

**Preventing Veteran Suicide by Integrating a Public Awareness Air Campaign with a Ground Campaign  
Collaborative project between MCW & War Memorial Center, Milwaukee, Wi.  
MCW PI: Bertrand Berger, Ph.D., Dept of Psychiatry**

**Response to Letter Of Intent Reviewers' Feedback**

**Strengths:**

1. This proposal would expand upon the PSAs already being aired with community and peer engagement. The participants are integrated in the Veteran community and can draw upon established programs at the VA and War Memorial Center to implement this project.

**Response:** Thank you and agree that the War Memorial Center is a key beacon for Veteran issues throughout Southeastern Wisconsin and in partnering with the VA the project can expand the reach of important Veteran suicide prevention public messaging throughout the state of Wisconsin. Additionally the partnership with Wisconsin Broadcasting Association assists in maintaining the reach of the Air Campaign.

2. The repeated messaging from trusted messengers for this population to reduce suicides is critical and necessary. The prior work and commitment demonstrates successful outcomes. Need is clearly demonstrated and partnering of ground campaign with air campaign by VPS are strengths. Feasibility of accomplishing this work appears realistic and data collection, analysis and aims also seem realistic to accomplish the goal. The direct support and training components of this LO are likely more critical than the campaign itself, but perhaps the campaign is the "door opener".

**Response:** Thank you and agree with statements. Consistent public awareness messaging is critical to impacting population health factors and this project will intensify the "big picture" awareness campaigns occurring in Wisconsin. The ground component is a critical factor necessary to verify the message is reaching people in direct in-person venues. Agree that the air campaign can assist in making the campaign visible to the public and "open the door" to agencies and organizations to consider the training opportunities the project will be able to offer.

3. Describes a WI-based health need with cited evidence and past efforts that informed the proposed AHW project. Includes evaluation methods and metrics to demonstrate impact during the project period and towards the desired long-term health impact Includes plans for dissemination and a plan to seek additional funding sources for creating a scalable model for other WI communities to use.

**Response:** Thank you for the emphasis on building on past efforts projects as we move these important public awareness messages forward with the intent to ultimately reduce Veteran suicides. This project will assist with improving our overall public awareness project by integrating both air and ground campaigns which will improve the impact and provide opportunities for sustainable growth, community empowerment, and a lasting positive influence on public health awareness.

**Weaknesses**

1. It is unclear if the project is tailored to Veterans or people in a Veteran's life, or both, as well as if community events would be the best place to engage with Veterans who may be struggling, since they are very public and there's still so much stigma surrounding mental health issues and suicide. It may be that a struggling vet would walk right past the information table because they don't want to admit publicly (or to their friends and family) that they need help. Are there other ways to engage vets in addition to county fairs, etc.?

**Response:** Thank you for raising this important point. The Principal Investigator (PI) has extensive experience in Veteran-focused outreach and recognizes the challenges of engaging Veterans at general public events due to stigma and privacy concerns. To address this, the project will incorporate strategies that prioritize Veteran-specific venues and family-inclusive gatherings, creating environments where participation feels safe and supportive. In addition, we are implementing complementary approaches beyond public events, including discreet outreach through trusted Veteran Service Organizations (e.g, American Legion Posts and VFWs), targeted digital campaigns, and peer-to-peer engagement opportunities at the War Memorial Center designed for Veteran outreach. These methods provide multiple, stigma-sensitive pathways for Veterans and their families to access resources and support. Your feedback reinforces the importance of these diverse strategies, and we remain committed to refining them to ensure accessibility and impact.

2. It might also be helpful to work with gun ranges and gun stores, either by leaving pamphlets or by educating staff on how to recognize warning signs of suicide or other mental health issues. Finally, would it be helpful to also distribute gun locks along with resources and information?

**Response:** Thank you for this excellent suggestion. The Principal Investigator (PI) currently directs the Live Today – Put It Away (LT-PIA) initiative, Wisconsin’s established “Gun Shop” program, which partners with gun stores and ranges to provide suicide prevention materials and training. The proposed project will actively promote and expand participation in LT-PIA, ensuring that gun retailers and range staff are equipped to recognize warning signs and connect individuals to resources. In addition, we agree that distributing gun locks alongside educational materials is a critical component of reducing access to lethal means. This will be incorporated into our outreach strategy at events and through participating gun shops, reinforcing both safety and awareness.

3. Awareness campaigns are difficult to measure true impact as there are so many confounding variables. While with this population and in conjunction with the air campaign, it increases reach and reinforces messaging, it is unfortunately one of those things that constantly needs funding and hard to isolate in cause and effect.

**Response:** We agree that measuring the true impact of awareness campaigns presents challenges due to confounding variables and the difficulty of isolating cause and effect. To address this, our approach includes two key strategies: **Sustainable Funding:** We are actively working to strengthen public-private partnerships through the expansion of our Veteran Suicide Prevention Public Awareness Coalition, ensuring ongoing support for these efforts. **Robust Evaluation:** In order to address this weakness, we will implement routine statewide surveys of Wisconsin residents to monitor changes in attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors over time and test the impact of the ground campaign as compared to the air campaign. This will be accomplished since the ground campaign will be focused on 4 counties in SE Wisconsin and the air campaign will include the entire state. Therefore, the project will be able to measure differences between counties that have both ground and air campaigns and those with only the air campaign. This research design will allow an improved approach to determine the impact of the ground campaign. This will provide valuable insights into trends and identify gaps, informing decisions about future interventions and resource allocation. Even if causality cannot be definitively established, this project will generate actionable evidence on the effectiveness—or limitations—of current strategies, guiding continuous improvement and ensuring that public awareness efforts remain responsive and impactful.

4. Lacks a clear timeline, limiting the ability to assess feasibility

**Response:** We have detailed a clear timeline to ensure the ability to address feasibility – see our visual timeline in the narrative.

## Project Need & Strategy

**Health Need and Priority:** Veteran suicide prevention is a critical public health priority in the United States and especially in Wisconsin due to the significant health disparity between Veterans and non-Veterans. According to the 2025 VA National Suicide Report, the unadjusted suicide rate for US Veterans in 2023 was 35.2 per 100,000 as compared to non-Veterans at 18.2 per 100,000.<sup>1</sup> In Wisconsin, this disparity is even more pronounced as Wisconsin's rate of Veteran suicide is ranked 16<sup>th</sup> as compared to Veterans in other US states. Additionally, Wisconsin Veterans die by suicide at a rate of that is statistically higher at 39.4 per 100,000, as compared to Wisconsin non-Veterans at 18.2 per 100,000.<sup>2</sup>

Firearms are the leading method of suicide among Wisconsin Veterans, accounting for 70.8% of Veteran suicides, compared to 54.6% among non-Veterans. These statistics underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions that address Veteran issues, mental health stigma and lethal means safety.<sup>2</sup>

**Why This Need Is a Priority:** Veterans often experience unique cultural barriers to seeking help, including a heightened sense of toughness, self-reliance, lack of a mission, mental health stigma and high rate of firearm ownership. Research indicates that stigma, such as fear of appearing weak, remains a major deterrent to accessing mental health care.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, more Veterans who die by suicide are not engaged in VA healthcare (10 per day) compared to those who are engaged (7 per day), highlighting the need for community-based outreach beyond VA systems.<sup>1</sup> Public awareness campaigns are a viable method to improve health factors as has been demonstrated by the Ad Council's work in improving health behaviors through public awareness campaigns on smoking, car seats, and texting while driving.<sup>6</sup> In the past few years there has been an increase of national public awareness campaigns on Veteran suicide prevention linked to help seeking behavior and responsible firearm storage.<sup>4,5</sup> However, rates of Veteran suicide continue to remain at record levels.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, additional public education/awareness campaigns are needed at state, regional and local levels<sup>6</sup> to prevent Veteran suicides. Public awareness campaigns which focus on the importance to Reach Out for help when in crisis (being brave by seeking help), encourage non-Veterans to reach out to Veterans, increase social interactions through volunteer activities, and responsibly store firearms are recommended.<sup>1</sup>

**Current Gap:** While public awareness campaigns have demonstrated effectiveness in shifting attitudes, they often fail to translate into sustained behavioral change without complementary grassroots engagement. Between 2022 to 2024, our project team conducted an Air Campaign: "Reach Out to a Wisconsin Veteran Campaign" (see ReachOutWis.org) which found that advertising resulted in positive changes in (a) attitudes toward seeking help from a health care provider or a friend/loved one during a mental health crisis, (b) attitudes toward firearm storage during a crisis, and (c) self-reported secure firearm storage behaviors post-advertising, particularly among Veterans.<sup>7</sup> This Air Campaign (e.g., Reach Out to a Wisconsin Veteran) improved attitudes toward help-seeking and firearm safety but were not sustained.

In 2025, we conducted a 2nd project where the WMC again deployed the Reach Out to a Wisconsin Air Campaign to include direct email, TV and radio, Public Service Announcements (PSA) by partnering with the Wisconsin Broadcasting Association - Public Education Program (WBA-PEP). The email marketing resulted in more than 1,378,199 impressions and more than 600,000 video starts. There were 16,174 TV and radio spots of the Reach Out Campaign PSAs worth \$494,992.90 (net cost <\$75,000.00) across more than 200 Wisconsin stations. The PEP campaign successfully resulted in more than 4000 unique visitors to the ReachOutWis.Org website. However, preliminary results of surveys from a pre-post sample of Wisconsin residents did not result in a change in attitudes and/or behaviors on help seeking or firearm responsible storage (data available on request).

**Implementation Plan:** This project proposes to integrate Air Campaigns (Public Education/Awareness) with Ground Campaigns (in-person and outreach) that provide direct, stigma-sensitive engagement through trusted messengers such as Veteran Peer Specialists (VPS).

VPSs are Veterans with "lived experience" (in recovery from mental health and/or substance abuse problems) and trained (certified) to provide supportive services to vulnerable individuals and specifically qualified to connect with Veterans.<sup>5</sup> The Medical College of Wisconsin's (MCW) Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach (VPO) program, with the established website VeteranOutreach.org, has provided VPS outreach and has been effective in engaging Veterans with resources and supportive services. VPSs will provide Ground Outreach Campaign activities using the Capt. Mason VPO program model. VPS will provide outreach and direct support to Veterans through: 1. unique ability as a Veteran to relate to other Veterans, 2. connect Veterans to VA healthcare/benefits and community programs, 3. provide crisis intervention support/referrals, 4. provide non-clinical supports and 5. community volunteer opportunities and 6. trainings to Veteran and non-Veteran groups on Veteran cultural issues and suicide prevention trainings.

The proposed project Air Campaign (WBA-PEP) will focus on Veterans messages promoting the importance to Reach Out for help when in crisis (being brave by seeking help), encourage non-Veterans to Reach Out to Veterans, increase social interactions through volunteer activities (encouraging Veterans struggling to develop a mission), and messaging on responsible storage of firearms highlighting the Live Today – Put It Away program (Wisconsin’s program to decrease suicide lethal means with a firearm focus). The landing page for the WBA-PEP will be the ReachOutWis.org website optimized for landing PSA traffic from TV, radio, direct email.

The proposed project will additionally incorporate Ground Outreach Campaigns (GOC) which will be conducted by dedicated VPS outreach coordinator(s) and integrate this approach with the momentum of our previous Air Campaigns from the “Reach Out To a Wisconsin Veteran”. The GOCs will focus on Wisconsin counties in southeastern Wisconsin (Milwaukee, Waukesha, Washinton, Ozaukee and Racine) while the Air Campaign will provide public education regarding Veteran suicide prevention resources throughout Wisconsin. The study will be evaluated by comparing the combined Air and Ground Outreach Campaign in Southeastern (SE) Wisconsin counties to the Air Campaign conducted in the rest of the state. The impact between approaches will be measured using a survey which will ask residents key variables: 1. exposure to the campaign: TV, radio, email, in-person, 2. help-seeking attitude change, 3. knowledge of the “Reach Out to Wisconsin Veterans” message, 4. engagement in volunteer activities, and 5. attitude changes about responsible firearm storage. Surveys will also be collected at in-person outreach events which will provide additional Veteran specific results over the course of the project.

### **Key Objectives by Project Aims**

**Aim 1: Ground Outreach Campaigns (21 months) Overall Objective:** Engage Veterans—especially those not connected to VA healthcare—through in-person, direct, stigma-sensitive outreach by Veteran Peer Specialists.

**Objective 1a: Community Events and Branded Outreach Events:** Community events: Skylight Theater, Veteran specific plays, 3-5 events (fall/winter); Summerfest Veteran free day (July), State Fair Veteran free day (Aug). Other events will include county fairs or invited events throughout SE Wisconsin. WMC events branded for the Reach Out Ground Campaign: Veterans day 5K Run (late summer), Veteran Frost Fest (Feb), VA Women’s Retreat (fall), Music in the Garden (4 summer events). Launch at least 1 social media awareness challenge to drive traffic to social media (e.g., 17 Veterans die from suicide per day: walk, run, push-up, or pull-up other challenge on Facebook Live).

**Objective 1b: Sport Events – Veteran focus:** The WMC has partnered with local sports teams including Milwaukee Brewers baseball at 13 Sunday night home games and at least 1 Milwaukee Bucks basketball game. These games have a Veteran focus and will be branded with the WMC and the Reach Out to a Veteran Campaign. Air Campaign videos will be presented during the games on the JumboTrons (massive video displays).

**Objective 1c: Suicide Prevention Trainings (Veteran specific):** The VPS will deliver **suicide prevention trainings** (e.g., VA S.A.V.E., QPR) approximately quarterly with up to 8 events to local organizations such as Veteran Service Organizations, (e.g., VFW, American Legion) and non-Veteran community venues. This will include information on volunteer opportunities for Veterans, suicide prevention focused on the positive aspects of seeking mental health care (non-stigmatizing) and responsible firearm storage. Non-Veteran trainings will include addressing Veteran culture and suicide prevention. Training events will be coordinated by the WMC.

**Objective 1d: Support, Follow-Up and On-site resources:** The VPSs will respond to email inquiries and phone calls generated by the Air and Ground campaigns with non-judgmental support and referrals to VA healthcare, assist in VA eligibility determination, community resources and Veteran volunteer activities developed by the WMC. VPSs will have resource tables at events for Objectives 1a and 1b to distribute materials and initiate conversations. Distributions will include the following: 1. free gun locks, 2. Veteran volunteer opportunities resources, 3. VA healthcare and eligibility resources, 4. 998 crisis line information, 5. lethal means information with firearm responsible storage materials, 6. project surveys (gift cards will be offered to facilitate survey completion on site).

**AIM 1 Outcomes:** Engage directly with individuals at each community venue and distribute up to 500 gun locks (gun locks are available for free from the VA) over to course of the project. WMC events are anticipated to have attendance of 50 to 150 participants per event. Each sporting event is anticipated to distribute resources to 50 to 100 individuals. Suicide prevention trainings will include an average of 8 to 20 participants. The social media “challenge” will engage up to 100 to 500 participants. Survey completion at

outreach events is expected to result in a completion of a goal of 30 - 50 project surveys per quarter with a goal of 300 participants over 7 quarters. Gift cards (\$10.00) will be offered to participants completing surveys at in-person events.

## **Aim 2: Coordinate Public Awareness Air and Ground Outreach Campaigns (21 months)**

**Objective 2a: Air Campaign - Public Education Program (PEP)** will include at least 1 week of state wide programming per quarter (7 campaigns). The PEP will integrate the “Reach Out to a Wisconsin Veteran” and VPS messaging to highlight peer support, credibility and feature VPS statements and testimonials to reduce stigma and encourage help-seeking attitudes.

**Objective 2b: Air and Ground campaign coordination. Event Alignment:** Coordinate PEP schedules with VPS in-person events so that advertising promotes specific dates and locations. War Memorial Center (WMC) team will manage calendar synchronization. **Focus Group review:** Veteran Peer Specialist will provide focus group evaluation of messaging. **Training Promotion:** Incorporate announcements for suicide prevention and mental health first aid trainings into PEP content and ensure consistent branding across media and event material. **Website Integrations:** Update the Reachoutwis.org (Air Campaign), LivetodayPutitAway.org (Lethal Means) and VeteranPeerOutreach.org (Ground Campaign) websites to enable easy navigation between websites and provide consistent messaging, public education and referrals to Veteran resources. This is feasible since the Principle Investigator facilitates and updates the websites/domains.

## **AIM 3: Evaluate the Effectiveness of the Ground (AIM 1) and Air Campaigns (AIM 2).**

**Objective 3a: Conduct state-wide survey to measure effectiveness:** Contract with the Qualtrics research team to assist in collecting 400 surveys from a geographic representative sample of Wisconsin residents. The survey will measure: demographic characteristics, exposure to the Reach Out to a Wisconsin Veteran campaign, understanding of campaign messaging, likelihood of seeking mental health treatment, engaging in volunteer activities, and self reported firearm storage behaviors.

**Objective 3b: Conduct data analysis** of the primary variables (campaign recognition, exposure, help seeking attitudes, volunteer engagement, and secure firearm storage) will be analyzed using survey weighted generalized linear models with a region (SE WI vs. rest of state) × period (pre vs. post) interaction; this interaction is the difference in differences estimate of the Air + Ground intervention effect in SE WI relative to Air only elsewhere.

**Objective 3c: Track and monitor Air and Ground Campaign marketing** metrics: website traffic, number of radio & TV stations broadcasting messages, times messages played and times messages were shown. Direct email marketing metrics (touches, video opens, etc.).

## **Alignment of Aims with the Implementation Plan**

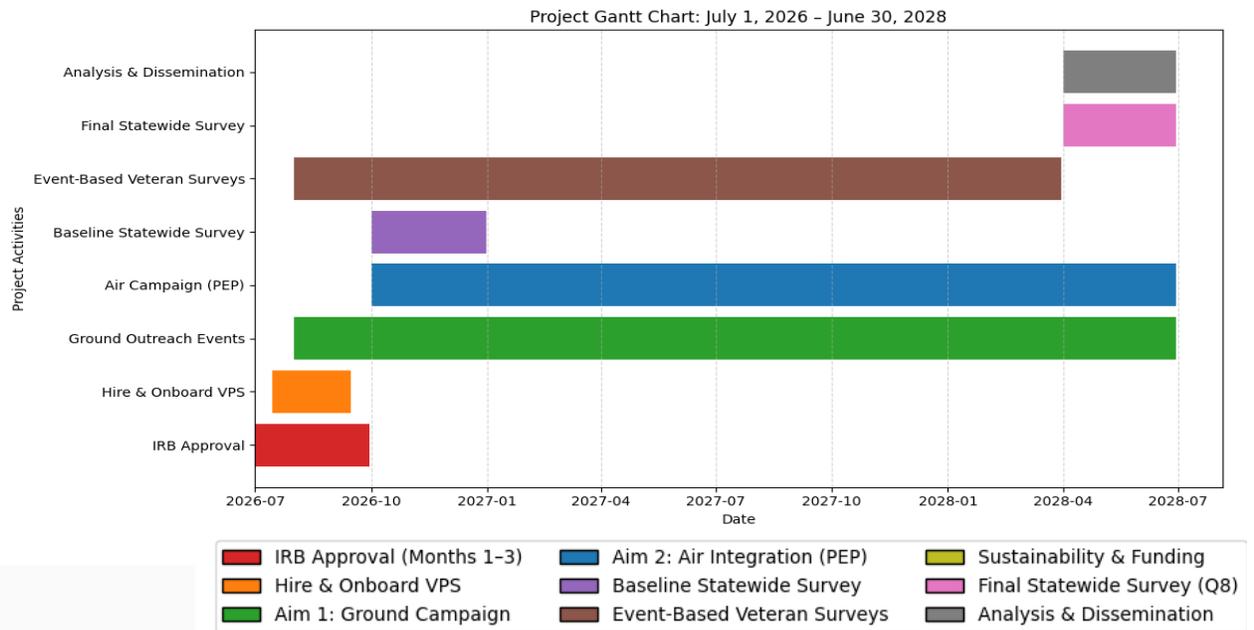
This project directly addresses the documented gap between broad public awareness and sustained behavioral change by intentionally integrating Air and Ground suicide prevention strategies. The Air Campaign leverages the established *Reach Out to a Wisconsin Veteran* platform to maintain statewide visibility and normalize help-seeking and responsible firearm storage. By embedding Veteran Peer Specialist (VPS) voices within this messaging, the campaign increases credibility and relevance while reducing stigma among Veterans and those close to them.

The Ground Outreach Campaign operationalizes this awareness through targeted, in-person engagement where prior Air-only efforts did not yield additional behavioral change. VPS-led outreach provides stigma-sensitive, peer-to-peer interactions that reinforce campaign messages, connect Veterans to resources, volunteer activities, distribute firearm safety tools and lethal means information, and create immediate pathways to support. In this way, the ground component addresses the critical limitation of awareness campaigns by translating exposure into action.

Evaluation activities will be research and IRB approved while being aligned with both aims to determine whether this integrated approach produces greater impact than Air-only messaging. A mixed-methods framework will assess differential changes in campaign exposure, help-seeking attitudes, and firearm storage practices in southeastern Wisconsin relative to the rest of the state, while event-based surveys provide Veteran-specific outcome data. These measures will support continuous refinement during the project period and guide decisions about broader implementation.

By aligning mass communication with direct peer engagement and a focused evaluation strategy, the project is designed to produce measurable improvements in help-seeking and lethal-means safety. Over time, this alignment is expected to reduce suicide risk among Veterans and narrow persistent disparities. The

Project Gantt Chart below provides a visual timeline for the project which indicates key components of the project to ensure feasibility within the 2 year funding period.



### Sustainability Strategy

The sustainability of this project is grounded in the deliberate use of existing infrastructure, established partnerships, and scalable implementation models that can extend beyond the grant period. The project builds on two mature and complementary platforms—the *Reach Out to a Wisconsin Veteran* Air Campaign and the Medical College of Wisconsin’s Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach (VPO) program—both of which have demonstrated feasibility, reach, and impact across multiple funding cycles. By integrating these platforms rather than creating parallel systems, the project minimizes start-up costs and positions core activities to continue with reduced external funding.

Sustainability is further supported through institutional integration. Veteran Peer Specialist (VPS) outreach is embedded within MCW and VA-affiliated community engagement structures that have been operating since 2018 and are aligned with state and federal suicide prevention priorities. Formal partnerships with the War Memorial Center, Veteran Service Organizations, firearm retailers participating in Live Today – Put It Away (LT-PIA), and the Wisconsin Broadcasting Association Public Education Program ensure that outreach, training, and messaging responsibilities are shared across organizations rather than concentrated within a single funding stream. These partnerships enable cost-sharing, in-kind contributions, and continuity of activities such as gun-lock distribution, suicide prevention trainings, and public service announcements.

The project also incorporates funding diversification strategies to sustain both Air and Ground components. The Public Awareness Coalition will be expanded to include corporate sponsors, philanthropic organizations leveraging demonstrated return on investment from prior campaigns to begin generating substantial donated media value. In parallel, the project team will pursue federal and state funding opportunities (e.g., VA, SAMHSA, DHS) that prioritize community-based suicide prevention, peer support, and lethal-means safety.

Long-term sustainability is reinforced through capacity building and replication. The project will have the capability to train additional Veteran Peer Specialists and develop standardized toolkits, templates, and outreach materials that allow local coalitions to replicate the integrated Air-and-Ground model with minimal technical assistance. This approach supports geographic expansion while maintaining fidelity to core program elements.

Finally, sustainability is strengthened through a continuous evaluation and dissemination framework. Annual statewide surveys, event-based data collection, and marketing tracking will provide ongoing evidence of reach, behavior change, and return on investment. These data will be used to refine implementation, demonstrate effectiveness to funders and partners, and support peer-reviewed publications and conference presentations. By linking evaluation to funding justification and policy relevance, the project ensures that successful components are positioned for continuation and scale beyond the project period.

## Study Recruitment and Retention Plan: Data Collection, Measurement, and Evaluation

The evaluation strategy is designed to assess the effectiveness of integrating Public Awareness Air Campaigns with Ground Outreach Campaigns in influencing attitudes, behaviors, and engagement related to Veteran suicide prevention. A mixed methods survey approach will be used to measure campaign reach, message recognition, help seeking attitudes, engagement in volunteer activities, and responsible firearm storage practices. Survey items will include demographic characteristics, exposure to the Reach Out to a Wisconsin Veteran campaign, understanding of campaign messaging, likelihood of seeking mental health treatment, engaging in volunteer activities, and self-reported firearm storage behaviors. Participant recruitment will occur through two coordinated pathways aligned with project aims. Veteran-specific recruitment will occur on a rolling basis through Aim 1 Ground Outreach Campaign activities, beginning in August 2026 and continuing through the penultimate project quarter. Veterans will be recruited at trusted Veteran-focused and community venues by Veteran Peer Specialists using stigma-sensitive, in-person engagement strategies, with a target of approximately 30–50 surveys per quarter ( $\approx 300$  total). Recruitment methods prioritize Veterans not engaged in VA care and individuals less likely to respond to traditional surveys. Because data collection relies on independent cross-sectional and point-of-contact surveys, participant retention is not required; sustained engagement is achieved through continuous outreach and repeated presence at community venues.

Aligned with AIM 3, a statewide survey will be conducted, during the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the study (following IRB approval) and during the final quarter of the study. Surveys are difficult to obtain in large demographic samples due to individuals that attempt to scam and use chatbots to randomly complete surveys to obtain rewards (PI has with past experience with these problems). Therefore, the project will contract with a Qualtrics research team (includes incentives for participant participation) to ensure subjects are demographically consistent to Wisconsin residents and equal sized samples between southeastern Wisconsin counties and the rest of the state. This approach has been IRB approved in our past projects. Wisconsin's July 1, 2024 population estimate is 5,960,975, with 20.8% under age 18; thus the adult (18+) population is  $\approx 4.72$  million. At this population size, the Finite Population Correction is 0.99996 for  $n = 400$ , so it is negligible and does not meaningfully change the  $\pm 4.9$ -point margin of error. Using two independent statewide cross sections (400 pre / 400 post) design has the power of  $\approx 80\%$  to detect absolute improvements of  $\sim 9.5$ –10 percentage points over a broad range of plausible baselines (e.g., from 40%  $\rightarrow$  50% or 50%  $\rightarrow$  60%) with a two-sided  $\alpha = 0.05$ . This result uses the standard two-proportion z-test (normal approximation) framework commonly recommended.<sup>8</sup>

Quantitative analyses will compare responses between southeastern Wisconsin and the rest of the state with the hypothesis that key outcome variables, including at least a 10% improvement in help-seeking attitudes, knowledge and recognition of the *Reach Out to a Wisconsin Veteran* message, campaign exposure, volunteer engagement, and firearm safety practices indicate more impact in southeastern Wisconsin where there was both Ground and Air Campaigns. Behavioral outcomes will be assessed through a targeted goal of achieving a minimum 5% increase in self-reported secure firearm storage among surveyed Veterans that were contacted in-person at outreach events. Primary variables (campaign recognition, exposure, help-seeking attitudes, volunteer engagement, and secure firearm storage) will be analyzed using survey-weighted generalized linear models with a region (SE-WI vs. rest-of-state)  $\times$  period (pre vs. post) interaction; this interaction is the difference-in-differences estimate of the Air + Ground intervention effect in SE-WI relative to Air-only elsewhere. Binary outcomes will use logistic regression with model-based marginal risk differences and score-based confidence intervals; Likert outcomes will use proportional-odds ordinal logistic regression with diagnostics for the proportional-odds assumption.

To support continuous quality improvement, outreach metrics and survey findings will be reviewed on a quarterly basis. These reviews will inform real-time adjustments to campaign messaging, outreach strategies, training content, and event selection to maximize effectiveness, cultural relevance, and impact across Veteran and community populations. The Air Campaign has been presented in past national Suicide Prevention Conferences, American Psychological Association Convention, and at Wisconsin Prevent Suicide Conventions and the team will plan to disseminate the combined Air/Ground Campaign program through articles and conference presentations.

## Collaboration: Project Team

### War Memorial Center (WMC)

**Primary Community Partner:** The WMC is a leading Wisconsin Veteran organization and a beacon of advocacy, remembrance, and hope for Veterans and their families. Staff will lead the design and implementation of community outreach programs and events to elevate awareness of Veteran-related initiatives for this project.

### Primary Community Partner: Staff & Consultants

**Retired General Brian Winski**, President & CEO. General Winski retired from the U.S. Army as a two-star general after 37 years of distinguished service. His career included service across the globe and leadership of infantry and combined arms units at every echelon, including command of the renowned 101st Airborne Division and Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Winski became President/CEO of the War Memorial Center in February 2026 and also serves as President & CEO of the Fort Campbell Historical Foundation, leading a \$40 million effort to build a world-class museum honoring the history and legacy of the units stationed at Fort Campbell. A Wisconsin native, Winski earned his bachelor's degree in history from the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee and a master's degree in history from Louisiana State University. He was commissioned as an infantry officer through UWM's ROTC program, with his commissioning ceremony fittingly held at the War Memorial Center. He is a graduate of Airborne, Air Assault, and Ranger schools, a Master-rated parachutist, and a recipient of the Combat Infantryman's badge with star. General Brian Winski brings extensive experience in coalition-building and community engagement. He has strong relationships within both corporate and Veteran communities will strengthen collaborative partnerships and expand the project's reach and impact.

**Vicki Chappell, CPA**, Chief Strategy and Program Officer. Over the past two decades, she has held senior leadership roles across education and nonprofit organizations, bringing expertise in strategy, fundraising, finance, and program development. At the War Memorial Center, she leads initiatives that advance the Center's mission and community impact.

**Mary Bridges**, Marketing and Public Relations Consultant/Contractor. Ms. Bridges brings more than 40 years of expertise in marketing, public relations, and community engagement, with a proven record of leading high-impact campaigns and rebranding initiatives that exceed organizational goals. She is Vice President of the Board of Directors of Skylight Music Theater and has served in leadership positions with the International Festivals and Events Association, Milwaukee World Festival, Inc., Executive Director of Professional Dimensions, Marquette University Alumni Board, Elmbrook Education Foundation, Senior Vice President of Marketing and Communications at the Milwaukee Public Museum and Carnegie Mellon University's Order of the May. She is recognized for her skills in public speaking, media relations, and fostering partnerships across community, corporate, and governmental sectors. Mary has been deeply involved in nonprofit and cultural organizations. Mary directs the Reach Out Air Campaign and will integrate it with the proposed Ground Campaign and facilitate outreach events in conjunction with the Veteran Peer Specialist.

### Medical College of Wisconsin:

**Bertrand Berger, Ph.D.**, (he, him, his), Principle Investigator & Clinical Psychologist, Milwaukee VA Medical Center, Mental Health Division Manager and Assistant professor, Dept of Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine. In his VA role, he supervises Milwaukee VA's suicide prevention clinical and community outreach programs. At MCW he is the director of the Capt. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach project designed to prevent suicide through community engagement activities by Veteran peer specialists and facilitates the Live Today – Put it Away (Wisconsin's Firearm Safe Storage project). He has been part of ongoing Veteran suicide prevention activities for more than 20 years. He developed the Southeastern Wisconsin Task Force on Veteran Suicide Prevention in 2019 and was the PI on 2021 AHW pilot project to investigate the effect of suicide prevention public messaging on Wisconsin Veteran and non-Veteran population (see ReachOutWis.org) and the 2023 AHW Momentum Grant to sustain Veteran suicide prevention public awareness campaigns throughout Wisconsin. He will provide oversight for all aspects of the project including data collection, survey development and data analysis.

**Mark Flower**, Veteran Peer Specialist. Past role as mentor/trainer for the Captain John D. Mason Veteran Outreach Program at the MCW, Dept of Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine. Mark is a Veteran Peer Specialist who has been advocating for Veteran issues for more than 20 year. He has experience working with a number of Veteran specific outreach projects and programs (e.g., American Legion, Dry Hootch). He will provide input to the Air Campaign and provide mentorship and training to the VPS hired by the WMC. He will engage in key in-person outreach with the WMC VPS as part of the Ground Outreach Campaigns.

**Collaborators:**

**Michael McBride, MD**, U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, Zablocki VA Medical Center, psychiatrist and military Veteran. Dr. McBride will provide Veteran specific messaging and assist in developing outreach events. He is one of the Veteran messengers for the previous Reach Out Wisconsin Campaigns.

**Jamie Noffsinger, Ph.D.** U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, Zablocki VA Medical Center, psychologist and military Veteran. Dr. Noffsinger will provide Veteran specific messaging and assist in developing outreach events. She is one of the Veteran messengers for the previous Reach Out Wisconsin Campaigns.

**Doc Dentice**, grass roots connector – Doc is a Vietnam Veteran who organizes communications to Veterans and annual Holiday gifts to hospitalized Veterans at the Milwaukee VA.

**Janine Sijan**, Community leader and Veteran supporter. Captain Lance Sijan's sister, Janine, produced the documentary film about his life and experience as a prisoner of war in Vietnam. She also created the memorial to her brother.

**Rabbi Levi Stein**, community activist in suicide prevention. Rabbi Levi organizes the Friendship Circle of Wisconsin which provide suicide prevention trainings in the community and is licensed Living Works SafeTALK Suicide Prevention trainer.

## Citations:

- <sup>1</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs. *2025 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report*, VA Suicide Prevention, Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, Feb 2026.
- <sup>2</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs. *Wisconsin Suicide Data Sheet, 2023*, Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, Feb 2026.
- <sup>3</sup> Kulesza M, Pedersen E, Corrigan P, Marshall G. *Help-Seeking Stigma and Mental Health Treatment Seeking Among Young Adult Veterans*. *Mil Behav Health*. 2015;3(4):230-239. doi: 10.1080/21635781.2015.1055866. Epub 2015 Jun 26. PMID: 26664795; PMCID: PMC4672863.
- <sup>4</sup> Preventing suicide: a community engagement toolkit. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.
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