

# U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Presses VA for answers on misuse of suicide prevention funds

Posted on Friday, Jan 4, 2019

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

Contact: [press@baldwin.senate.gov](mailto:press@baldwin.senate.gov)

202-224-6225

*The VA has spent less than one percent of its budget for suicide prevention*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin joined Senator Jon Tester (D-MT) and 19 of their colleagues to take the Department of Veteran’s Affairs (VA) to task for misusing its resources for suicide prevention outreach.

Following a [report](#) from the Government Accountability Office that poor leadership at the VA resulted in a misuse of resources and lackluster outreach efforts to at-risk veterans, the Senators are demanding a full accounting of the VA’s budget for suicide prevention and mental health outreach and for the VA to consult with public and mental health outreach experts on how to better track the VA’s performance.

Of the \$6.2 million allocated to paid suicide prevention outreach like promoted social media posts and sponsored keyword search results, the VA only spent \$57,000, less than one percent of its budget.

**“As suicide prevention is the VA’s highest clinical priority and the third highest priority in its 2018-2024 Strategic Plan, it is appalling that the VA is not conducting oversight of its own outreach efforts,”** the Senators wrote. **“We request that you provide a full accounting of the \$17.7 million the VA budgeted for its suicide prevention and mental health media outreach for Fiscal Year 2018. We also request that rather than rely**

**strictly on metrics the VA develops internally, that you consult with experts with proven track records of successful public and mental health outreach campaigns with a particular emphasis on how those individuals measure success.”**

The report also found that the VA does not have trackable goals or targets to evaluate the effectiveness of its suicide prevention efforts. In addition, the report found that a lack of consistent or permanent leadership hampered the VA's suicide prevention efforts and outreach.

Baldwin and Tester are joined by Senators Patty Murray (D-WA), Richard Durbin (D-IL), Jack Reed (D-RI), Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Joe Manchin (D-WV), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Brian Schatz (D-HI), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Tina Smith (D-MN) and Doug Jones (D-AL).

The Senators' letter is available [here](#).

An online version of this release is available [here](#).