Death Notification, Data Quality, and the Suicide Mitigation and Risk Reduction Tracking (SMARRT) System

Homeland Security

Anthony Arita, PhD

Office of Health Security,

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

25 APR 2023

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

- Workforce of 250,000+ members
  - 40,000+ servicemembers
  - 80,000+ law enforcement personnel
- DHS is the largest law enforcement agency in the U.S.
- Law enforcement components:
  - U.S. Secret Service
  - Immigration and Customs Enforcement
  - Customs and Border Protection
  - Transportation Security Administration Federal Air Marshal Service
  - US Coast Guard
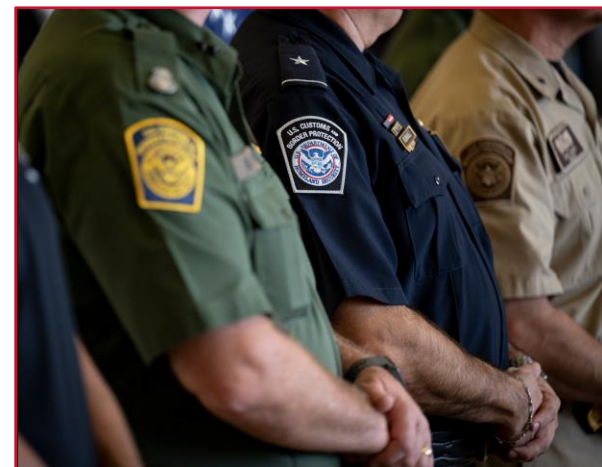

2

Homeland
Security

SMARRT System – Inception

- Impetus for Change
  - No standard method to collect suicide mortality data across the Department.
  - Limited data on suicides and associated factors.

- Policy Support – DHS establishes a suicide prevention policy (OCT 2020) requiring Component reporting of suicides.

- Suicide Mitigation and Risk Reduction Tracking System build completion – May 2023

Homeland Security

SMARRT System – Intended to:

- Standardize collection method, variables, analyses, reporting

- Improve data quality

- Increase understanding of factors related to suicide mortality, patterns, trends

- Inform policy and program development

- Promote data-driven prevention, intervention, and postvention strategies

- Encourage greater awareness and willingness to report events

- Reinforce a collective, unified effort to reduce suicides

Homeland Security

SMARRT System – Design

- Built on a secure SharePoint and an interface with DHS civilian Human Resource (HR) system's Enterprise Information Environment (EIE).
- EIE receives biweekly feeds from the National Finance Center (NFC) that correspond to pay periods, DHS employees who have died during the previous two weeks will be designated with a special OPM Nature of Action (NOA) code.
- This code prompts an alert of an employee death to the SMARRT System and initiates a record in the SMARRT System.
- SMARRT System notifies SMARRT System Program Manager of new record in the system.

Homeland Security

SMARRT System – Design (cont.)

- Program Manager emails the decedent's supervisor with a secure link to the SMARRT System to address the manner of death of the decedent.
- In the case of a suicide death, the supervisor is presented with a broader survey, with questions related to the employee's background and circumstances of death.
- Supervisor support
  - Training Video is available on SMARRT site
  - SMARRT Data Sheet (download) to guide collecting of data
  - Follow up on survey completion
  - Suicide Postvention Support

Homeland Security

SMARRT System – Data Collected

Subject Area	Variables/Data Elements
Personal	age, sex, race, ethnicity, education, veteran status, LEO status
Occupational	agency, location, job series, pay grade, position, job length, duty status, performance, disciplinary issues, shift work
Event	date/time, location, method used, alcohol/substance use
Family	marital status, living arrangement, minor children
Mental Health	stressors (relationship, finances, losses, legal, burnout, trauma), MH conditions, past SI/SA, trauma exposure
Medical	injuries or illnesses impacting work or career, TBI
Alcohol/Drugs	history of use, previous problems, recent use
Legal	disciplinary action, facing criminal charges, under investigation
Resources	previous treatment, EAP, connectedness, problem-solving skills

Homeland Security

Data Sharing

- **Pursuit of Additional Data**
  - National Death Index
    - Date of death, state of death, cause of death
  - Death Certificate Data
    - Date of injury, location of injury
    - Date of death, location of death
    - Manner of death, cause of death
  - Potential data sharing source: NVDRS
    - Would add medical examiner/coroner reports, toxicology data, law enforcement reports
- **Support to Law Enforcement Suicide Data Collection**
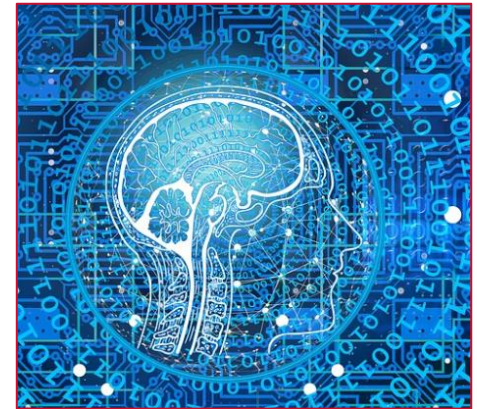 - DHS law enforcement suicide deaths

Homeland Security

SMARRT System Implementation

1. The SMARRT System has been socialized with the psychological health leads across DHS Components.

2. Communications Plan

   - DHS Headquarters (HQ) message to DHS HQ supervisors

   - DHS HQ message to Component Heads, accompanied by messaging toolkit (includes draft messaging, FAQs)

     - Component Heads to message Component supervisors

3. DHS HQ initiates contact with decedents' supervisors across the Department.

Homeland Security
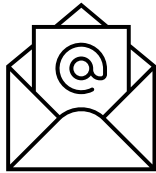
Additional Data Considerations

- Barriers (stigma, privacy concerns, lack of psychological safety) may influence data quality/quantity and support.

- SMARRT System will not (initially) collect data related to suicide attempts.

- Psychological, risk, and engagement factors are critical
  - Stress, burnout
  - Trauma, secondary trauma, moral distress/injury
  - Suicidal ideation and behavior
  - Maladaptive coping
  - Protective factors
  - Barriers to care and engagement
  - Consider periodic, anonymous surveys to establish baseline prevalence, trends, and measuring impact of efforts

Homeland Security

Anthony Arita

anthony.arita@hq.dhs.gov