



Department of New Hampshire
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New Hampshire's "Ask the Question" Campaign

Preventing Suicides by Engaging the Community

Lt. Col. Stephanie Riley of the New Hampshire Air National Guard worked in an emergency room of a New Hampshire hospital in 2013. She often witnessed individuals presenting with symptoms of headaches, dizziness or hearing loss. These patients were diagnosed with a migraine, when they were actually veterans suffering with a Traumatic Brain Injury. They were not diagnosed accurately because they were never identified as a veteran during intake.

Later that same year, a veteran met with Lt. Col. Riley at the National Guard Medical Command Unit. This veteran had been to three different healthcare facilities in New Hampshire and not one of them asked if he had ever served in the military. By the time this veteran reached out to Lt. Col. Riley, it was too little, too late. And this veteran died by suicide.

Across our Country, over two thirds of our veterans receive care in the community - and not from the Veterans Administration. As the VA continues to struggle with bureaucracy and service challenges, the number of veterans seeking care outside the VA continues to rise.

Our communities need to respond to this crisis.

20 veterans die by suicide each day. 6 of these veterans receive care at the VA; and 14 do not. While we know that the majority of our veterans receive care in the community, we also know that veterans don't feel completely understood by civilian, VA or military health care professionals. The New Hampshire Legislative Committee on PTSD and TBI conducted a survey of New Hampshire veterans asking about barriers in accessing care. The New Hampshire Veterans of Foreign Wars was honored to fund and support this survey. Survey results indicated that the top barrier identified was stigma, embarrassment and shame. The 2nd highest barrier in accessing care was a consistent comment from New Hampshire veterans stating, "I do not feel understood by the providers who serve me."

New Hampshire is working hard to keep our veterans safe and connected with the "Ask the Question" Campaign. The "Ask the Question" Campaign encourages all service providers to ask the question, "Have you or

a family member ever served in the military?” This simple question can open the door to greater communication. And communication and understanding is at the heart of good care and services.

New Hampshire’s Community Mental Health Center (CMHC) Military Liaison Initiative is a powerful example of how one healthcare system in New Hampshire has “operationalized” the “Ask the Question” Campaign – as part of their successful efforts to support our military. Through “Ask the Question”, we now know that 15% of clients served at the 10 New Hampshire Mental Health Centers are military connected. This new data is helping to create “intentional” strategies to serve our military by generating military culture trainings, developing internal military staff meetings, coordinating client referrals with the VA and providing greater supports for military families. The Mental Health Centers also created an internal Military Liaison in each of the 10 Centers to help move this initiative forward.

HOW we ask the question is critical to engaging our military. Not all veterans identify as a veteran, so it is important to ask, “Have you or a family member ever served in the military?” By asking the question, we are also acknowledging that military service is important. Many of us know a Vietnam Veteran or Korean War Veteran who may have served in the military for only a few years, yet his or her service defines who they are and how they lived and many continue to serve their Communities by being members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars or other Veteran Service Organizations.

New Hampshire has learned that in order to best serve our military, we need to first identify them. And we need to identify them within our hospitals, mental health centers, senior centers, employment offices, law enforcement, courts and schools.

Veterans are often hesitant to ask for help because of pride, shame or stigma. Many veterans don’t ask for help because they want to save that help for their brother or sister who served. The “Ask the Question” Campaign puts the responsibility on the service provider – removing possible barriers from the veteran, service member or their families.

The “Ask the Question” Campaign truly opens the door to how we define a veteran, and creates opportunities to better understand our military community – through communication, resources and connections.

Lt. Col. Stephanie Riley of the New Hampshire Air National Guard Riley died of cancer in December of 2014. But she continues to serve her Country through the “Ask the Question” Campaign.

The “Ask the Question” Campaign was recently approved to be included in the National Suicide Prevention Plan.

Thank you, Lt. Col. Riley, for your service to our State and your service to our Country.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Paul Lloyd".

Paul Lloyd, State Adjutant
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