



DEFENSE SUICIDE PREVENTION OFFICE

SUPPORTING THE MILITARY IN SUICIDE PREVENTION:

Supporting the Military in Suicide Prevention: DSPO's Military Community Engagement Activities – 2022/2023
Promoting Help and Hope to Save Lives

The mission of the Defense Suicide Prevention Office (DSPO) is to lead data-driven suicide prevention efforts in the Department of Defense by advancing policy, oversight, program evaluation, and engagement to save the lives of Service members, their families, and the military community.

DSPO routinely partners with other DoD offices and military Services, as well as working with nongovernmental and community-based organizations to support a variety of suicide prevention efforts. Over the past 12 months, as part of the 2022-2023 year-long suicide prevention campaign, **Connect to Protect: Support is Within Reach**, DSPO participated in 10 such events with over 600,000 attendees. Working alongside other offices, agencies, and programs, DSPO promoted suicide prevention tools and resources, raised awareness about postvention efforts, and supported Service members, families, and the greater military communities. While participating in these events, DSPO engaged with over 2,000 individuals directly and distributed nearly 6,000 suicide prevention materials. These collective efforts served to increase knowledge, reduce stigma, and increase help seeking behaviors.

In Oct. 2022, DSPO participated in the National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp hosted by the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors in Grapevine, Texas. TAPS hosted this specialized gathering for military family members to share their stories while spending time connecting with other survivors who have experienced the loss of a loved one by suicide. This inspiring event underscored the importance of peer-based support for military families healing from suicide.

On Nov. 17, 2022, DSPO participated in the Northeast Air Force Wounded Warrior (AFW2) Program Care Event and Resource Fair at the National Harbor in Maryland. This was an opportunity for DSPO to connect directly with wounded warriors and caregivers, provide information about our mission, and engage with other event participants.

The Space Force Ten-Miler Run held on Dec. 10, 2022, in Cape Canaveral, Florida – provided valuable information about care and support for Service members, Veterans and caregivers. DSPO hosted a resource table at “The Finish Line Festival” that included special exhibitors and event sponsors. Approximately 386 runners, family members, and friends participated at this event.

In Spring 2023, DSPO participated in two key events in the Washington, D.C. area. On Mar 23, DSPO attended the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center Internship and Employment Fair to support transitioning Service Members and Veterans. On Apr. 11-13, 2023, DSPO shared information at a resources table at the VA and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)'s Governor's Challenge. Currently fifty-four states and territories take part in the Governor's Challenge, which promotes a public health approach to preventing suicide among Service members, Veterans, and their



**Connect to Protect:
Support is Within Reach**

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families. DSPO provided attendees with information on DoD suicide prevention programs, resources, and tools to support state-wide efforts.

On May 9-11, 2023, DSPO participated in a tabling event at the Innovation Conference Governor's Challenge in the National Capitol area. Programming and presentations provided key information to participants interested in innovative crisis systems, data collection and analysis, and program evaluation.

Over the 2023 Memorial Day weekend, DSPO attended a second event hosted by TAPS. The 25th Annual Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors and Good Grief Camp took place in Arlington, Virginia, and supported military family members who have lost loved ones. The event included multiple workshops, guest speakers, and a resource village where DSPO shared information, tools, and resources.

On June 3, 2023, Mrs. Charlene Austin, wife of Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin, joined DSPO for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's Out of the Darkness Overnight Walk in Washington, D.C. Mrs. Austin walked well into the night with participants, many of whom were military family members. She listened to stories of loss and healing, provided support to survivors, and frequently stopped to thank volunteers for their service. The Department is committed to prevention efforts and supporting those affected by suicide within our military and broader communities.

DSPO's efforts continued in June with the Capital Pride Festival in Washington, D.C., in support of LGBTQI Service members and their families. This year's event was one of the largest ever with over 600,000 attendees.

The Texas Suicide Prevention Symposium in New Braunfels for service providers and community organizations closed out our list of ten events in June. DSPO and VA's Suicide Prevention Program participated in an open-forum question and answer session, offering a wealth of information, and facilitating collaboration for attendees.

While the past 12 months have been busy ones for DSPO, they are honored to work with other programs and efforts that support the Service members and families who protect our nation. When asked about DSPO's engagement strategy, Director Dr. Liz Clark shared the value of these efforts. "These occasions shine a light on the challenges faced by Service members and families. DSPO's mission is to infuse hope, community, and care into every day."

As DSPO transitions the 2022-2023 **Connect to Protect: Support is Within Reach** campaign theme to the 2023-2024 *Joining Your Fight: Connect to Protect* campaign theme, the team is grateful for the relationships forged, the lives impacted, and the opportunities that lie ahead to continue to carry out the Department's critical mission to save lives.

DSPO is excited to continue the year-long suicide prevention campaign. *Joining Your Fight: Connect to Protect* is a year-long effort to maintain awareness, share resources and inspire creative, culturally appropriate, and credible suicide prevention efforts. The campaign is a call to action to the greater military community to focus on connection, collaboration, and hope.

Service members and veterans who are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, or those who know a Service member or veteran in crisis, can call the Veterans/Military Crisis Line for confidential support available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Call 988 and Press 1, text 838225, or chat online at [MilitaryCrisisLine.net](https://www.militarycrisisline.net).



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