SDDVA Secretary Whitlock’s September Column – Don’t Wait – Reach Out!

September is “Suicide Prevention Month.” It is a great opportunity for all of us to reach out and do our buddy checks!

There are many reasons that veterans in particular feel like there is no way out of a difficult time – whether its PTSD, MSD, survivor’s guilt, financial strain, family problems, or a combination of these. But it’s up to all of us to help veterans realize that they are not alone, that help, and resources are available.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, now known as the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, is a free, confidential crisis resource that veterans and their families can access any day, any time. Trained responders are ready to listen, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. It’s three quick digits – dial 988 and then press 1.

The VA also has a website and app called “PTSD Coach.” This tool provides education about PTSD, information about professional care, a self-assessment for PTSD, opportunities to find support, and tools that can help veterans manage their stressors. Visit: https://mobile.va.gov/app/ptsd-coach.

South Dakota’s Departments of Social Services, Health, Education, Tribal Relations, Ag and Natural Resources, and Veterans Affairs have been working together for the past three years on a statewide suicide prevention plan. This group has collected data, developed education and training programs, and developed communication messages. The South Dakota Suicide Prevention website provides a lot of information and resources. Visit: https://sdsuicideprevention.org/.

South Dakota has two VA medical centers, two Vet Centers, eight Community Based Out-Patient Clinics, numerous mental health care facilities, and 11 community mental health centers to assist veterans and their families.

In addition, we have county and tribal veterans service officers in every corner of the state, we have over 20 veterans service organizations located within the borders of South Dakota, and we have our team here at the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs.

Remember, we are all in this together. Support is just a call, click, or text away.

Veterans, don’t wait – reach out!

Greg Whitlock, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs