



**Sheila E. Hixson Behavioral Health Services
Matching Grant Program for Service Members,
Veterans, and their Families**

2025

Health-General § 7.5-210(i)

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Executive Summary

The Sheila E. Hixson Behavioral Health Services Matching Grant Program (Hixson), established in 2021 under Health General Article § 7.5-210, is an initiative of the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) designed to address the behavioral health needs of service members, veterans, and their families (SMVF). With an annual appropriation of up to \$2.5 million, the program funds local nonprofit organizations to develop and expand community-based behavioral health services tailored to the unique needs of the military-connected population.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2025, MDH awarded grants to nine organizations, serving 2,716 SMVF across Maryland through 13,952 services and engagements. Grantees included Chesapeake Therapeutic Riding, Easterseals Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic, For All Seasons, Lifeline Horse Rescue and Rehabilitation, Objective Zero Foundation, Tuerk House, Warrior Canine Connection, Warrior Music Foundation, and Wraparound Maryland. Services provided ranged from equine therapy, counseling, art and music therapy, and sexual assault support to case management and peer support. Collectively, these programs reduced depression, stress, isolation, and anxiety while fostering resilience, connection, and well-being.

MDH established a statewide system of outcome measurement to assess the effectiveness and adequacy of services provided by each grantee. Currently, notable outcomes from the program include:

- Chesapeake Therapeutic Riding – 148 veterans served; 273 equine therapy sessions; 5 staff/volunteers trained.
- Easterseals Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic – 226 SMVF served; 1,422 therapy sessions; 197 screenings; 119 case management sessions; 86 medication management sessions; 57 medical evaluations.
- For All Seasons – 352 SMVF served; 1,112 therapy sessions; 237 screenings; 186 psychiatry sessions; 50 case management sessions; 1 retreat; 4 workshops.
- Lifeline Horse Rescue and Rehabilitation – 118 SMVF served; 223 individual and 21 group EAP sessions; 185 wellness coaching sessions; 25 therapeutic riding sessions; 7 yoga groups; 40 outreach events; 13 staff trained.
- Objective Zero Foundation – 1,164 SMVF reached; 1,156 resource connections; 154 peer supports; 289 tools accessed; 252 screenings.
- Tuerk House – 157 SMVF served with comprehensive behavioral health services; 133 specialized care referrals.
- Warrior Canine Connection – 158 SMVF engaged in Animal-Assisted Therapy and Service Dog Training during 3,543 sessions.
- Warrior Music Foundation – 50 high-risk SMVF served through 600 music therapy sessions plus individualized treatment planning.
- Wraparound Maryland – 101 SMVF screened; 31 received case management and follow-up resource connections.

The Program underscores MDH's commitment to building a sustainable, community-driven behavioral health system that meets the needs of Maryland's military population. With continued legislative support, this initiative enhances the resilience, improves access to care, and promotes the overall well-being of service members, veterans, and their families.

Background

The Sheila E. Hixson Behavioral Health Services Matching Grant Program for Service Members and Veterans was established in 2021 under Health General Article § 7.5-210(i) and is administered by the Maryland Department of Health (MDH).

This program provides funding to local Maryland nonprofit organizations to develop and expand community behavioral health programs that address the unique needs of service members, veterans, and their families (SMVF). This initiative reflects MDH's commitment to supporting the behavioral health needs of service members, veterans, and their families (SMVF).

According to Health General Article § 7.5-210, the Governor may include an annual appropriation of up to \$2.5 million for the program in the State's operating budget to support it. For State Fiscal Year 2024, the Governor has appropriated \$2,432,821 million for this program.

The Maryland Commitment to Veterans (MCV) unit within MDH's Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) provides management and oversight for the program. MCV was established in 2008 as part of Maryland Senate Bill 210, focusing on Maryland Veterans' Behavioral Health and dedicated to addressing the behavioral health needs of Maryland veterans and ensuring their access to essential services.

FY 2025 Hixson Grant Program

In Fiscal Year 2025, MDH allocated funding through the Hixson Grant Program to nine organizations across the State. The funding was distributed in two grant cycles to support the development and expansion of community behavioral health programs and services tailored to meet the unique needs of service members, veterans, and their families (SMVF). Collectively, these programs served a total of 2,716 individuals throughout the State.

Round 1 Grants (One-Year Awards) were awarded to four nonprofit organizations, which included:

- Chesapeake Therapeutic Riding,
- Easterseals Steven A Cohen Military Family Clinic,
- Lifeline Horse Rescue and Rehabilitation,
- Tuerk House.

Round 2 Grants (Three-Month Awards) were awarded to five nonprofit organizations, which included:

- For All Seasons,
- Objective Zero Foundation,
- Warrior Canine Connection,
- Warrior Music Foundation,
- Wraparound Maryland.

These organizations focused on programs that enhance self-esteem, physical health, and self-awareness while promoting a sense of connection between individuals and animals. They also provided valuable information about complementary and alternative community services.

Additionally, the program made significant strides in reducing depression, isolation, stress, and anxiety among SMVF. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, these positive outcomes create protective conditions that help mitigate the risk of suicide.¹

Program Accomplishments

The nine organizations funded through the Hixson Grant Program provided support to 2,716 service members, veterans, and their families (SMVF) across Maryland in FY 2025. They delivered a total of 13,952 services and engagements. These initiatives led to measurable improvements in participants' behavioral health, including reductions in depression, stress, isolation, and anxiety, while promoting greater connection, resilience, and overall well-being.

To ensure accountability and foster continuous improvement, the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) is working to establish a statewide outcome measurement system to evaluate the effectiveness and adequacy of the services provided by each grantee.

Project Name: Expanding Access to Equine Assisted Services at CTR for Veteran Programs

Implementing Organization: Chesapeake Therapeutic Riding (CTR)

Project Overview: The program provided equine therapy to Maryland service members and veterans enrolled for services at the Veterans Affairs Maryland Health Care System.

The program offered a range of services and activities, including:

1. Mounted Programming activities, which included
 - a. Adaptive Riding Lessons
 - b. Equine Therapy sessions.
2. Unmounted Programming activities, which included
 - a. Basic Horsemanship
 - b. Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy.
3. Training for staff and volunteers:
 - a. CTR conducted training on topics of military, cultural competency, and suicide prevention for the veteran population.
 - b. Veterans Affairs (VA) staff conducted training for CTR staff and volunteers through the VA S.A.V.E. program,² a Training that will help individuals act with care and compassion when they come across a Veteran in crisis or having thoughts of suicide.
 - c. The staff also attended the Star Behavioral Health Providers Level 1 Training (SBHP),³ a tier-based continuing education program that enhances the scope of knowledge and skills of behavioral health providers in treating military Service members, Veterans, and their families with concerns related to reintegration and deployment.

The involvement of Veterans Administration staff was invaluable in transporting, supporting, and recruiting veterans for equine therapy programs.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). Risk and Protective Factors for Suicide. <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/risk-factors/index.html>

² U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2025). VA S.A.V.E. Training, Four Ways You Can Help a Veteran in Crisis. https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/docs/VA_SAVE_Training.pdf

³ Uniformed Services University. (2024). Star Behavioral Health Providers Level 1 Training. https://deploymentpsych.org/system/files/member_resource/Tier_One_Combined_Handouts-Oct-24_0.pdf See also, <https://www.nhveterans.nh.gov/event/star-behavioral-health-providers-tier-1-training-0>

Service Area:

1. Baltimore County
2. Cecil County
3. Harford County
4. Baltimore City

Target Audience: Veterans and service members age 20 and older, living with disabilities and behavioral health diagnoses

Performance Measures:

- Total veterans served: 148
- Equine Therapy sessions held: 273
- Staff and volunteers trained on military cultural competency and suicide prevention: 5

Project Name: The Steven A Cohen Military Family Clinic at Easterseals

Implementing Organization: The Steven A Cohen Military Family Clinic at Easterseals

Project Overview

The program provided mental health, suicide prevention, and substance use disorder treatment through screening, therapy, medical evaluation, medication management, case management, and wellness workshops delivered in person and/or by telehealth services to the military community.

These services included:

1. Behavioral health screenings
2. Individual therapy
3. Family therapy
4. Couples therapy
5. Group therapy
6. Evidence-based and alternative therapies such as Cognitive Processing Therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Emotionally Focused Couples and Family Therapy, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), Play Therapy, Problem Solving Therapy, and Prolonged Exposure Therapy
7. Case management
8. Medical evaluations
9. Medication management
10. Wellness workshops

Service Area: All Maryland counties

Target Audience: Service members, veterans, and their families (spouses and children) in need of mental health support services

Performance Measures:

- Total number of Service Members, Veterans, and Families (SMVF) served: 266
- Behavioral health screenings completed: 197
- Individual in-person & telehealth therapy sessions conducted: 1,015
- Couples in-person & telehealth therapy sessions conducted: 346
- Family in-person & telehealth therapy sessions conducted: 42
- Group in-person & telehealth therapy sessions conducted: 19
- Medical Evaluations conducted: 57
- Medication Management sessions conducted: 86
- Case Management sessions conducted: 119
- Wellness Workshops held: 9

- Staff trained on military culture and suicide prevention: 12

Project Name: Operation Rapid Access Eastern Shore SMVF Services

Implementing Organization: For All Seasons

Project Overview

The program provided mental health and sexual assault services to the Maryland Eastern Shore military community.

These services included:

1. Behavioral health screenings
2. Therapy services
3. Psychiatry services
4. Rape crisis services
5. Interpretation services
6. Case management services
7. Telehealth and/or telemedicine
8. Alternative therapies (trauma-informed yoga and iRest Meditation)
9. Retreat focused on stress recognition, burnout prevention, and mental wellness
10. Workshops on psychoeducation, outreach, emotional wellness, and self-care strategies

Service Area:

1. Caroline,
2. Dorchester,
3. Kent,
4. Queen Anne's,
5. Talbot County

Target Audience: Service members, veterans, and their families (spouses and children) in need of mental health and sexual assault support services

Performance Measures:

- Total number of Service Members, Veterans, and Families (SMVF) served: 352
- Screenings completed: 237
- Therapy sessions conducted: 1,101
- Alternative therapy services provided: 11
- Psychiatry services provided: 186
- Rape Crisis services provided: 1
- Interpretation services provided: 1
- Case management services provided: 50
- Telehealth and/or telemedicine services provided: 738
- Retreats provided: 1
- Workshops provided: 4

Project Name: LETS-Hixson BHS Matching Grant Program for the Prevention of Veteran Suicide

Implementing Organization: Lifeline Horse Rescue and Rehabilitation

Project Overview

Lifeline Horse Rescue and Rehabilitation (LHRR) implemented its Lifeline Equine Therapy Services (LETS) program to offer both individual and group Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy

(EAP) sessions through the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA). They also added to their programming this year.

- Equine-assisted health and wellness coaching.
- Recreational therapeutic horseback riding
- Trauma-informed yoga practice.

Staff also underwent training in EAGALA Fundamentals and Advanced Skillset, Advanced Life Coaching Skills, and trauma-informed yoga instructor training, and completed necessary recertifications.

Service Area: Statewide, with a primary focus on

1. Anne Arundel,
2. Charles,
3. Howard,
4. Montgomery,
5. Prince George's, and
6. Washington Counties

Target Audience: Service members, veterans, and their families (spouses and children) who have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), military sexual trauma (MST), and other mental health conditions putting them at risk for suicide.

Performance Measures:

- Total number of Service Members, Veterans, and Families (SMVF) served: 118
- Screenings for mental health, substance use, or co-occurring disorders: 46
- Individual equine-assisted psychotherapy sessions held: 223
- Group equine-assisted psychotherapy sessions held: 21
- Equine-Assisted Health and Wellness Coaching Sessions held: 185
- Recreational Therapeutic Horseback Riding Sessions held: 25
- Group Trauma-Informed Yoga Sessions held: 7
- Community outreach and education events held: 40
- Staff trained in IFS Therapy Immersion: 1
- Staff trained: 12

Project name: Objective Zero App

Implementing Organization: Objective Zero Foundation

Project Overview

The Objective Zero Foundation connects the military and veteran community to mental health and wellness resources through the Objective Zero App. The platform offers text, voice, and video chat capabilities, ensuring that service members, veterans, their families, and caregivers can connect to the support they need, wherever and whenever they need it at no cost to the user.

Service Area: Statewide

Target Audience: The greater military and veteran community, which includes service members of all branches of military service on active or reserve status, veterans(irrespective of discharge type), officers-in-training (ROTC, service academies, cadet corps), their family members, and caregivers.

Performance Measures:

- Total number of Service Members, Veterans, and Families (SMVF) served: 1,164
- SMVF connected to Peer Support: 154
- SMVF connected to Resources: 1,156

- SMVF connected to Tools: 289
- SMVF Screenings completed: 252

Project Name: Expanding Tuerk House Services to Military Personnel, Veterans, and their Families

Implementing Organization: Tuerk House

Project Overview

Tuerk House offered a comprehensive range of services to military personnel (including active-duty officers), veterans (including those dishonorably discharged), and their families. These services include Integrated behavioral health care

Substance use treatment

Urgent care

family support programs.

Each service is designed to address the unique challenges faced by military personnel and their families, ensuring holistic and personalized care.

Service Area:

- Baltimore City
- Howard County

Target Audience: Veterans, active-duty military personnel, and their qualifying family members

Performance Measures:

- Total number of Service Members and Veterans (SMV) served: 157
- Behavioral Health Screenings conducted: 157
- Individual Counseling/Therapy sessions held: 157
- Behavioral Health Support Groups held: 157
- Detoxification sessions held: 6
- Inpatient Substance Use Treatment sessions held: 16
- Outpatient Substance Use Treatment sessions held: 0
- Recovery Support Group sessions held: 157
- Medical Assessments held: 157
- Emergency Interventions held: 157
- Specialized Care Referrals held: 133
- Family Counseling sessions held: 0
- Family Education sessions held: 0
- Telemedicine sessions held: 0
- Peer Recovery Support sessions held: 157
- Case Management sessions held: 157
- Transportation assistance provided: 157

Project Name: Montgomery County Animal Assisted Therapy Program

Implementing Organization: Warrior Canine Connection

Project Overview

Warrior Canine Connection (WCC) offers two essential programs to support wounded Service Members and Veterans: a unique form of Animal-Assisted Therapy known as Mission-Based Trauma Recovery (MBTR) and the placement of highly skilled service dogs with these individuals. WCC is accredited by Assistance Dogs International (ADI). While there are over 100 ADI-accredited service dog organizations, WCC is the only one in Maryland that uses

service dog training as a therapeutic intervention for Veterans dealing with the unseen effects of war. Each WCC dog has the potential to provide healing for many Warriors before being placed with their permanent Veteran partner. WCC applied the MBTR approach during this initiative.

Service Area:

- Montgomery County (Primarily)
- Frederick,
- Howard, and
- Baltimore County

Target Audience: Active-Duty Service Members or Veterans and their family members

Performance Measures:

- Total number of Service Members, Veterans, and Families (SMVF) served: 158
- MBTR Program and Service Dog Training for SMV sessions held: 3,543
- Puppy Yoga for SMVF sessions held: 0

Project Name: Expand Music Therapy Program to Reduce the Number of “High Risk for Suicide” Military Individuals on the Waitlist for Services

Implementing Organization: Warrior Music Foundation

Project Overview

The Warrior Music Foundation offered music therapy sessions that included initial assessments, treatment plan reviews, and discharge plan reviews. Music therapy's therapeutic goals and objectives focus on enhancing participants' communication and cognitive skills, facilitating trauma processing, reducing social isolation and symptoms of anxiety, improving sleep patterns, and regulating mood.

Service Area: Statewide, but primarily

1. Anne Arundel,
2. Baltimore,
3. Howard,
4. Prince George's Counties and
5. Baltimore City

Target Audience: Service members, veterans, and their families (spouses and children) who have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), military sexual trauma (MST), and other mental health conditions putting them at risk for suicide.

Performance Measures:

- Total number of Service Members, Veterans, and Families (SMVF) served: 50
- Initial assessments completed: 50
- Treatment plan reviews held: 50
- Music therapy sessions in-person completed: 600
- Group Music therapy sessions via Zoom completed: 13

Project Name: Mid-Shore Behavioral Health Screening and Care Coordination Program

Implementing Organization: Wraparound Maryland

Project Overview

The Mid-Shore Behavioral Health Screening and Care Coordination Program identified behavioral health needs of SMVF through evidence-based screenings and provided case management to ensure timely access to appropriate care.

Service Area:

Mid-Shore counties of Maryland's Eastern Shore:

- Caroline,
- Dorchester,
- Kent,
- Queen Anne, and
- Talbot.

Target Audience: Service Members, Veterans, and their families

Performance Measures:

- Total number of Service Members, Veterans, and Families (SMVF) served: 101
- Behavioral Health Screenings conducted: 101
- Case management, connect to resources & follow-up care: 31
- Community outreach events: 2
- Completed participant surveys: 11
- Partnerships strengthened with local organizations: 9
- Staff trained on the project's screening tools and case management protocols: All

Additional Complementary Hixson Grant Fund Programs, Events and Activities

After two rounds of awards to the nine qualified grantees mentioned above, \$97,283 in unobligated funds remained, with no further application period scheduled for FY25 to utilize these funds. MDH intended to allocate the remaining funds to support behavioral health programs, events, and activities that focus on SMVF, in alignment with the goals of the Hixson Grant Program. These initiatives aim to support the national Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and Families in Maryland, as well as an outreach campaign to inform SMVF about the availability of Regional Resource Coordinators from MCV unit within BHA.

Maryland Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among SMVF

- Crisis Intercept Mapping Summit lodging for peer coordinator subject matter expert
- Crisis Intercept Mapping Summit catering
- Crisis Intercept Mapping Team promotional items for outreach events
- Items to support Lethal Means Safety & Safety Planning (this includes photo printers, power banks, and firearm lock boxes)
- Items to support the individual team action plans of jurisdictional Crisis Intercept Mapping Teams (includes ATQ cards, veteran pins and items that were not promotional in nature)

SMVF Outreach Campaigns

- Motor Vehicles Administration Closed Circuit TV Campaign
- Veterans Crisis Line Campaign via MDH social media
- Military Commissary Closed Circuit TV Campaign
- Maryland's Commitment to Veterans Campaign via MDH social media

Future Endeavors

With a solid program and marketing framework established in Fiscal Year 2025, the Hixson Grant Program is well-positioned for continued growth in the years to come. The Maryland

Department of Health (MDH) remains dedicated to adapting and innovating to meet the evolving behavioral health needs of service members, veterans, and their families (SMVF).

During Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025, the Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) issued 13 Hixson awards totaling \$2.7 million to nine organizations. MDH will continue to work closely with these partners to provide technical guidance, monitor deliverables, and track outcomes, ensuring accountability and impact.

Conclusion

The activities mentioned above demonstrate MDH's strong commitment to improving the well-being of Maryland's service members, veterans, and their families. As we move forward, MDH remains dedicated to adapting and innovating to meet the changing needs of our esteemed veterans.