

Veterans and Military Families

Fully fund the ongoing PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Peer Support Program in all counties in New York

According to the RAND Center for Military Health Policy Research 20 percent of the vets who served in either Iraq or Afghanistan suffer from either major depression or post-traumatic stress disorder. 19.5 percent of vets in these two categories have experienced a traumatic brain injury. These three service-related disorders alone have an enormous impact on the demand for veteran mental health treatment. Unfortunately, veterans with mental health needs are often reluctant to get help for a variety of reasons including stigma, shame, embarrassment and fear of being perceived as weak. A tragic consequence of untreated mental illness among veterans is suicide. In 2020, 6,146 veterans died by suicide. That's nearly 17 veterans every day.

The peer to peer (i.e., vet-to-vet) approach of the program helps to overcome these barriers. The program allows for complete anonymity without fear of reprisal. The program's goal is to link Veterans together for socialization and friendship and ultimately, if needed, a greater willingness to seek and receive mental health care.

Launched in 2012 as a pilot project the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Peer Support Program takes a confidential, one-on-one, peer-to-peer approach to overcoming these barriers. The mission of the Dwyer Project is to assist Veterans, service members, and their families to achieve and sustain personal health, wellness, and purpose in their post-service lives through the support of trained veteran peers.

The Dwyer program has been expanded since its inception to include projects in every county in the state, but additional funding is still needed to more directly engage families through trainings, family support peer groups, family workshops and family oriented events.

Legislative Need

MHANYS appreciates that Governor Hochul included \$7.7 million in the 2023/24 Executive Budget to support existing Dwyer programs in all counties in the state. We urge the Legislature to continue to support the Dwyer Project in the state budget. We also advocate for greater involvement of families within the funding model.