AN ACT Relating to establishing programs and measures to prevent suicide among veterans and military members; amending RCW 43.70.445; adding new sections to chapter 43.60A 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 43.216 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 74.04 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 9.41 RCW; creating a new section; providing an expiration date; and declaring an emergency.

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 reducing suicide by 20 percent 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.
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.

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.

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.

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.

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 University of Washington, 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 evidence-based, research-based, or promising practices, or peer support models.

(3) The department shall report to the legislature annually beginning July 1, 2022, on grant recipients, number of veterans and military members served, and the types of services offered by grant recipients.

(4) The University of Washington 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.

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 3 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 2021, 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 appropriations provided 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 December 1, 2021. The department must make the database accessible on its website to veterans, military members, and their families; and

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

NEW SECTION. Sec. 6. A new section is added to chapter 43.70 RCW to read as follows:

In order to encourage providers to consider additional available training and resources to better serve veterans, military members, and their families, every primary care provider required to complete training under RCW 43.70.442 shall, when assessing, screening, referring, treating, or managing a patient, inquire into whether the patient is a veteran, member of the military services, or a family member or spouse of a veteran or member of the military services.

Sec. 7. RCW 43.70.445 and 2019 c 415 s 967 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) (a) 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 University of Washington (school of social work). To the extent possible, the task force membership should include representatives from geographically diverse and priority populations, including tribal populations.

(b) The suicide-safer homes task force comprises a suicide prevention and firearms subcommittee and a suicide prevention and health care subcommittee, as follows:

(i) The suicide prevention and firearms subcommittee shall be cochaired by the
University of Washington ((school of social work and a member identified in (b)(i)(A) of this subsection (1):

(A) A representative of the national rifle association and a representative of the second amendment foundation;
(B)) a representative of the department of veterans affairs, and either a representative of the national rifle association or a representative of the Second Amendment foundation. The subcommittee shall also consist of the following members:

(A) Two representatives of suicide prevention organizations, selected by the cochairs of the subcommittee;
((C)) (B) Two representatives of the firearms industry, selected by the cochairs of the subcommittee;
((D)) (C) Two individuals who are suicide attempt survivors or who have experienced suicide loss, selected by the cochairs of the subcommittee;
((E)) (D) Two representatives of law enforcement agencies, selected by the cochairs of the subcommittee;
((F)) (E) One representative from the department of health;
((G)) (F) One ((representative from the department of veterans affairs, and one other)) individual representing veterans ((to be selected by the cochairs of the subcommittee));
((H)) (G) One member of a Washington or federally recognized Indian tribe; and
(H) No more than ((two)) five other interested parties, selected by the cochairs of the subcommittee.

(ii) The suicide prevention and health care subcommittee shall consist of the following members and be cochaired by the University of Washington ((school of social work)) and a member identified in (b)(ii)(A) of this subsection (1):

(A) Two representatives of the Washington state pharmacy association;
(B) Two representatives of retailers who operate pharmacies, selected by the cochairs of the subcommittee;
(C) One faculty member from the University of Washington school of pharmacy and one faculty member from the Washington State University school of pharmacy;
(D) One representative of the department of health;
(E) One representative of the pharmacy quality assurance commission;
(F) Two representatives of the Washington state poison control center;

(G) One representative of the department of veterans affairs, and one other individual representing veterans to be selected by the cochairs of the subcommittee;

(H) Three members representing health care professionals providing suicide prevention training in the state, selected by the cochairs of the subcommittee; ((and))

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

(J) No more than two other interested parties, selected by the cochairs of the subcommittee.

(c) The University of Washington ((school of social work)) shall convene the initial meeting of the task force.

(2) 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) In consultation with the department of fish and wildlife, review the firearm safety pamphlet produced by the department of fish and wildlife under RCW 9.41.310 and, by January 1, 2017, recommend changes to the pamphlet to incorporate information on suicide awareness and prevention;

(c) Develop and approve suicide awareness and prevention messages for posters and brochures that are tailored to be effective for firearms owners for distribution to firearms dealers and firearms ranges;

(d) Develop suicide awareness and prevention messages for posters and brochures for distribution to pharmacies;

(e) 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;

(f) Develop suicide awareness and prevention messages for training for the schools of pharmacy and provide input on trainings being developed for community pharmacists;

(g) Create a website that will be a clearinghouse for the newly created suicide awareness and prevention materials developed by the task force;
(h) Conduct a survey of firearms dealers and firearms ranges in the state to determine the types and amounts of incentives that would be effective in encouraging those entities to participate in suicide-safer homes projects;

(i) Gather input on collateral educational materials that will help health care professionals in suicide prevention work; and

(j) Create, implement, and evaluate a suicide awareness and prevention pilot program in two counties, one rural and one urban, that have high suicide rates. The pilot program shall include:

(i) Developing and directing advocacy efforts with firearms dealers to pair suicide awareness and prevention training with distribution of safe storage devices;

(ii) Developing and directing advocacy efforts with pharmacies to pair suicide awareness and prevention training with distribution of medication disposal kits and safe storage devices;

(iii) Training health care providers on suicide awareness and prevention, paired with distribution of medication disposal kits and safe storage devices; and

(iv) Training local law enforcement officers on suicide awareness and prevention, paired with distribution of medication disposal kits and safe storage devices; and

(k) Make recommendations regarding the creation and content of 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.

(3) The task force shall, in consultation with the department of health, develop and prioritize a list of projects to carry out the task force's purposes and submit the prioritized list to the department of health for funding from the suicide-safer homes project account created in RCW 43.70.446.

(4) Beginning December 1, 2016, the task force shall annually report to the legislature on the status of its work. The task force shall submit a final report by December 1, 2020, that includes the findings of the suicide awareness and prevention pilot program evaluation under subsection (2) of this section and recommendations on possible continuation of the program. The task force shall submit its reports in accordance with RCW 43.01.036.

(5) 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) A prevent veteran suicide emblem shall be created and made available for purchase by the general public. The emblem is to be displayed on license plates in the manner described by the department of licensing, existing vehicular registration procedures, and current laws.

(2) The department of veterans affairs shall create the emblem, which must incorporate the 988 suicide prevention hotline within the emblem design, and submit the emblem to the department of licensing.

(3) Any person requesting a prevent veteran suicide emblem must pay a prescribed fee set by the department of licensing.

(4) 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 43.216 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The department shall, upon intake at point of service or application for service, inquire whether the applicant has ever served in the United States armed forces or is a family or household member of someone who has ever served in the United States armed forces. 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.

(2) The department shall report nonidentifying comprehensive data collected in response to the inquiry made under subsection (1) of this section to the department of veterans affairs on an annual basis.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 10. A new section is added to chapter 74.04 RCW to read as follows:

(1) 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.

(2) The department shall report nonidentifying comprehensive data collected in response to the inquiry made under subsection (1) of this section to the department of veterans affairs on an annual basis.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 11. 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. 12. Section 7 of this act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of the state government and its existing public institutions, and takes effect immediately.

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