner organizations that delivered serv-
22 ices funded by the grant and the amount
23 of such grant received by each recipient
24 and partner organization.

1 (iii) The number of veterans sup-
2 ported by each grant recipient, including
3 through services provided to family mem-
4 bers.

5 (iv) The number of veterans sup-
6 ported by financial assistance under this
7 section, including through services provided
8 to family members.

9 (v) The number of veterans supported
10 by financial assistance under this section,
11 including through services provided to fam-
12 ily members, who were not previously re-
13 ceiving care furnished by the Department.

14 (vi) The number of veterans whose
15 mental resiliency and mental outlook re-
16 ceived a baseline measurement assessment
17 under this section and the number of such
18 veterans whose mental resiliency and men-
19 tal outlook will be measured by the De-
20 partment or a community partner over a
21 period of time.

22 (vii) The types of data the Depart-
23 ment was able to collect and share with
24 partners, including a characterization of
25 the benefits of that data.

1 (2) FINAL REPORT.—Not later than three years
2 after the date on which the first grant is awarded
3 under this section, the Secretary shall submit to the
4 appropriate committees of Congress—

5 (A) a follow-up on the interim report sub-
6 mitted under paragraph (1) containing the ele-
7 ments set forth in subparagraph (B) of such
8 paragraph; and

9 (B) a report on—

10 (i) the effectiveness of the provision of
11 financial assistance under this section, in-
12 cluding the effectiveness of community
13 partners in conducting outreach to vet-
14 erans at risk of suicide and veteran fami-
15 lies;

16 (ii) an assessment of the increased ca-
17 pacity of the Department to provide serv-
18 ices to veterans at risk of suicide and vet-
19 eran families, set forth by State, as a re-
20 sult of the provision of financial assistance
21 under this section; and

22 (iii) the feasibility and advisability of
23 extending or expanding the provision of fi-
24 nancial assistance under this section.

25 (k) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

1 (1) APPROPRIATE COMMITTEES OF CON-
2 GRESS.—The term “appropriate committees of Con-
3 gress” means—

4 (A) the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs
5 and the Subcommittee on Military Construc-
6 tion, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies of
7 the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate;
8 and

9 (B) the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs
10 and the Subcommittee on Military Construc-
11 tion, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies of
12 the Committee on Appropriations of the House
13 of Representatives.

14 (2) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—The term “eligible enti-
15 ty” means—

16 (A) an incorporated private institution or
17 foundation—

18 (i) no part of the net earnings of
19 which incurs to the benefit of any member,
20 founder, contributor, or individual;

21 (ii) that has a governing board that
22 would be responsible for the operation of
23 the suicide prevention services provided
24 under this section; and

1 (iii) that is approved by the Secretary
2 as to financial responsibility;

3 (B) a corporation wholly owned and con-
4 trolled by an organization meeting the require-
5 ments of clauses (i), (ii), and (iii) of subpara-
6 graph (A);

7 (C) a tribally designated housing entity (as
8 defined in section 4 of the Native American
9 Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act
10 of 1996 (25 U.S.C. 4103)); or

11 (D) a community-based organization that
12 is physically based in the targeted community
13 and that can effectively network with local civic
14 organizations, regional health systems, and
15 other settings where veterans at risk of suicide
16 and the families of such veterans are likely to
17 have contact.

18 (3) PEER SPECIALIST.—The term “peer spe-
19 cialist” means a person eligible to be appointed as
20 a peer specialist under section 7402(b)(13) of title
21 38, United States Code.

22 (4) RISK OF SUICIDE.—The term “risk of sui-
23 cide” means exposure to or the existence of any of
24 the following:

1 (A) Health risk factors, including the fol-
2 lowing:

- 3 (i) Mental health challenges.
- 4 (ii) Substance abuse.
- 5 (iii) Serious or chronic health condi-
6 tions or pain.
- 7 (iv) Traumatic brain injury.

8 (B) Environmental risk factors, including
9 the following:

- 10 (i) Access to lethal means (such as
11 drugs, firearms, etc.).
- 12 (ii) Prolonged stress.
- 13 (iii) Stressful life events.
- 14 (iv) Exposure to the suicide of an-
15 other person or to graphic or sensational-
16 ized accounts of suicide.
- 17 (v) Unemployment.
- 18 (vi) Homelessness.
- 19 (vii) Recent loss.
- 20 (viii) Legal or financial challenges.

21 (C) Historical risk factors, including the
22 following:

- 23 (i) Previous suicide attempts.
- 24 (ii) Family history of suicide.

1 (iii) History of abuse, neglect, or trauma.
2

3 (5) SUICIDE PREVENTION SERVICES.—The
4 term “suicide prevention services” means services to
5 address the needs of veterans at risk of suicide and
6 veteran families and includes the following:

7 (A) Outreach to identify veterans at risk of
8 suicide, with an emphasis on veterans who are
9 at highest risk or not receiving health care or
10 other services furnished by the Department.

11 (B) A baseline mental health assessment
12 for risk screening and referral to care.

13 (C) Education on suicide risk and preven-
14 tion to families and communities.

15 (D) Direct treatment.

16 (E) Medication management.

17 (F) Individual and group therapy.

18 (G) Case management services.

19 (H) Peer support services.

20 (I) Assistance in obtaining any benefits
21 from the Department that the veteran at risk of
22 suicide or veteran family may be eligible to re-
23 ceive, including—

24 (i) vocational and rehabilitation coun-
25 seling;

1 (ii) supportive services for homeless
2 veterans;

3 (iii) employment and training services;

4 (iv) educational assistance; and

5 (v) health care services.

6 (J) Assistance in obtaining and coordi-
7 nating the provision of other benefits provided
8 by the Federal Government, a State or local
9 government, or an eligible entity.

10 (K) Temporary cash assistance (not to ex-
11 ceed 6 months) to assist with emergent needs
12 relating to—

13 (i) health care services;

14 (ii) daily living services;

15 (iii) personal financial planning;

16 (iv) transportation services;

17 (v) temporary income support serv-
18 ices;

19 (vi) fiduciary and representative payee
20 services;

21 (vii) legal services to assist the vet-
22 eran family with issues that may con-
23 tribute to the risk of suicide of the veteran;
24 and

1 (viii) child care (not to exceed \$5,000
2 per veteran family per fiscal year).

3 (L) Such other services necessary for im-
4 proving the resiliency of veterans at risk of sui-
5 cide and veteran families as the Secretary con-
6 siders appropriate, which may include—

7 (i) adaptive sports or in-place rec-
8 reational therapy;

9 (ii) substance use reduction program-
10 ming;

11 (iii) individual, group, or family coun-
12 seling; and

13 (iv) relationship coaching.

14 (6) VET CENTER.—The term “Vet Center”
15 means a center for readjustment counseling and re-
16 lated mental health services for veterans under sec-
17 tion 1712A of title 38, United States Code.

18 (7) VETERAN.—The term “veteran” has the
19 meaning given that term in section 101 of title 38,
20 United States Code.

21 (8) VETERAN FAMILY.—The term “veteran
22 family” means, with respect to a veteran at risk of
23 suicide, any of the following:

24 (A) A parent.

25 (B) A spouse.

1 (C) A child.

2 (D) A sibling.

3 (E) A step-family member.

4 (F) An extended family member.

5 (G) Any other individual who lives with the
6 veteran.

7 (9) VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATION.—The
8 term “veterans service organization” means any or-
9 ganization recognized by the Secretary of Veterans
10 Affairs for the representation of veterans included as
11 part of the annually updated list at [https://](https://www.va.gov/vso/)
12 www.va.gov/vso/ or a successor website.

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