

# SAVE THE DATE!

## BITTERROOT VALLEY VETERAN'S RESOURCE FAIR

SATURDAY MAY 30TH 2026

9 - 3 PM

OPENING CEREMONY AT 10AM

-PRESENTATION OF COLORS AND NATIONAL ANTHEM

RAVALLI COUNTY  
FAIRGROUNDS  
EVENT CENTER

VENDOR/PROVIDER SET UP ON  
FRIDAY FROM 12 - 5PM

NO FEES

REMARKS BY:

**TODD DUNLAP**, EWCM, USN (RET)

(DIRECTOR, MILITARY & VETERAN AFFAIRS)

(OFFICE OF US SENATOR TIM SHEEHY (R-MT))

**BG GIBSON**, MONTANA ADJUTANT GENERAL

(TENTATIVE)

**CSM DEBOO**, COMMAND SENIOR ENLISTED LEADER

(MONTANA ARMY NATIONAL GUARD)

BREAK OUT SESSIONS:

HOME CARE PROGRAMS, 988, QPR, VSO MEETINGS

AND MEDICAL CLAIMS ASSISTANCE

SERVICE & CARE PROVIDERS FROM AROUND THE VALLEY

OPEN TO COMMUNITY - HAM RADIO DEMONSTRATIONS

FOR MORE INFO:

CONTACT

VICTORIA MIRALDA

(406) 677-0524

### SUPPORTERS

VA OUTREACH OFFICE, HELENA  
RAVALLI COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE CENTER  
RAVALLI COUNTY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH COALITION  
MISSOULA VETS CENTER  
CORVALLIS AMERICAN LEGION POST 91



MOON EAGLE  
RIVER RANCH



VETERANS  
VICTORY ALLIANCE



# Bitterroot Valley Veterans Resource Fair Briefing to Ravalli County Commissioners

Program Leads: Ravalli County Behavioral Health Coalition  
Presented by: Jaime Biesiot, Victoria Miralda, Jamie Smothers  
Supported by: Todd Lester MT VA and John Tabb, MT DPHHS

**April 1<sup>st</sup> 2026**

# Behavioral Health Coalition Goals



- Serve Ravalli County citizens with the most appropriate response to their needs
- Reduce unnecessary law enforcement demands freeing up resources
- Assess the needs of a more efficient Ravalli County Crisis Response leveraging other successful models

SOMEONE TO  
CALL

SOMEONE TO  
RESPOND

SOMEWHERE  
TO GO

# Coalition Members

- Ravalli County Sheriff's Office
- Hamilton Police Department
- Bitterroot Health
- Ravalli County Veterans Service Center
- AWARE
- Olive Branch Counseling
- Youth Court
- Council on Aging
- Ravalli County Public Health
- SAFE
- Ravalli Services



## **Ravalli County Behavioral Health Coalition Mission Statement:**

To enhance and implement a county appropriate system of response, treatment, and care to community members experiencing behavioral health crises, in an effort to provide every Ravalli resident the right service, in the right place, every time.

# Montana Warriors Forward Mission

- Task – Implement a suicide prevention program for Montana’s Service members, Veterans and their Families (SMVF) that addresses the root causes of suicide through identification and screening for risk, building protective factors and facilitating care transitions for those determined to be at risk and by providing safe storage and/or disposal of lethal means for individuals in crisis.
- Purpose – To reduce the number of suicides among the SMVF community in Montana and to build a network of protective factors to reduce suicide risk.
- End state – The suicide rate for SMVF in Montana lowered to below the state rate and a statewide network of providers and protectors established to keep it that way.

# Montana Legislation: 2025-2027

- 2025  
69th Legislature 2025

SB 95



AN ACT ALLOCATING MONEY FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION EFFORTS FOR VETERANS AND SERVICE MEMBERS; ESTABLISHING PURPOSES FOR USE OF THE MONEY; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE AND A TERMINATION DATE.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

**Section 1. Allocation.** (1) There is allocated \$300,000 from the state special revenue account established in 17-6-603 to the department of public health and human services for the biennium beginning July 1, 2025, for grants made pursuant to 53-21-1101 and 53-21-1111 for suicide prevention activities.



# Montana Warriors Forward Priorities Areas

Priority Area 1 –  
Identification and  
Screening

Priority Area 2 –  
Promote  
Connectedness and  
Improve Care  
Transitions

Priority Area 3 –  
Lethal Means Safety  
and Safety Planning



SOMEONE TO  
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# Bitterroot Valley Veterans Resource Fair

- Task – Conduct a Veterans resource fair to connect Veterans and their Families to whole person medical and health care, VA and Community Based
- Purpose – Reduce suicide risk by addressing isolation, pain treatment and quality of life care, by building a network of protective factors to reduce suicide risk.
- End state – The suicide rate for Veterans in Montana lowered to below the state rate and a statewide network of providers and protectors established to keep it that way. Enhanced quality of life.

**Support Priorities 2 & 3 of MT Warriors Forward**



# The Why

- Montana had the fifth highest rate of suicide among veterans in 2023 at 53.9 per 100,000\*. This is compared to the state rate at 28 per 100,000 (Second highest in the nation) and the national rate of 14.2 per 100,000
- The majority of veterans who take their own lives are white, middle-aged, or older and almost exclusively choose a firearm as their lethal means.
- The Interpersonal Theory of Suicide\*\* states that three factors need to exist for a suicide to take place: a sense of being a burden, social isolation and acquired capacity to use lethal means. These factors are especially heightened in Montana veterans.

\*Source USDVA Suicide Data Report

[https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide\\_prevention/data.asp](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/data.asp)

# Key Event Facts



- Saturday May 30th Ravalli County Fairgrounds
- Projected 5 Veteran Service Officers to help with claims- art building privacy
- Senior leaders welcoming and speaking to Veterans Issues
- Chief Ret Todd Dunlap, Mil and VA Advisor to Sen Sheehy
- John Tabb, DPHHS Program Manager for 988
- CSM DeBoo, Montana National Guard
- DAV, VFW, American Legion, Vietnam Veterans, Marine Corps League represented
- Nearly 20 VA Medical experts and program leads
- Masons supporting with BBQ sandwiches
- Children's activities pending
- COIN project for Buddy Coins and designing new challenge coins
- HAM Radio Emergency Communications, Food Trucks
- Missoula Vets Center and Mobile Crisis Van, RCSO Mobile Command, VA Mobile Treatment Van
- Tent. Live Music at 3 PM- 1-1.5 hours

# Way Ahead



- Continue to Recruit more care providers and emplo
- Ensure Organization and Volunteer support
- Media and Press Releases, Community Meetings
- Sponsors for Veteran meals, \$10 per voucher goal
- Unite the Community
- Celebrate and Honor our Veterans with focus on Vietnam Veterans
- Continually assess and improve crisis response
- Align with “ Montana Warriors Forward”
- Preparing for Press release and radio two weeks prior

# Status to Date

- \$1,000 Donations in hand, + \$1,600 pending for food
- Tremendous Community Response
- Employers category needs additional focus, 4 so far
- VA Providers and Program Leaders All in
- VNN, Billings mentoring based on their successful events

# Back Ups

# Why does Montana have such a high rate of suicide?

It's not one factor, but rather multiple factors all occurring at the same time.  
It is a cultural issue.

Vitamin D Deficiency (correlated with increased risk of depression)

High concentration of Veterans, American Indians, and middle age White men

Alcohol as a coping strategy (alcohol in the blood at the time of death is 2x the national average)

## Altitude

Metabolic stress caused by long-term oxygen deprivation. Worldwide, above 2,500 feet, you see a spike in suicides. The average suicide in Montana occurs at 3,500 feet

## Social Isolation

Montana has 6.7 people per square mile. The national average is 88.7

## Access to Lethal Means

Nearly 65% of suicides are by firearm and nearly 90% of all firearm deaths in Montana are suicides

## Socioeconomic

1/5 Montana kids live more than 100% below the federal poverty level

## Lack of Behavioral Health Services

Lack of psychiatrists and integrated behavioral health into primary care.

## STIGMA

We see depression as a weakness, that we are a burden. And if you think you are a burden, how likely are you to ask for help?

# Local Veteran Care Status and State Demographics

- Ravalli County does not have a VA mental health provider, despite VA efforts
- VA Mental Health Providers in Ravalli County provided primarily remotely
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), reports some of the critical concerns for veterans include homelessness, trauma, risk of suicide, and problems with *behavior-related health matters that sometimes involve the criminal justice system.*
- Montana's veteran population is predominantly concentrated in seven counties (Cascade, Flathead, Gallatin, Lewis and Clark, Missoula, Ravalli, and Yellowstone), together totaling 65% of the state's *veterans (a. Decennial Montana Veterans' Long-Term Care Needs Assessment Legislative Report- Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) )*
- Improving the overall well-being of Montana veterans requires addressing their physical, mental, and social health needs through comprehensive, coordinated efforts (see Appendix F for health considerations for Montana veterans). Source: *b. Decennial Montana Veterans' Long-Term Care Needs Assessment Legislative Report, Delivered by: Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) September 2024*

*Why does Montana have such a high rate of suicide? It's not one factor, but rather multiple factors all occurring at the same time. It is a cultural issue. (a)*

**“Lack of psychiatrists and integrated behavioral health into primary care”**