



Stigma and Veterans, Active-Duty Military and Their Families

If you feel you are in crisis – call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1. Reach the Veterans Crisis Line online chat or send a text message to the Veterans Crisis Line at 838255.

The Veterans Crisis Line provides free, confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Twenty years. That's how much time passed before Patrick Welch, PhD., U.S. Marine Corps (retired), acknowledged that he needed help with his mental health. Carrying the weight of trauma and survivor's guilt along with the daily pressures of life became too much of a burden.

"I had to maintain a persona of being the tough Marine who always had his act together," he said. "Each day I would put on my armor, business suit and face mask, and go face the world with strength and confidence. When I got home and took off the heavy suit of armor I would collapse because I had survived another day," Welch said.

Three common mental health concerns for Veterans and active-duty service members are post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and traumatic brain injury (TBI).

Some statistics:

- In 2017, Veterans accounted for 13.5% of all deaths by suicide among U.S. adults and constituted 7.9% of the US adult population.
- Approximately 17 Veteran suicides occur daily. Eleven out of the 17 are not linked with any VA treatment.
- 30 percent of active duty and reserve military personnel deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan have a mental health condition requiring treatment – approximately 730,000 men and women, with many experiencing PTSD and major depression.

Continued on Page 2



Stigma may cause Veterans and active-duty military to experience shame, hopelessness, embarrassment, isolation, and unfair treatment or discrimination. They may also internalize the stigma and start to believe that there is something wrong with them because of their mental illness. Veterans carry this additional burden on top of the challenges they already face.

According to Cathleen Larson, contract coordinator with the Erie County Department of Mental Health (ECDMH) and an active member of the Community Veteran's Engagement Board (CVEB), veterans are less likely to seek help because of stigma. Many veterans do not seek out treatment, services or even support for what they are going through. They worry that disclosing mental illness or seeking out mental health treatment will negatively impact their military careers and worry about how others in the military will view them.

"Military culture values teamwork, toughness and self-reliance," Larson said. "This can lead to Veterans feeling like they must handle and cope with their struggles and difficult emotions on their own and not get outside help. These same values are what contributes to the stigma."

"Veterans worry that they may be perceived as weak, that their peers or leaders can't rely on them, that they'll be treated differently, or blamed for the problem," she said.

Katie Coric, LCSW, suicide prevention coordinator and emergency services program manager for the VA Western New York Healthcare System, works to connect veterans to resources. In her role, she encourages individuals to come in before there is a mental health crisis.

"They've had to deal with so many things, such as combat. Many find it hard to justify seeking help since they dealt with so many things during their service, they feel they should be able to deal with their own mental health struggles," Coric said.

Coric emphasized that there is hope for veterans and there are many wonderful and effective treatment resources for Veterans both at the VA and in the community.

CALL VA TODAY

1-800-MyVA411
(1-800-698-2411)

Call this number for information on VA care, benefits, and services or to speak to a live agent for assistance.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE RESOURCES

"I've seen countless Veterans get the mental health treatment and support that they need and make big changes to improve their mental health and quality of life. Veterans can call the VA Western New York healthcare system to be linked with treatment or call or text the Veterans Crisis Line (838255)," Coric said.

Family and Peer Support

Family members and friends often struggle to encourage Veterans they care about to seek treatment and they may experience stigma themselves.

Friends and family can support their loved ones by listening without judgment and being supportive and compassionate. They can learn about mental illness and talk about their family member's diagnosis and treatment.

Dr. Welch and other Veterans encourage fellow Veterans to reach out for help. There are numerous resources and programs to help individuals with mental health issues.

Western New York Heroes Operation B.O.O.T.S. brings Veterans and their families together monthly in a casual, non-clinical, non-threatening, setting in safe, fun environments.

For families, Operation COM (Children of the Military) is a free program offered by Mental Health Advocates of WNY in partnership with the Veterans One Stop Center of WNY. The mission of the Operation COM program is to strengthen military family relationships in Western New York using creative activities, peer support, and family-centric activities.

"If exposing my story of pain and suffering can help one other person seek help, then dropping that persona of being the tough Marine is worth it," Dr. Welch said. ■

A Q&A with Native American Community Services of Erie & Niagara Counties, Inc. (NACS)

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Native American Community Services of Erie & Niagara Counties, Inc. (NACS) is a non-profit organization founded in 1975 to provide quality health and social services to the off-reservation Native American population in Erie and Niagara Counties.

We recently spoke with Star Wheeler, health and wellness director, about the mental health challenges and stigma.

Why did your organization become a member of The Anti-Stigma Coalition?

NACS wanted to be a member of The Anti-Stigma Coalition because we understand that mental illness and addiction can arise from a variety of sources and that anyone can be affected. NACS is also aware of the relationship between stigma, prejudice and discrimination. We know that fear and misunderstanding can lead to discrimination. NACS wanted to be a part of spreading awareness to help educate about mental illness and addiction to eliminate stigma so that people access the help they need.

How are people with mental health challenges impacted by stigma?

People with mental health challenges are impacted in many ways. Discrimination and negative attitudes can lead to feelings of hopelessness and shame in those struggling with their mental health and/or addiction. These feelings can affect their well-being and hinder them from seeking the help they need.

What impact is the Campaign having in the community?

The campaign provides the needed education and resources about mental illness and addiction, assists people with the help and support they need and creates awareness of the harmful effects that stigma can have on those who experience it. It is also helping to change negative attitudes and encourage people to seek help. ■



BECOME A MEMBER OF THE ERIE COUNTY ANTI-STIGMA COALITION

Does your organization, church, temple, or community group want to combine forces with our organization? Do you individually want to engage with us to stop the stigma of mental illness? Please consider becoming a member of our Coalition by completing our membership form at letstalkstigma.org/support/pledge.

It is going to take a massive community effort to move the needle on stigma, please become a part of the solution. Questions? Please contact Karl Shallowhorn, Chairperson, at kshallowhorn@chcb.net.

WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBER



Visit letstalkstigma.org/current-members for more information on our current members.

April Events

APRIL 8-12
Deaf History Month Cone Virtual
Deaf Access Services

APRIL 20
Headway's Peer and Caregiver Support Groups
Headway of WNY, Inc.

April 22
Surviving the Moment: Normalizing
Our Feelings & Mindful Methods
Horizon Health Services

April 24
Out of the Darkness Western New York Chapter
Virtual Campus Walk
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

May 3
Caregiving Solutions & Resources
Horizon Health Services

More Events & Information: Visit letstalkstigma.org/events

MHA OF WNY SUPPORT GROUPS

April 14, 21, 28 Teen Peer Support Group

April 9 & 16 20-Something Online Support Group

April 8 & May 13 Online Family Support Groups

PEOPLE, INC. PROGRAMS

Senior Companion "Phone Connection"
Program Accepting Recipients
Contact: 716.768.2381

Affordable Apartments Accepting Applications
Contact: Email housing@people-inc.org or call 716.880.3890

Senior Living Apartments Accepting Applications
Contact: Email Seniorliving@people-inc.org or call 716.817.9090



FACEBOOK LIVE: THE EFFECT OF STIGMA ON PEOPLE THAT SERVED IN THE MILITARY

The Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition hosted a Facebook Live event on April 1 to discuss stigma experienced by Veterans, military members, and their families.

The panelists were:

- Katie Coric, LCSW, suicide prevention coordinator at VA Western New York Healthcare System and emergency services program manager
- Chris Kreiger, founder of WNYHeroes
- Cathleen Larson, contract coordinator with the Erie County Department of Mental Health (ECDMH)
- Dr. Patrick Welch, retired US Marine Corps who works with Buffalo Veterans Treatment Court and Justice for Veterans.

The panel discussed common mental health challenges and provided a variety of resources for Veterans and their families.

Dr. Welch encourages all Veterans and military personnel to get help to lead normal, well-adjusted lives and enjoy a good quality of life.

The discussion was hosted by Karl Shallowhorn, chair of the Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition.

To view the event, visit The Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition's [Facebook Page](#).

ERIE COUNTY
ANTI-STIGMA
COALITION

Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition Founding Members:

BryLin Behavioral Health System • Children's Mental Health Coalition of Western New York, Inc.
Community Partners of Western New York • Compeer • Crisis Services of Erie County
Erie County Department of Mental Health • Erie County Office for People with Disabilities
Fellows Action Network • Fuerst Consulting Corporation • Jewish Family Service of Buffalo & Erie County
The Mental Health Advocates of WNY • Millennium Collaborative Care • Patrick P. Lee Foundation
Preventionfocus, Inc. • Telesco Creative Group • The Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation