

April 21, 2020

**VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY**

The Honorable Robert Wilkie  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie:

I am writing to recommend two innovations in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Public-Private Partnerships (P3) program at the community level during and after the coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic to counteract the impact of loneliness and social isolation experienced by Veterans and service members in high risk groups.

Unprecedented safety measures, including stay-at-home orders, to avoid transmission of COVID-19 exacerbate social isolation and loneliness. Research has found a consistent relationship between loneliness, lack of connection, depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. Most at risk for loneliness are individuals in adolescence, early adulthood, early 50's, and 80's. Former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy determined volunteerism, a phone call, or a visit alleviates the effects of loneliness. The President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS) concurs human-to-human connections mitigate risk.

Therefore, it is essential for VA to expand upon its P3 program to enhance community investment on behalf of our Veterans and service members in these at-risk groups to:

- First, in accordance with VA's 2018-2028 National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide, Objective 3.1, I recommend VA's Office of Community Engagement (OCE) to establish an annual stellar community service provider award program to incentivize Veteran Service Organizations (VSO) to implement outreach programs enhancing connectedness among Veterans and service members in their municipal. VSOs are uniquely positioned through membership, mission, and community connection to offer volunteer assistance.
- Second, utilize the Social Impact Partnerships to Pay for Results Act to expand VA's efforts to direct P3 resources toward counteracting the effects of loneliness. VA's role on the Federal Interagency Council on Social Impact Partnerships can assist the Treasury Secretary in the development and implementation of projects that:
  - Improve the health and well-being of those with mental, emotional, and behavioral health needs

- Improve the employment and well-being of returning United States military members

I look forward to speaking with you soon to discuss these recommendations in greater detail. Lindsay McDonough from my office will be in touch with your staff to arrange a telephone call.

Sincerely,



Todd Young  
United States Senator