

Stories of Prevention Across Commands

PREVENTION IN ACTION

U.S. ARMY

Army Brigade Commander Creates a Culture of Prevention during Deployment

Leaders have a critical role in fostering healthy command climates and stopping harmful behaviors before they occur. Knowing how to support a prevention system is a learning objective for leaders who will oversee and support primary prevention activities once Integrated Primary Prevention Workforce (IPPW) professionals are incorporated into their installations and units.

Leaders can take steps to establish a prevention system even before IPPW are hired. As commander of the 3rd Division Sustainment Brigade, Army Col. Jennifer McDonough created a prevention system focused on improving the environment for a multi-composition (Active, Reserve, and National Guard) force from 22 states distributed through eight countries and 15 different locations during a recent deployment as a rotational brigade to Europe.

Col. McDonough is an example of a commander leading the way to primary prevention before the IPPW is incorporated into her organization. She describes primary prevention as “creating an environment where soldiers and families can thrive.”



“Inside an Army brigade, I have a lot of single-focus assets. I have a sexual assault response coordinator, a behavioral health officer, master resilience trainer, master fitness trainer, the chaplain, and food service specialists. Over time, they started working side-by-side, and it was all about making life better for soldiers.”

- Col. McDonough

Note: When IPPW are present in an installation or unit, they will integrate individual efforts and resources to achieve common goals as a key area of leadership support.





Here's an overview of how Col. McDonough developed a prevention system to reduce harmful behaviors, encourage healthy relationships and outlets, and ensure that service members thrive during deployment:

KEY TAKEAWAY

Col. McDonough's leadership in primary prevention demonstrates how establishing and tracking metrics, holding team members accountable for collaboration, and constant communication between the command team and prevention team are attainable elements of creating positive change.

1. Developed a deliberate, integrated, and continuous process:

To establish the prevention system, McDonough relied on what she learned when she served as chief of staff for the Secretary of the Army's [People First Task Force](#) in 2021. McDonough adapted the primary prevention process from the [Primary Prevention Plan of Action](#) 2.0 to the brigade's deployed environment by putting the concepts of understanding a problem, developing a comprehensive approach, quality implementation, and continuous evaluation in terms of the Army targeting framework for continuing improvement: Decide, Detect, Deliver, Assess. The command team met with the prevention team every week to discuss needs, solutions, and evaluate their implementation.

2. Used data to focus limited resources to areas of greatest need:

The prevention team members covered protective factors of focus within the command, including safe housing/communities, spiritual connectedness, financial security, healthy outlets, and healthy relationships. The group assigned point values to desired outcomes tied to each protective factor – such as regularly scheduled off-duty events, sufficient indoor fitness equipment, and the absence of alcohol-related incidents in the previous 30 days – and then continually assessed the status of each protective factor using a 0–5-point scale. Leveraging this data allowed the command team to assess each location and focus limited resources to areas of greatest need and opportunity in this dynamic brigade environment.

3. Gained buy-in to achieve effective solutions:

"It took trial and error to get started and get buy-in. But now they're all in," said McDonough. "Soldiers started talking about it, because we'd have the prevention team go out on a road show to the different locations, and then they would see the results." The team created momentum when soldiers began noticing changes that the prevention team put in place, such as additional fitness equipment for productive down-time and more lights on paths to support a safer community.