

United States Department of Defense Means Safety Efforts for Suicide Prevention in the Military

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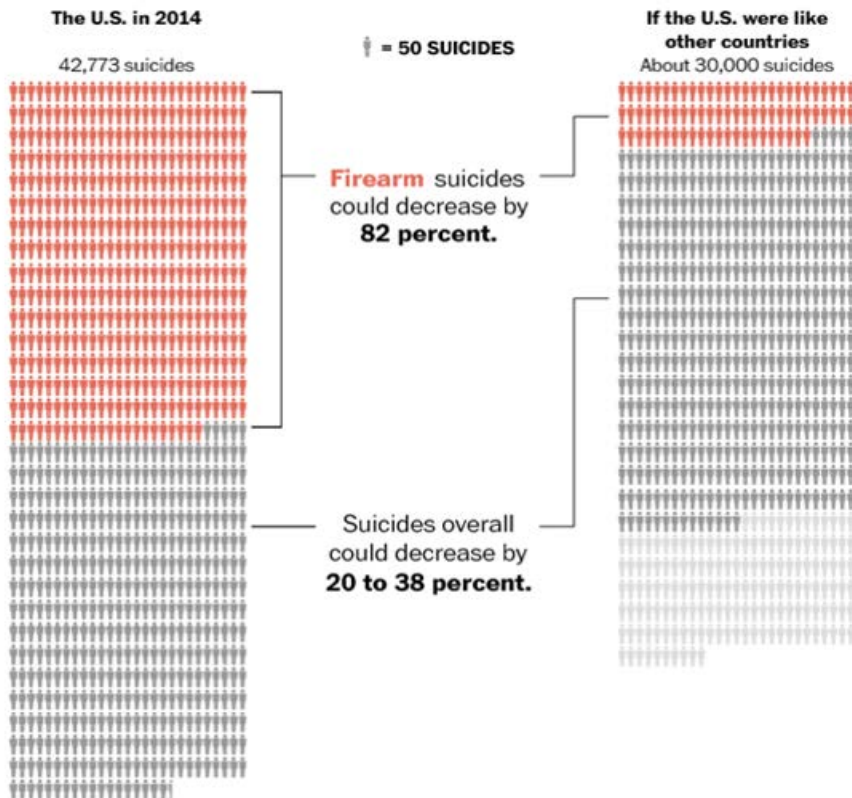
Objectives

- Overview of the Means Safety Task Force
- Understanding the significance of suicide means
- Review of firearm use in the military
- Translating research into practice and policy



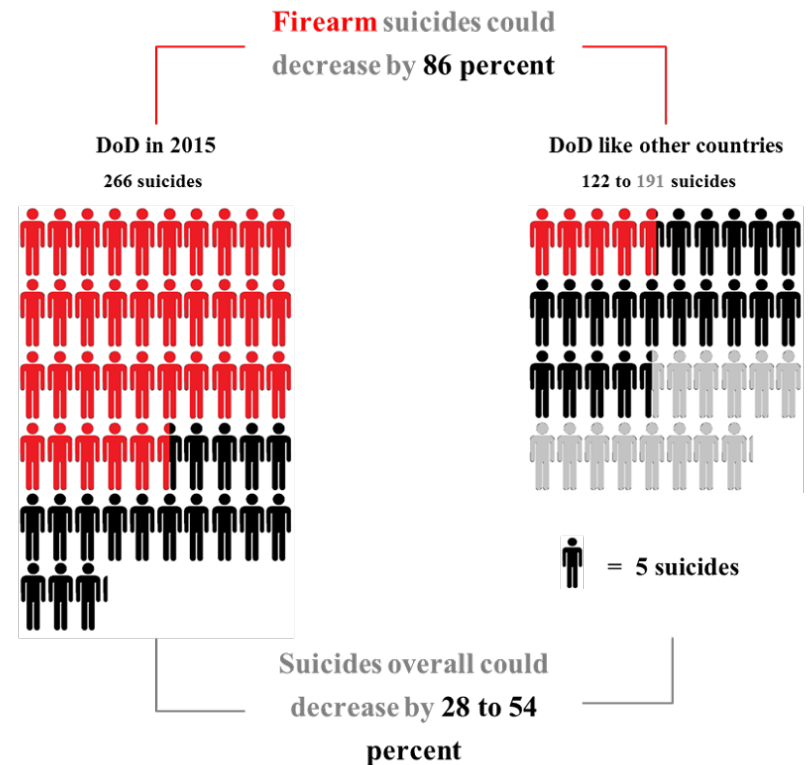
“To Reduce Suicide, Look at Guns”

U.S. Civilian Population



To Reduce Suicide, Enhance Policies & Practices on Gun Safety

U.S. Military Population

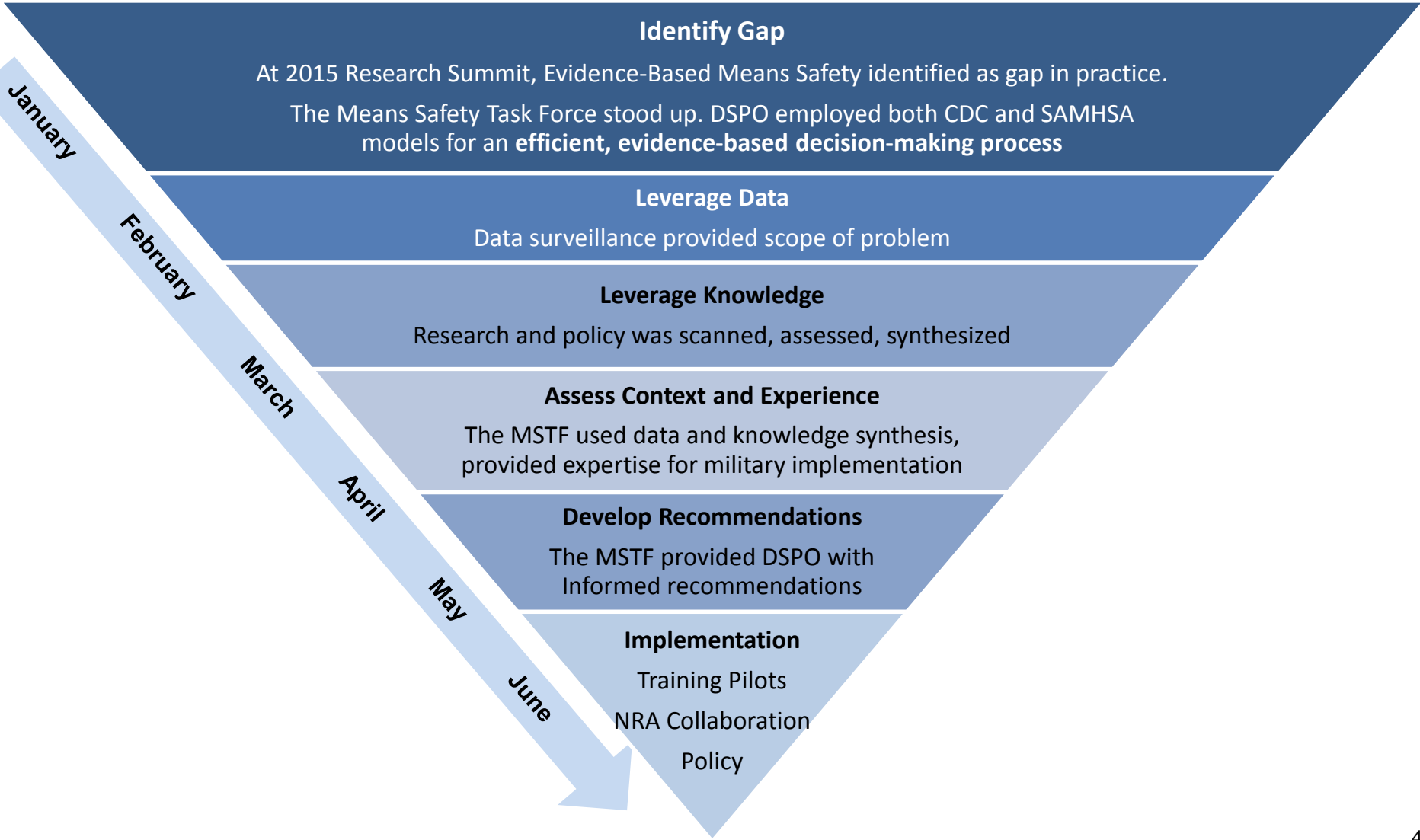


Washington Post, Soffen, 2016

Sources: Preliminary DoDSER 2015 active military suicide numbers; methodology of gun reduction effect on suicide rates comes from [“The math behind our suicide and guns calculations.”](#) The Washington Post (July 13, 2016)



Translation Success Story: Means Safety Task Force





Standing up a Means Safety Task Force

Background – The need for a collaborative public-private forum on Lethal Means Safety in suicide prevention was a key finding of the 2015 DoD Suicide Prevention Research Summit.

Basis – The Defense Lethal Means Safety Task Force directly supports Goal 6 of the 2015 Defense Strategy for Suicide Prevention – “Promote efforts within the Department of Defense to reduce access to lethal Means of suicide among individuals with identified suicide risk.”

Outcome – The development of recommendations to advocate lethal means safety and restriction through military interventions (leadership, peers, family members).



Task Force Members

- Keita Franklin, Working Group Chair, DSPO
- Wendy Lakso, DSPO
- Adam Walsh, DSPO
- Lt Col Charles Knapp, Joint Staff J1
- Mike Anestis, University of Southern Mississippi
- Shannon Frattaroli, Johns Hopkins SPH
- Joseph E. Logan, CDC
- Emma B. McGinty, Bloomberg SPH
- LTC Dennis McGurk, MOMRP
- Richard McKeon, SAMHSA
- Kate Nassauer, MOMRP
- Jane Pearson, NIMH
- Jerry Reed, SPRC
- Mike Schoenburg, University of South Florida
- Caitlin Thompson, VA

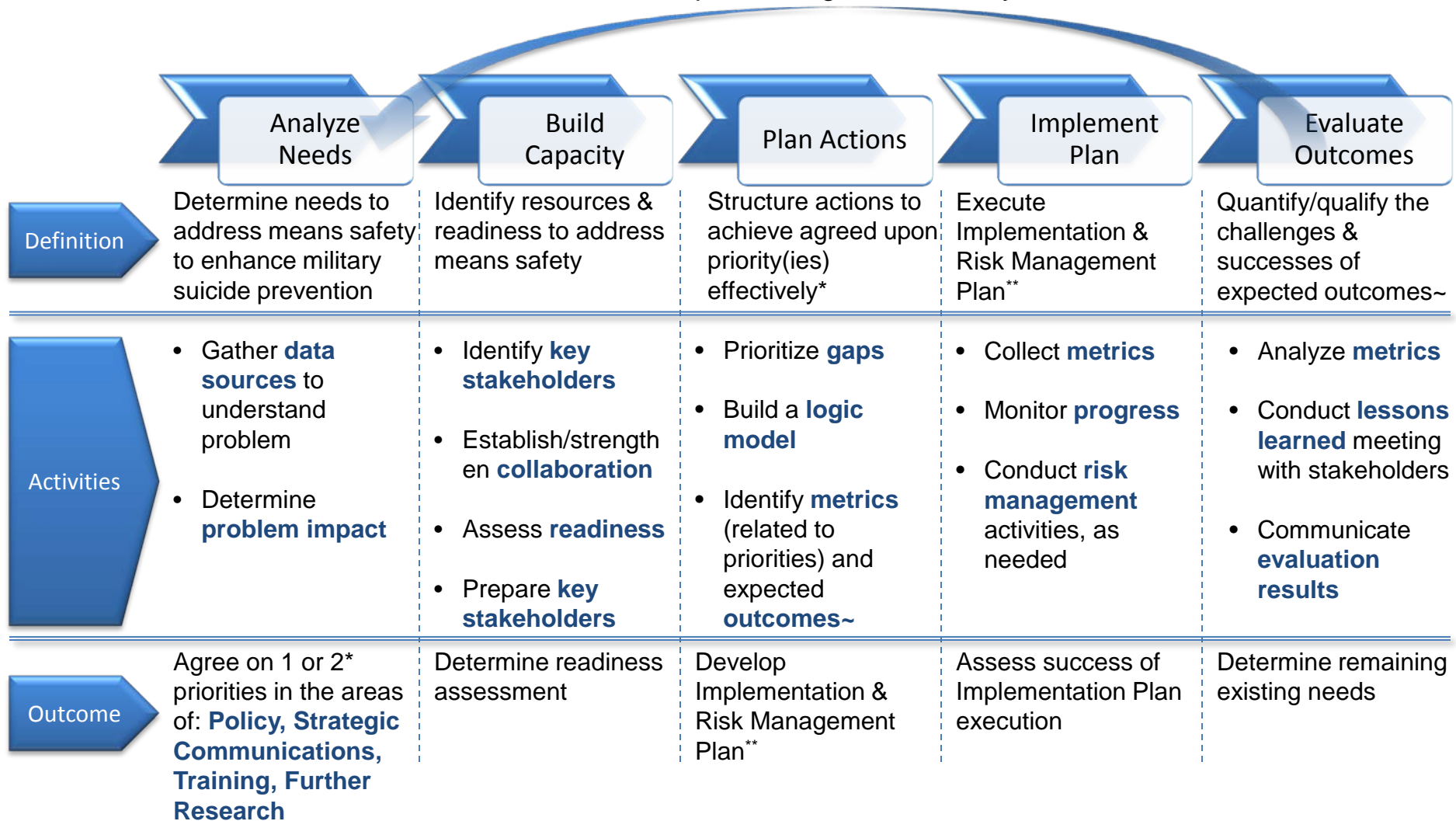


Process Overview

Objective: Prevent suicide among military members

Risk: Access to lethal means

Protective Factor: Implementing means safety/restriction





Task Force Mission and Objectives

Mission

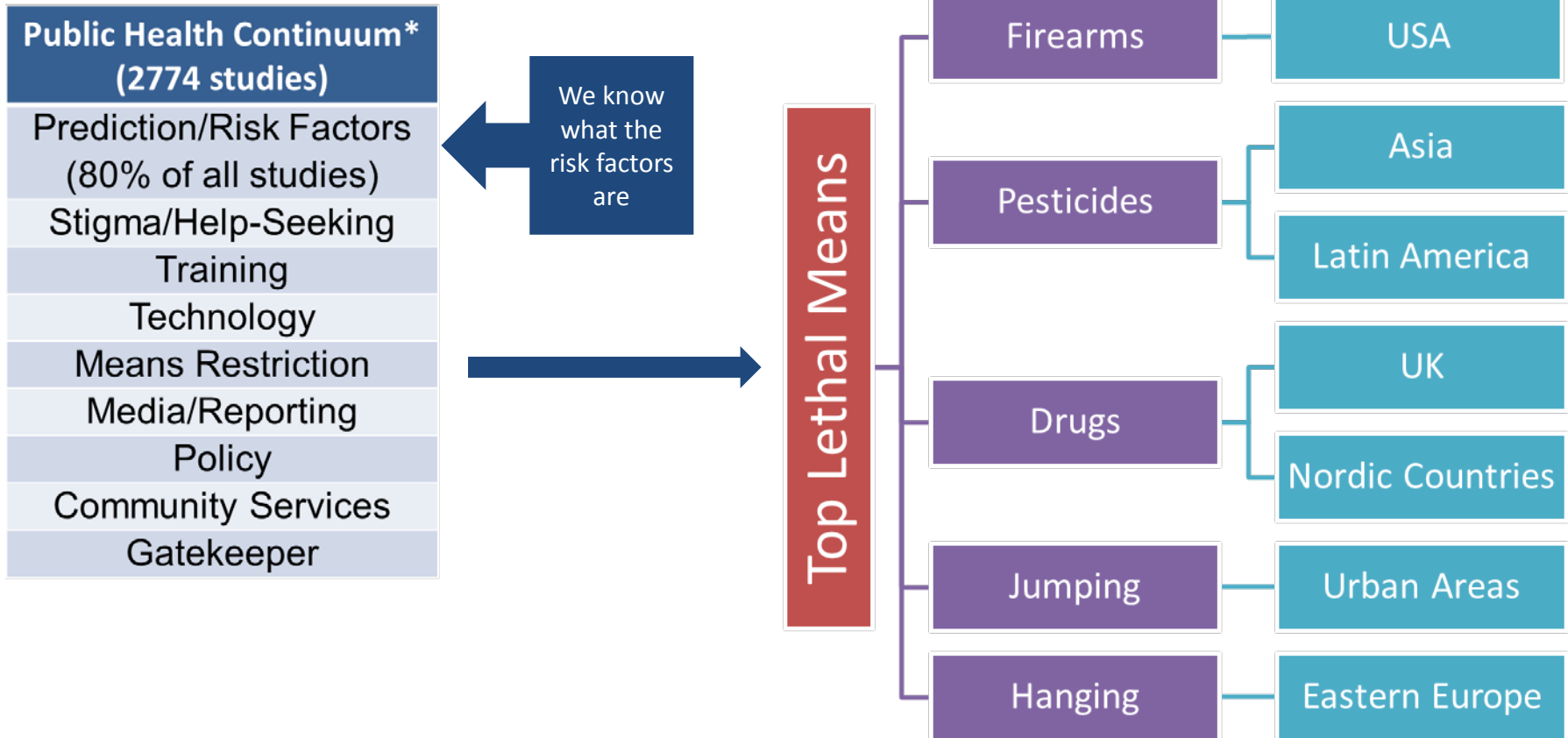
Provide targeted recommendations for policy, programs, and practices to improve the effectiveness of Lethal Means Safety towards reducing suicide.

Objectives

1. Refine the DoD lethal means safety policy
2. Develop DoDI policy guidance on lethal means safety training programs
3. Synchronize DoD lethal means safety research and activities
4. Ensure update/creation of DoD lethal means safety policies, programs, and practices



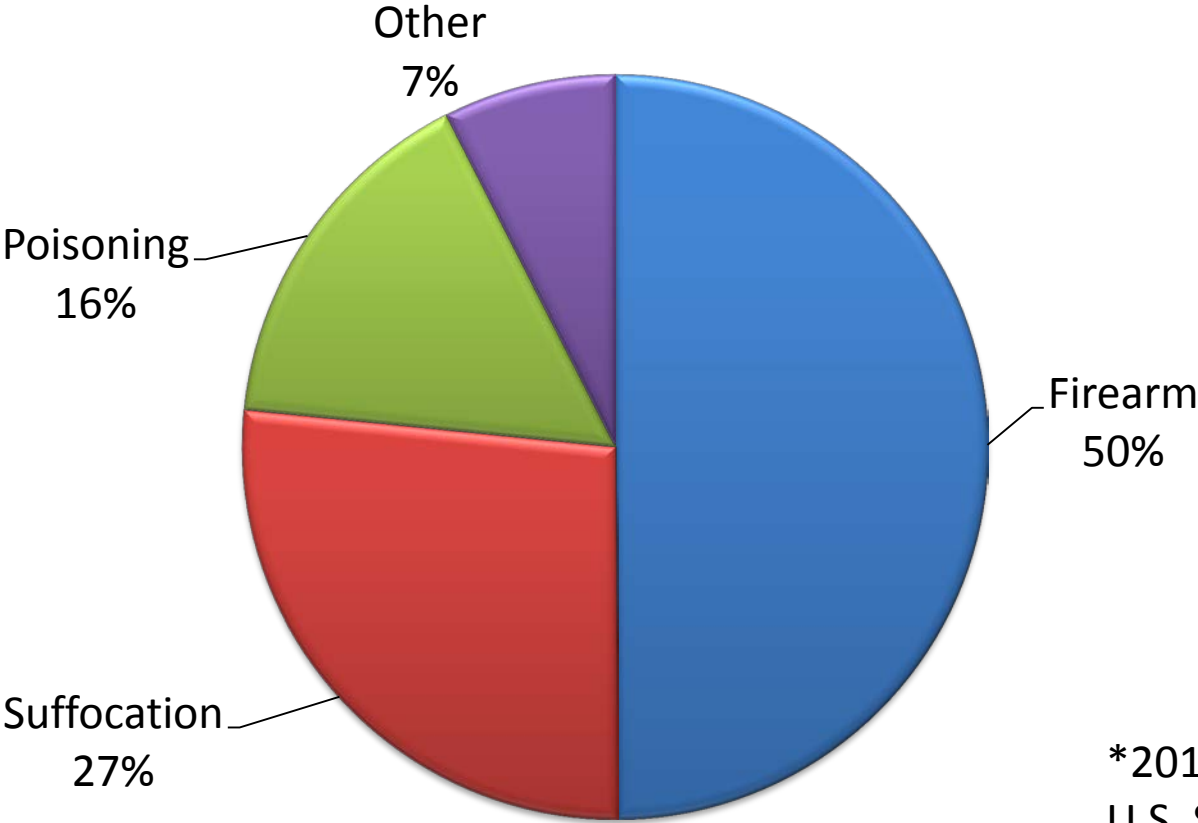
Moving from “Why” to “How”



* WHO and CDC



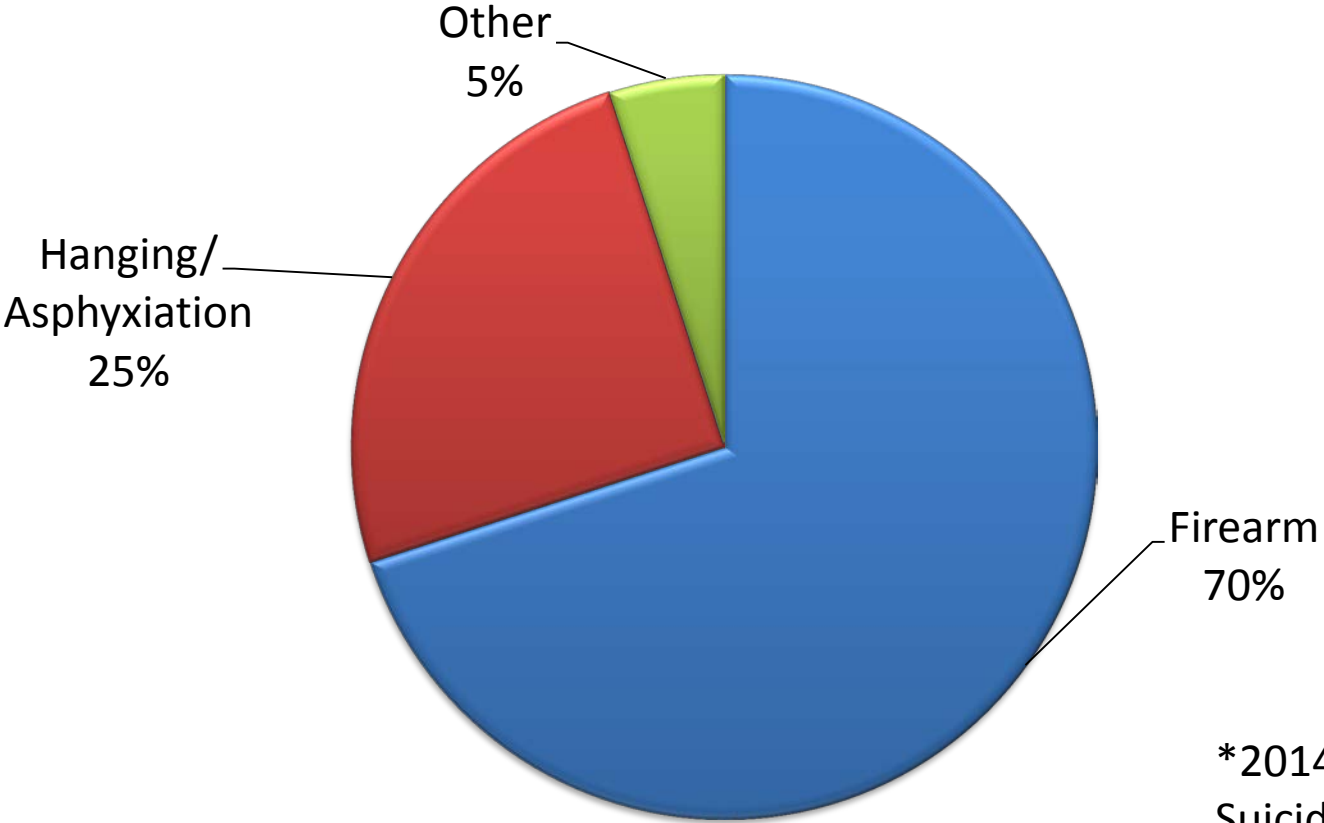
“How” in the U.S. Suicide Deaths



*2014 CDC
U.S. Suicides by Method



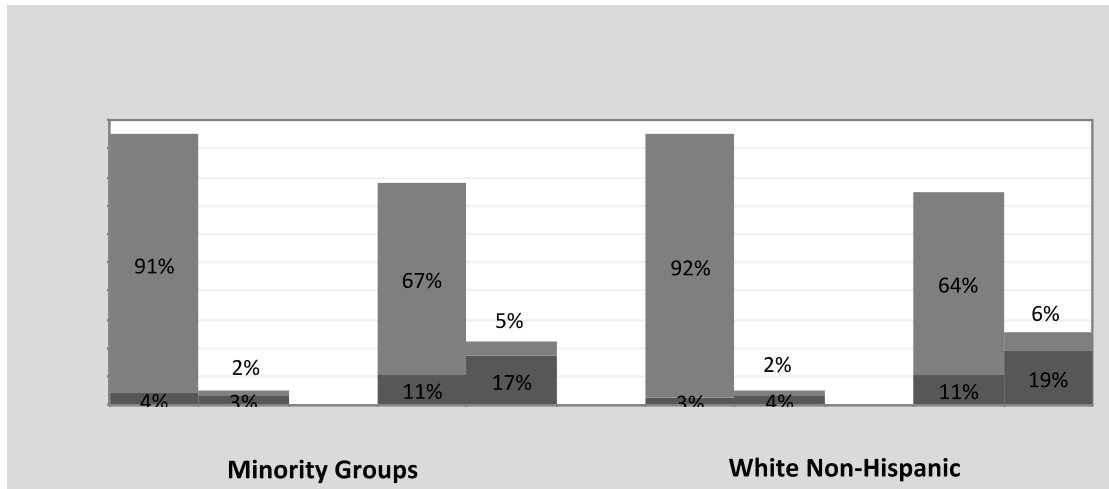
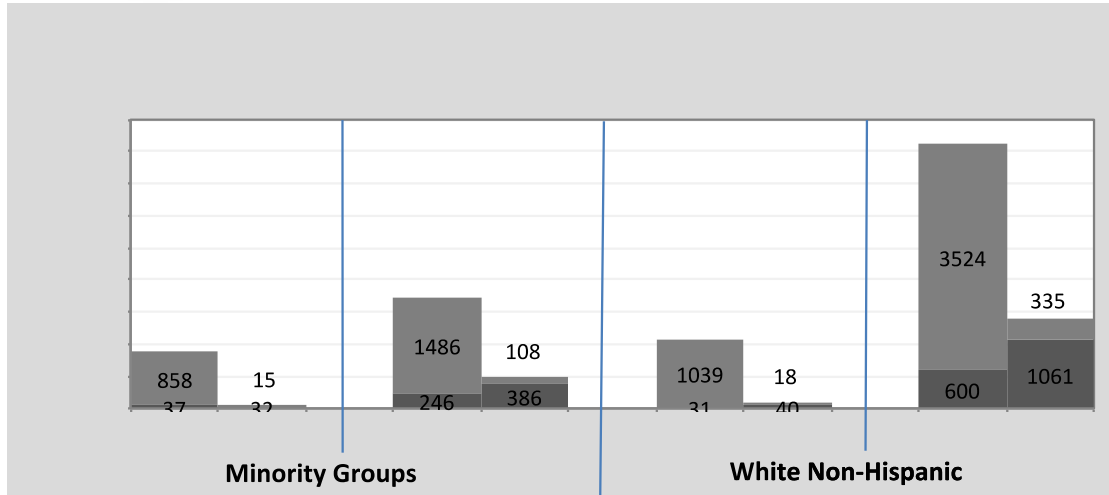
“How” in the Military Suicide Deaths



*2014 DoDSER
Suicide Event Methods
All Services



Firearm Usage by Gender and Minority Status

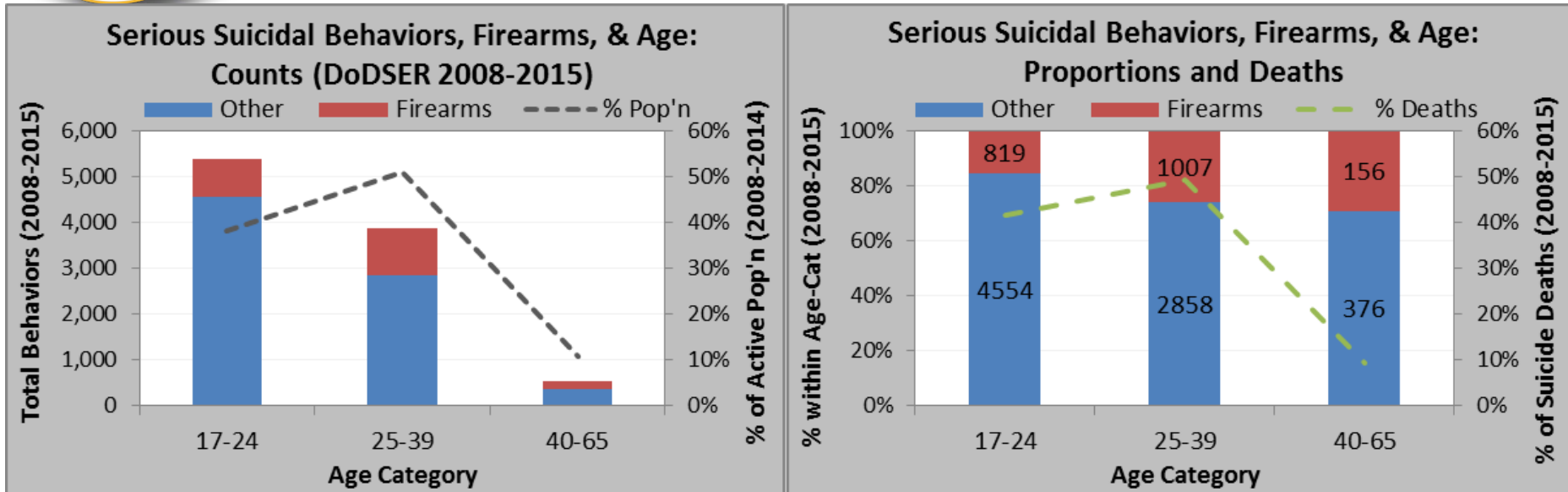


- DoD is largely made up of White Non-Hispanic males, a high risk group for suicidal behaviors.
- Firearms are a highly lethal method.
- Females in both Minority-Status groups are less likely to choose a firearm than males. Compared to females, males are 5X more likely to choose a firearm than another method.
- White Non-Hispanic males are slightly more likely to choose a firearm than Minority Groups.

Source: DoDSER, 2008-2015



Firearm Usage by Age Category



- From 2008-2015, 17-24 year olds were disproportionately involved in suicidal behaviors (see the bar above the % population line, the other groups are below it).
- Looking within groups (chart on right), older groups are more likely to use a firearm.
- Despite fewer suicidal behaviors, the older groups exhibit more *lethality* as there are disproportionate numbers of deaths given the number of suicidal behaviors.



States with Most Military Suicides

State	Deaths ¹	Population ²	Suicide Rate	Died by Firearm ³	Gun Law Rank	CONUS Suicide%	CONUS Pop'n%
KY	39	38,445	33.8	63%	8.5	5.3%	3.3%
SC	34	36,723	30.9	82%	16	4.7%	3.2%
KS	21	24,658	28.4	87%	2	2.9%	2.1%
CO	30	35,872	27.9	71%	29.5	4.1%	3.1%
NC	85	109,906	25.8	63%	17	11.7%	9.5%
GA	52	68,280	25.4	69%	16	7.1%	5.9%
TX	96	132,505	24.2	67%	14	13.2%	11.4%
FL	37	54,486	22.6	70%	16	5.1%	4.7%
VA	64	104,462	20.4	67%	22	8.8%	9.0%
WA	32	57,616	18.5	64%	47.5	4.4%	5.0%
HI	23	47,099	16.3	24%	73.5	3.2%	4.1%
CA	69	151,970	15.1	53%	93.5	9.5%	13.1%

- Notes
1. Military suicide data: 2013-2015, source: AFMES.
 2. Population Data: 2013-2015, source: DMDC.
 3. Died by Firearm: % suicides (lethal attempts) by firearm; 2013-2015, source: DoDSER.
 4. Highlighted states produced a disproportionate share of suicides.
 5. Gun Law Rank from Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, based on evaluation of relative strength of gun laws ranked 0-100

MSTF Recommendations





Recommendations

● Low Risk
 ● Medium Risk
 ● High Risk

AREAS	ACTIVITIES	IMPACT
<p>Policy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop policy that requires military leadership to ask about existence of firearm in DEOCS ● Develop policy on mandatory training about means safety and relation to suicide ● Develop memo that requires gun locks on bases for Service members' personally owned guns ● Develop and implement gun buy-back policy pilot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raises leadership's awareness and decreases circulation of firearms • Initiates a change in the culture
<p>Strategic Communications & Outreach</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cultivate relationships with key stakeholders (NRA/OSPO) and educate on military suicide ● Develop outreach materials (posters, tri-folds) on guns and suicide ● Socialize concept: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If you are concerned about Service member, ask about gun ownership - Offer to store gun ● Work with AAFES/gun-shop owners to educate them about suicide and safe ownership ● Develop marketing campaign for CA gun law (GVRO) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases effectiveness of policy and means safety efforts by leveraging stakeholders that have direct access to end users • Raises general public awareness and reinforces change in culture



Recommendations (cont.)

● Low Risk
 ● Medium Risk
 ● High Risk

AREAS	ACTIVITIES	IMPACT
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Educate health providers about the need to ask about gun ownership and access ● Integrate suicide prevention training in existing content related to wellness, health, etc. ● Apply competency framework to training and education through role-play and practice ● Update existing suicide prevention training with lethal means safety ● Provide education to internal and external partners (Chamber of Commerce, gun-shop owners) ● Facilitate training for Family Advocacy Program Coordinators, new support personnel, etc. ● Develop and disseminate safety training video to Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalizes the effort of several initiatives in other areas (policy and communications) • Creates accountability and reinforces public health approach to suicide prevention
Further Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conduct research study about effectiveness of guns and gun locks ● Pilot interventions to assess effectiveness of means safety law on military bases (e.g., CA gun violence restraining order) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates cycle of continuous improvement

Recent Research





Recent Research Developments

- Association Between Gun Law Reforms and Intentional Firearm Deaths in Australia, 1979-2013. (*Chapman et al., 2016*).
 - The rate of suicide deaths by firearm declined at a significantly accelerated rate after a gun law reform. No substitution of similarly lethal means occurred.
- Lessons From Australia's National Firearms Agreement (NFA; *Webster, 2016*).
 - Australia's NFA is an example of how a nation can unite to forge life-saving policies despite political and cultural divides.
 - Chapman et al. provided suggestive evidence that the gun-related reforms and measures in Australia were directly related to meaningful reductions in homicides *and* suicides.



Method Substitution

- The notion of method substitution repeatedly fails to garner empirical support (Daigle, 2005; Law et al., 2014; Lester & Abe, 1998)
- Several studies show no significant substitution effect after implementation of a means restriction policy (Cox, 2013; Law, 2014; Leenaars, 2007; Mann, 2013).
- If method substitution were supported by data, you would expect means restriction/safety to only reduce suicide rates by a specific method, not the overall suicide rate.



Time and Distance

- Putting time and distance between a person who is having thoughts of suicide and lethal means, such as a gun, can help save their life. (*World Health Organization; Barber, 2017; Kposowa, 2016; Mann, 2016; Simon, 2007; Vrinotis, 2015*).
- Suicidal thoughts and behaviors are fluid and can change frequently.
- Time and Distance allows for reconsideration and intervention
- Family and friends can take steps to ensure that lethal means are stored safely and securely, especially during times of crisis.
 - Recognize warning signs
 - Secure storage
 - Temporarily store guns outside of your home

Implementation Highlights





Means Safety Policy Memo

- OUSD(P&R) Memorandum, subject “Guidance on Promoting and Increasing Means Safety regarding Suicide Prevention,” Jan. 17, 2017
 - Provides guidance to emphasize suicide awareness and risk reduction as a basic tenet of firearms safety and responsible firearm ownership.
 - Requires the Military Departments to review and enhance all policies and procedures related to means safety to include safe-storage of firearms for Service members and their families, as well as voluntary storage of firearms in armories and access to gun locks.
- Provides additional guidance and resources to include:
 - Gun locks
 - Partnerships with local gun shop and firing ranges outside of military installations
 - Safe-Storage Access
 - Firearms Training
 - Presentations on suicide prevention at In/Out-Processing Centers, Officer and Enlisted Councils, and Officer and Enlisted Spouse Clubs
 - Provides information for the Military Crisis Line and the BeThere Peer Support Call and Outreach Center
- Policy to be evaluated by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control



Gun Shop Intervention Pilot

- Implementation pilot to determine the effectiveness of intervention at gun shops on and near military bases in the state of Colorado
- Comparison of 3 groups
 1. Educational materials only (*modeled on NH Gun Shop Owner Project*)
 2. Educational materials + safe storage devices (*modeled on the Washington State/NRA gun shop owner project*)
 3. Control (no intervention)
- Determine the specific elements of the program that are most effective



Perceptions and Beliefs about Gun Lock Policies in Military Gun Culture

- Understand the perceptions and beliefs of Service members about gun lock policies in the U.S. military
- Objectives:
 1. Develop survey on gun ownership, safety, and policy
 2. Determine what percentage of Service member suicides that occurred with registered or recently purchased firearms
 3. Update Anestis 2013 firearm suicide research
 - A comparison of the ratio of suicide attempts and deaths by suicide in the US military and general population. Suicide attempts in the military are more likely to result in death than in the general population due to the use of more lethal means (firearms).
- The results of this study will help shape means safety policy, education/training, and communication campaigns



Status of Forces Survey of Active Members (SOFS-A)

- Statistically sound random sample of Active Duty personnel
 - Results generalizable to the entire Active Duty force
- Provides some understanding of ideation and attempt frequency, training, help-seeking, barriers, resilience, awareness of resources, messaging preferences
- Addition of Firearms Questions
 - # of firearms owned
 - Location of firearm and ammunition
 - Storage practices and preferences
 - When firearms were acquired (before, during, after enlistment, deployment, etc.)
 - Purpose for owning
 - Crisis intervention strategies



Way Forward

- **DSPO will engage in a joint effort with the NRA on the following initiatives:**
 - Pilot to educate gun shop owners' and communities surrounding military installations in Texas on firearm safety, suicide prevention risks and protective factors, and how to provide support and resources to Service members in need.
 - Public Service Announcement on firearm safety
 - News Article on the joint DSPO/NRA initiative
- **Collaboration to Address All Means Safety**
 - The MSTF led to the first means industry National means safety working subgroup of the National Action Alliance to prevent suicide
 - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
 - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration
 - Suicide Prevention Resource Center
 - American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
 - Veterans Affairs
 - Department of Transportation
 - Pharmaceutical Industry
 - Poison Control



Conclusion

- Increasing safety and reducing access to firearms is an effective suicide prevention strategy.
- The establishment and expert recommendations of the MSTF informed a number of ongoing implementation and monitoring activities for means safety.
- These efforts will aid in the establishment of policies, communications, research and trainings to reduce suicide deaths among the U.S. military.