AN ACT Relating to establishing programs and measures to prevent suicide among veterans and military members; adding new sections to chapter 43.60A RCW; adding a new section to chapter 18.130 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 43.70 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 46.18 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 74.04 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 9.41 RCW; creating new sections; providing an effective date; and providing an expiration date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. Sec. 1. (1) Suicide is a public health issue that affects many Washington families and communities daily. Over the last 10 years, Washington state has been at the forefront of suicide prevention, investing more in upstream suicide prevention strategies and supports with the goal of a noteworthy reduction in suicide by 2025.

(2) At the request of the governor, in 2020 Washington stakeholders engaged in a national and statewide initiative to end veteran and military member suicide. This initiative culminated in a new state plan to educate providers and help them address the unique needs of veterans and military members, particularly those in transition to civilian life; and to provide resources and supports
including improved lethal means safety training. The purpose of this act is to support the implementation of that plan.

(3) Service members, veterans, and their families are at a higher risk of being affected by suicide as experiences prior to enlistment, during service, and transition from service can contribute to suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

(4) Washington is home to 544,290 veterans, 60,699 active duty service members, 17,941 guard and reserve service members, and 2,000,000 military and veteran family members. Although veterans themselves make up only seven percent of the Washington population, they account for 19 percent of total suicides in the state. Nearly 1,000 veterans have died by suicide in Washington state over the last five years. More than two-thirds of veterans who died by suicide in Washington used a firearm.

(5) Family members of veterans who die by suicide are at higher risk for future suicide due to the exposure of experiencing suicide loss. Research shows for every suicide that occurs, 135 people suffer from the effects either directly or indirectly, meaning veteran suicides impact a community of 2,600,000 people.

(6) There is no one path to suicide, but life experiences, moral injury, trauma, culture, and health can play a major role in suicidal behavior. Military and veteran culture in particular includes stigma around mental wellness and help-seeking behavior, emphasizes reliability on group cohesion, and facilitates access, comfortability, and familiarity with lethal means such as firearms. Additionally, a significant number of veterans do not seek care within the veterans administration system.

(7) The legislature intends to address the tragedy of suicide amongst veterans, military members, and their families through support of professionals and community and peer organizations serving veterans, cultural changes that support help-seeking behaviors, and investments in education, training, prevention, and care.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 2. A new section is added to chapter 43.60A RCW to read as follows:

(1) There is created in the department a suicide prevention community-based services grant program. The purpose of the grant program is to provide suicide prevention, peer support, and other assistance to at-risk and transitioning veterans and military members and their families in their communities.
(2) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for the specific purposes provided in this section and amounts disbursed from the veterans and military members suicide prevention account created in section 3 of this act, the department, in consultation with the forefront suicide prevention center, must establish a process to receive, review, process, and award grants to organizations, including nonprofit and peer support community programs, that address veterans, military members, and their families who may be at risk of suicide and other mental health crises. Priority should be given to organizations using peer support models that use evidence-based, research-based, or promising practices.

(3) The department shall report to the legislature annually beginning July 1, 2023, on grant recipients, number of veterans and military members served, and the types of services offered by grant recipients.

(4) The forefront suicide prevention center shall evaluate the effectiveness of each grant program recipient providing suicide prevention and peer support services to veterans, military members, and their families who may be at risk of suicide and other mental health crises.

(5) For the purposes of this section, "forefront suicide prevention center" means the University of Washington's forefront suicide prevention center of excellence.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 3. A new section is added to chapter 43.60A RCW to read as follows:

(1) The veterans and military members suicide prevention account is created in the custody of the state treasurer. The account shall consist of funds appropriated by the legislature, revenues received from the prevent veteran suicide emblem under section 8 of this act, and all receipts from gifts, grants, bequests, devises, or other donations from public and private sources to support veterans and military members suicide prevention measures. Expenditures from the account may be used only for the purposes provided in subsection (3) of this section. Only the director or the director's designee may authorize expenditures from the account. The account is subject to allotment procedures under chapter 43.88 RCW, but an appropriation is not required for expenditures.

(2)(a) The department may request and accept nondedicated contributions, grants, or gifts in cash or otherwise, and voluntary
donations for deposit into the account, including funds generated by voluntary donations under (b) of this subsection.

(b) The department may accept, for deposit into the account, voluntary donations from persons who are: (i) Applying for a concealed pistol license or renewal of a concealed pistol license; or (ii) undergoing a background check under chapter 9.41 RCW in connection with the purchase of a firearm from a firearms dealer. The department shall coordinate with local law enforcement agencies, the department of licensing, and firearms dealers licensed under chapter 9.41 RCW to develop a form and process for publicizing and collecting voluntary donations under this subsection. The department and the department of licensing shall post educational information regarding the voluntary donation provisions of this section on their websites.

(3) All moneys deposited into the account must be used for activities that are dedicated to the benefit of veteran and military member suicide education and prevention including, but not limited to: (a) Expanding the department's peer corps program; and (b) providing programs, peer support, and services that assist veterans and military members in addressing mental health and wellness impacts of military service, trauma, moral injury, and transition to civilian life. Funds may also be used for the suicide prevention community-based services grant program established in section 2 of this act. Funds from the account may not be used to supplant existing funds received by the department nor shall grant recipients use the funds to supplant existing funding.

(4) For the purposes of this section the following definitions apply:

(a) "Veteran" has the same meaning as provided in RCW 41.04.005 and 41.04.007.

(b) "Military members" means actively serving members of the national guard or reserves, or active duty military personnel.

(c) "Account" means the veterans and military members suicide prevention account.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 4. A new section is added to chapter 43.60A RCW to read as follows:

Beginning December 2022, subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the governor's challenge team and service members, veterans, and their families suicide prevention advisory committee shall report to the legislature on a biannual
basis regarding implementation of the plan developed by the committee.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 5. A new section is added to chapter 43.60A RCW to read as follows:

Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the department shall:

(1) Create and maintain a database of information on nonprofit, for-profit, city, county, state, and federal organizations, providers, and resources that address the mental health, well-being, and suicide prevention of veterans, military members, and their families. The department shall establish criteria for inclusion in the database by July 1, 2022. The department must make the database accessible on its website to veterans, military members, and their families by July 1, 2023;

(2) Provide suicide prevention education training and information for veterans, military members, and their families that is accessible through the internet; and

(3) By December 1, 2023, create, in consultation with the suicide-safer homes task force, a web-based application to be shared by state agencies and primary care providers with veterans, military members, and their families to provide applicable information and resources including but not limited to benefits, mental health resources, and lethal means safety information.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 6. A new section is added to chapter 18.130 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the department shall consult with the department of veterans affairs to create educational materials informing health care providers regulated under this chapter about the availability of the nationwide 988 phone number for individuals in crisis to connect with suicide prevention and mental health crisis counselors. The educational materials must include information about the veterans crisis line for veterans and service members, and, beginning July 1, 2023, information about the resources developed under section 5 of this act.

(2) The department shall:

(a) Determine the health professions to which this section shall apply; and
(b) Collaborate with the corresponding disciplining authority under RCW 18.130.020 to ensure that the educational materials are distributed electronically to appropriate licensed health care providers when a provider renews his or her license.

(3) Beginning July 1, 2023, all health care providers are strongly encouraged to inquire with new patients entering care whether the patient is a veteran, member of the military, or a family member of a veteran or member of the military. If the patient responds in the affirmative, the provider is encouraged to share the educational materials created under this section with the patient.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 7. A new section is added to chapter 43.70 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, a suicide-safer homes task force is established to raise public awareness and increase suicide prevention education among new partners who are in key positions to help reduce suicide. The task force shall be administered and staffed by the department of veterans affairs. To the extent possible, the task force membership should include representatives from geographically diverse and priority populations, including tribal populations.

(2) The suicide-safer homes task force shall be cochaired by the director, or the director's designee, of the department of veterans affairs and the director, or the director's designee, of the forefront suicide prevention center and also consist of the following members:

(a) Two representatives of suicide prevention organizations, selected by the cochairs of the task force;

(b) Two representatives of the firearms industry, selected by the cochairs of the task force;

(c) Two individuals who are suicide attempt survivors or who have experienced suicide loss, selected by the cochairs of the task force;

(d) Two representatives of law enforcement agencies, selected by the cochairs of the task force;

(e) One representative from the department of health;

(f) One representative from the department of fish and wildlife;

(g) One individual representing veterans;

(h) One member of a Washington or federally recognized Indian tribe;

(i) Two veterans;
(j) One representative of the national rifle association;
(k) One representative of the Second Amendment foundation;
(l) One representative of a nonprofit organization working on gun safety issues;
(m) One representative of a national firearms trade association;
(n) One representative of a Washington state pharmacy association; and
(o) No more than five other interested parties, selected by the cochairs of the task force.

(3) The department of veterans affairs shall convene the initial meeting of the task force.

(4) The task force shall:
(a) Develop and prepare to disseminate online trainings on suicide awareness and prevention for firearms dealers and their employees and firearm range owners and their employees;
(b) Partner with medical providers, firearms dealers, firearms ranges, and pharmacies to develop and distribute suicide awareness and prevention messages for posters and brochures;
(c) In consultation with the department of fish and wildlife, develop strategies for creating and disseminating suicide awareness and prevention information for hunting safety classes, including messages to parents that can be shared during online registration, in either follow-up email communications, or in writing, or both;
(d) Create a website that will be a clearinghouse for the newly created suicide awareness and prevention materials developed by the task force;
(e) Continue to support medical providers with suicide prevention and awareness work through the dissemination of collateral education programs;
(f) Allocate funding towards the purchase of lock boxes for dissemination via the forefront suicide prevention center’s TeleSAFER program;
(g) Develop and direct advocacy efforts with firearms dealers to pair suicide awareness and prevention training with distribution of safe storage devices;
(h) Partner with a statewide pharmacy association to market and promote medication disposal kits and safe storage devices;
(i) Train health care providers on suicide awareness and prevention, paired with distribution of medication disposal kits and safe storage devices; and

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(j) Train local law enforcement officers on suicide awareness and prevention, paired with distribution of medication disposal kits and safe storage devices.

(5) The forefront suicide prevention center shall provide subject matter expertise, technical and programmatic support, and consultation and evaluation to the task force.

(6) Beginning December 1, 2022, the task force shall annually report to the legislature on the status of its work.

(7) This section expires July 1, 2024.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 8. A new section is added to chapter 46.18 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The general public may purchase a prevent veteran suicide emblem for a prescribed fee set by the department. The emblem must be displayed on license plates in the manner described by the department, existing vehicular registration procedures, and current laws.

(2) The department, in creating the prevent veteran suicide emblem, must consult with the department of veterans affairs on the design of the emblem. The emblem must incorporate the 988 suicide prevention hotline or its successor.

(3) Revenues from the prevent veteran suicide emblem must be deposited into the veterans and military members suicide prevention account created in section 3 of this act.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 9. A new section is added to chapter 74.04 RCW to read as follows:

During the application process for public assistance benefits, the department shall inquire of each applicant whether he or she has ever served in the United States military services or is a family or household member of someone who has ever served in the United States military services. If the applicant answers in the affirmative, the department shall provide the applicant with information on how to contact the Washington department of veterans affairs to inquire as to whether the applicant may be eligible for any benefits, services, or programs offered to veterans, military members, or their families.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 10. A new section is added to chapter 9.41 RCW to read as follows:
(1) In order to better prevent suicide by veterans, military members, and their families, an expansion of safe storage of firearms and reduced access to lethal means in the community is encouraged.

(2) A dealer who provides a service of allowing a person to temporarily store a firearm on the dealer's premises in a storage locker, box, or container that is locked and not accessible to the dealer does not thereby create a special relationship, for civil liability purposes, between the dealer and the person who temporarily stores the firearm on the dealer's premises.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 11. Section 8 of this act takes effect October 1, 2022.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 12. If specific funding for the purposes of this act, referencing this act by bill or chapter number, is not provided by June 30, 2022, in the omnibus appropriations act, this act is null and void.

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