



VETERAN SPOUSE
NETWORK

Stronger Together

HOW PEER SUPPORT TRANSFORMS
VETERAN FAMILIES

PRESENTED BY

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PRESENTED TO

2026 Texas Council Conference
Room Code: 4009



AGENDA



- 1 Who We Are
- 2 Who do We Serve?
- 3 The Challenges
- 4 The Value of Peer Support
- 5 Delivering Effective Peer Support
- 6 Demonstrating Impact

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

The Veteran Spouse Network (VSN) provides evidence-based peer support, training, and tools to help military and veteran spouses and families grow through every phase of life. Through connection and shared experiences, we create a community where spouses feel seen, supported, and equipped to strengthen their well-being.



Peer Support (Groups & 1:1)

Connect through shared experience and grow with a supportive community.



Wellness Workshops

Explore practical skills for self-care and everyday well-being.



Suicide Prevention

Recognize warning signs, respond with care, and take life-saving action.



Educational Seminars

Gain expert insights and actionable strategies to adapt and thrive.



Community Voices

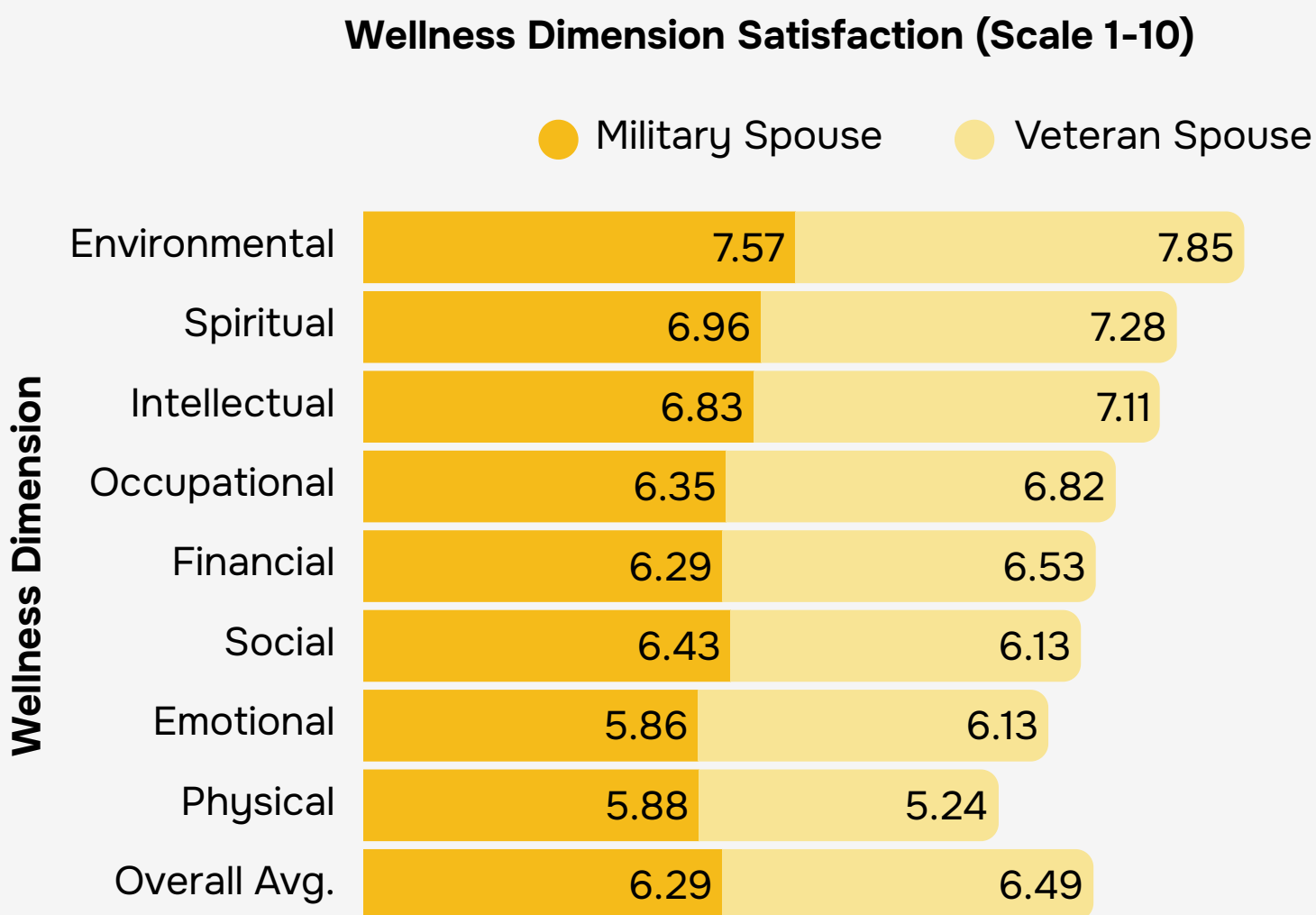
Discover real stories and perspectives that uplift and empower families.

DEFINING FAMILY

- Veteran Spouses/Partners
- Military Spouses/Partners
- Caregivers
- Other Family Members
- Widow/Widowers
- Divorced



OVERALL WELLNESS: THE BIG PICTURE



The Military & Veteran Spouse Wellness Survey (MVSWS)

- First comprehensive, multi-dimensional assessment
- All 8 SAMHSA wellness dimensions
- Validated instruments (PHQ-9, GAD-7, ISI, MOS-SSS, CFPB)
- 1,100+ respondents of unique populations

Overall Wellness



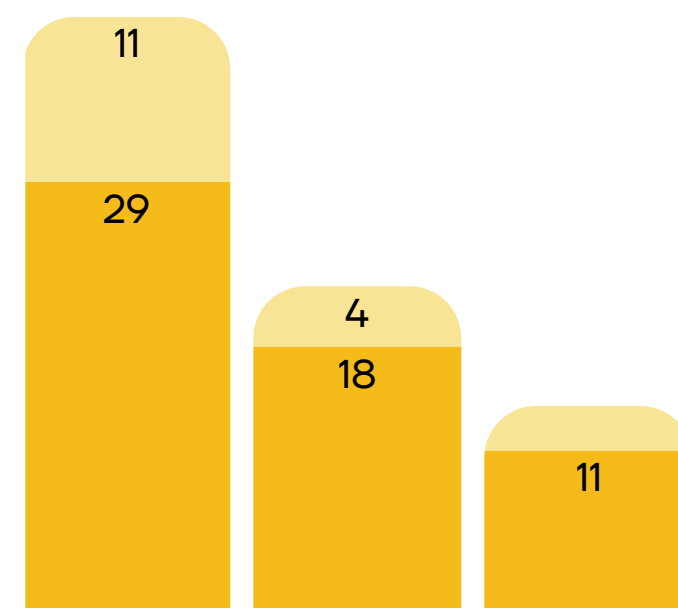
6.6 (Moderate)

BIGGEST CHALLENGES

Anxiety

GAD-7

● MVSWS ● NHANES



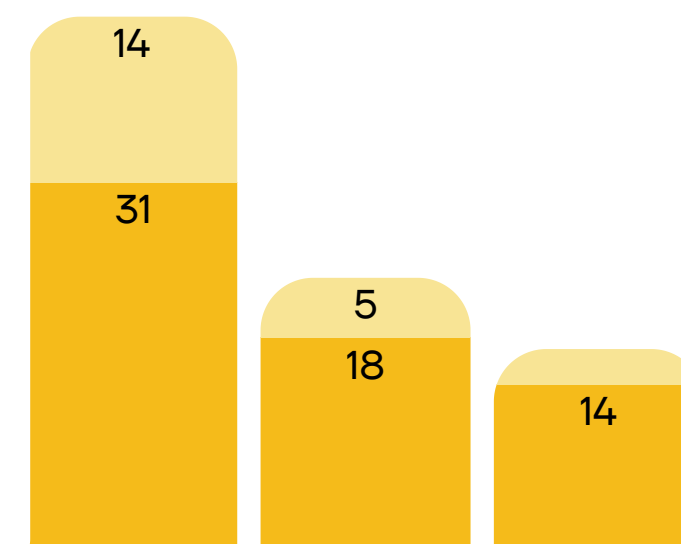
Mild Moderate Severe

Over half of the sample experienced some level of anxiety.

Depression

PHQ-9

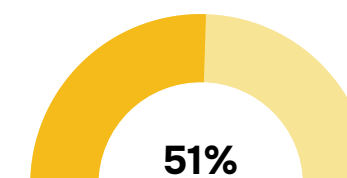
● MVSWS ● NHANES



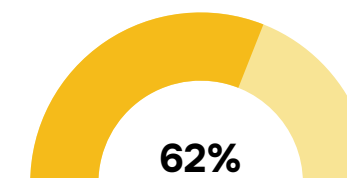
Mild Moderate Severe

Nearly two-thirds of respondents reported at least mild depressive symptoms.

Caregiver Burden



Subthreshold Insomnia

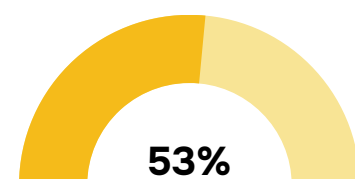


BIGGEST CHALLENGES

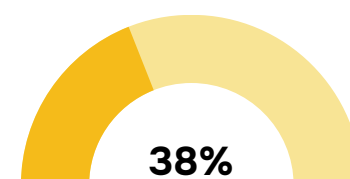
MOST FREQUENTLY REPORTED ISSUES



Community & friends



Social/peer support



SOCIAL SUPPORT

- Each +1 point in support = -0.32 in loneliness
- For caregivers: -0.11 in loneliness

WHAT IS PEER SUPPORT?



Support grounded in shared experience



Focused on empowerment, recovery and connection



Distinct from therapy or clinical services



Peer Support is...

A form of social, emotional, and practical support provided by individuals with shared lived experience who use that experience to help others navigate similar challenges and build resilience.

WHY SPOUSES NEED PEER SUPPORT

- Military/veteran family life can create chronic isolation
- These families' experiences and challenges are unique - "civilians just don't understand"
- Spouses carry invisible responsibility & lack their own support systems
- Spouses carry the load of their families - their well-being impacts the entire family
- Military & veteran culture still perpetuates mental health and help-seeking stigma



A photograph of a group of people sitting on a green lawn in front of a large, rustic stone building with a wooden door. Two women in the foreground are wearing white t-shirts with a blue logo. The scene is outdoors during the day.

VALUE OF PEER SUPPORT



- Reduces isolation in a population uniquely vulnerable to it
- Builds trust faster than many traditional services
- Transforms lived experience into service, supporting others - both parties benefit
- Builds confidence, hope, and self-efficacy
- Reduces stigma and increases help-seeking and engagement
- Improves mental health and wellbeing
- Strengthens families and communities

OUR MODEL



Listen: Engage the community to understand needs, gaps, and barriers



Co-Create: Develop programs alongside community and peer leaders



Equip: Provide structured training, coaching and support to peer leaders



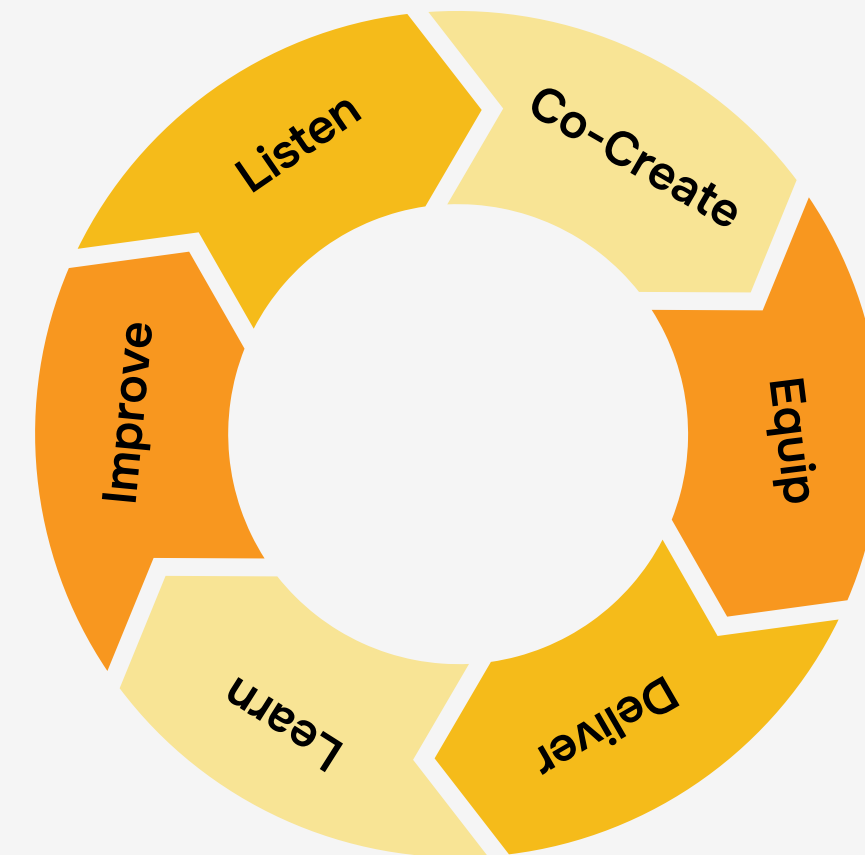
Deliver: Programs are implemented by peer leaders with staff support



Learn: Evaluate, collecting participant and leader outcome and feedback data



Improve: Use data and feedback to refine and strengthen programs



LISTEN



- Don't make assumptions
- Gather a diverse subset of the community to listen to
- Collect data and input through surveys, focus groups, and other formal or informal means
- Never stop listening

A photograph of three women sitting on a grassy lawn under a large tree. The woman on the left is wearing a white blazer and blue jeans, sitting cross-legged. The woman in the middle is wearing a maroon sweater and blue jeans, also sitting cross-legged. The woman on the right is wearing a black turtleneck and dark pants, sitting with her legs crossed and gesturing with her hands as she speaks. The background shows a stone building and more trees.

CO-CREATE



- Find the right people to engage in the right way
- Steering committees
- Review and provide feedback on curricula, protocols, policies, etc.
- Can change over time - today, we work more closely with our peer leaders in program development than we do with our participants

EQUIP



- Training in:
 - Program policies and expectations
 - Group Facilitation Skills
 - Virtual Group Facilitation Skills
 - Curriculum
 - Crisis Response
- Supported practice sessions with follow-up are essential
- Don't overload - focus on what's essential
- Provide ongoing training, coaching, and support
- Let them have a voice - take action on their feedback where you can

DELIVER



- Let it rip!
- Staff support and monitoring are essential at this stage
- Deliver with fidelity, but take note of what's not working, missing, etc.

LEARN



- Collect as much formal and informal data as possible
- Participant outcome and feedback data
- Leader fidelity and feedback data
- Session observations
- Talk about what's working and not working w/ the leaders any chance you get
- What's working and not working for staff, partners, and other stakeholders?

IMPROVE



- Assess the data
- What changes are needed and can be made, and what is your plan?
- Start the wheel back over
 - Is there more data you want or need?
 - Do you want to involve stakeholders in making the improvements?
 - Train your staff/leaders in any changes
 - Do you need to make any changes to how you're collecting future data?
- Never stop trying to improve, but be thoughtful about how and when you make change

IMPACT



Reduced Isolation & Increased Belonging: Not feeling alone, finally feeling understood, etc.



Safety & Trust: safe, nonjudgmental, welcoming spaces - feeling able to share for the first time



Practical & Emotional Support: Better understanding, improved coping strategies, and increased confidence.



Peer Connection: High value placed on hearing and learning from others.



Peer Leaders Are Critical: Viewed as trusted, relatable, compassionate, and credible.



80%

of participants rate sessions as being **Very Valuable**



“ I felt safe for the first time sharing.. and that I
am not alone in this journey. ”



“ I used to feel alone in my relationship issues... after this group I feel so much less alone. It was empowering and freeing. ”



“Honestly, this was life-changing for me... for 20 years,
I navigated this completely alone.”

2025 V-SRG REPORT



KEY OUTCOMES



Overview

100% improved in at least one domain



Self-Care

73.7% engaged in more self-care behaviors



Social Support

94.7% reported increased support.



Depression

61.9% showed symptom reduction



PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE



would recommend V-SRG

Favorite aspects of the program included:

-  **Connecting** with others & **feeling less alone**
-  Gaining **knowledge & skills**
-  **Group leaders**

BEST PRACTICES



Listen to what your community needs: Don't make assumptions; design programs that truly address needs.

Invest in your peer leaders: They are your single point of failure. They need training, mentoring, and support.

Keep evolving: Keep listening, learning, and be open to adapting to meet the evolving needs of participants and leaders.

Don't shy away from tough topics: Peer support is nonclinical, but that shouldn't mean it has to be 'light.'

CONNECT WITH US



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THANK YOU