

AMERICAN LEGION

HOW TO INITIATE AND SUPPORT A BE THE ONE PROGRAM

Background. The American Legion is changing and saving the lives of veterans and service members through its Be the One Mission. All across North Carolina, efforts are underway to reduce the number of military-affiliated Americans who are lost to suicide. Various estimates have put the daily toll at 22 or more. The Legion believes one suicide is one too many. As such, it has prioritized raising awareness by providing tools such as informational documents and free suicide prevention training to help those who find themselves struggling daily.

At the grassroots level, the North Carolina Department of the American Legion is raising awareness by sponsoring community awareness hikes and 5K events, conducting public information sessions, and coordinating with local community service organizations and First Responders to help connect at-risk veterans with the resources they need.

Commonly Asked Questions. There is a wide range of questions about *Be the One*. Here are answers to several common questions about the Mission.

Question: What is *Be the One*?

Answer: At its core, *Be the One* is the Legion's top priority - to reduce the number of veterans and service members who die by suicide. It involves the entire North Carolina Department.

At the national level, the National Headquarters Legion staff promotes *Be the One* through various marketing and internal and external media means. National Headquarters is also focused on creating more training opportunities and resource materials and identifying other ways that Posts and members can further the mission. At the Department level, staff can elevate awareness about how individual Posts and members are contributing to the cause and also create opportunities for training sessions, fundraisers, awareness events, and other means to promote *Be the One*.

Question: How can my Post best support *Be the One*?

Answer: There are many ways to lend support. As Posts would do with other sanctioned American Legion initiatives, it is best to take the *Be the One* concept and incorporate it into the needs of the local community. Follow the 10-point *Be the One* program on the Department website.

Post members can support *Be the One* by conducting Buddy Checks, raising awareness of resources for veterans in their communities, and taking the Veteran's Administration S.A.V.E. or Columbia University training so they know what to do in a potential time of crisis. Legion Posts, units, and squadrons can work together to host or support events aimed at bringing the darkness of suicide into the light. By talking about suicide, raising awareness, and fostering camaraderie, you demonstrate how to "Be the One."

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The majority of Posts already conduct events that they can adapt for or combine with a *Be the One* awareness event. These include a fundraising ride, cornhole tournament, car show, and other activities that Posts regularly conduct, like Blood Drives, Unserviceable Flag Collections, etc. This can be as simple as manning a *Be the One* information table at all events.

Leaders should contact local service providers (e.g., organizations providing emergency housing, rental or utility assistance, food pantries, etc.), local law enforcement, EMS, and firefighters to discuss the program. These organizations can prove highly beneficial to publicizing the program.

Question: When is the best time to conduct a *Be the One* event?

Answer: Through resolution, the American Legion has declared the first day of each month as a *Be the One* day. While the first day of each month is ideal for increasing public awareness about suicide awareness and preventing veteran suicide, in reality, there is a critical need to spread the word any day, anytime, and anywhere.

Form a *Be the One* committee (minimum three members) and call local service providers to ask what they are doing for Veterans and tell them about the program. Draft program media releases, conduct publicity-related events, and ask for interviews with local air and print media to help spread the word. Join the local Chamber of Commerce to help spread the word in the business community and to garner their support.

Program Funding. Monies may be available from various sources to help fund aspects of the *Be the One* program. These will help in offsetting air or print media advertising costs, billboard costs, etc. When applying for program funding:

1. Clearly identify your target population (e.g., commuters and residents who may benefit from seeing a *Be the One* billboard, data on local veterans, senior centers, nursing homes, etc.).
2. Identify and describe efforts to work with local service providers, law enforcement, EMS, etc.
3. Identify and discuss other community partners such as local charities, businesses, etc.
4. Identify local air and print media with whom the Post has established relationships to help promote the *Be the One* program.
5. Identify anticipated costs associated with advertising (including billboards), printing pertinent documents, other costs associated with publicizing the program, etc.
6. Identify and discuss events in which the Post has participated and actively publicized the program, such as car shows, unserviceable flag collections, blood drives, etc.
7. Address how will the team keep Post leaders and members informed of *Be the One* activity.

For more help and ideas, call John Hacker, *Be the One* Chair, NC Department of American Legion, at (910) 209-0770.

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