



# American Legion: How to Initiate and Support a Be The One Program

**Background** The American Legion is committed to changing and saving the lives of veterans and service members through its Be The One Initiative. Across the country, efforts are underway to reduce the number of military-affiliated Americans lost to suicide—estimated at 22 or more per day. The Legion believes that even one suicide is too many. To address this, it prioritizes raising awareness and provides tools such as informational documents and free suicide prevention training for families, caregivers and those struggling daily.

At the grassroots level, the North Carolina Department of the American Legion raises awareness by sponsoring community hikes and 5K events, conducting public information sessions, and coordinating with local community service organizations and first responders to connect at-risk veterans with needed resources.

## Commonly Asked Questions

### What is Be The One?

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 American Legion family at every level of the organization. Nationally, the Legion promotes Be The One through marketing and media, creates training opportunities, and develops resource materials. At the Department level, staff elevate awareness of local contributions and create opportunities for training, fundraisers, and awareness events. However, the real hands-on action starts at the local Post level.

### How can my Post best support Be The One?

There are many ways to support the program. Posts should incorporate Be The One into the needs of their local community and follow the 10-point Be The One program on the Department website. Examples include:

- Conducting Buddy Checks
- Raising awareness of resources for veterans
- Taking VA S.A.V.E. or Columbia University suicide prevention training
- Hosting or supporting events that bring suicide awareness to light (e.g., community service events, fundraising rides, cornhole tournaments, car shows, blood drives, unserviceable flag collections)
- Manning a Be The One information table at all events

Leaders should contact local community service providers (emergency housing, food pantries, etc.), law enforcement, EMS, and firefighters to discuss the program and help publicize it.

## **When is the best time to conduct a Be The One event?**

The American Legion has declared the first day of each month as “Be The One Day”. While this is ideal for increasing public awareness, there is a critical need to spread the word any day, anytime, and anywhere.

Form a Be The One committee (minimum three members) and reach out to local service providers. Draft media releases, conduct publicity events, and seek interviews with local media. Join the local Chamber of Commerce to spread the word in the business community to garner support.

## **Program Funding**

Funds may be available from various sources to help offset costs such as advertising, media and billboards.

When applying for funding:

1. Clearly identify your target population (e.g., commuters, local veterans, senior centers).
2. Describe efforts to work with local service providers, law enforcement, EMS, etc.
3. Discuss other community partners (charities, businesses, etc.).
4. Identify local media relationships to help promote the program.
5. List anticipated costs (advertising, printing, publicity, etc.).
6. Discuss events where the program has been publicized (car shows, flag collections, blood drives, etc.).
7. Explain how Post leaders and members will be kept informed of Be The One activities.

For more assistance and additional ideas, contact John Hacker, Be The One Chair, NC Department of American Legion, at (910) 209-0770.