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National Veterans Foundation and Zenti, Inc. Announce Alliance to Identify and Intervene Online with At-Risk Veterans to Prevent Suicides

July 18, 2016– Los Angeles - The [National Veterans Foundation](#) (NVF) and Palo Alto technology company [Zenti Inc.](#), with suicide prevention expert Dr. Joe Franklin at Florida State University, are allying to implement Zenti's software to identify and intervene with at-risk Veterans on leading social media platforms to prevent Veteran suicides. Zenti will be donating the use of its software to the National Veterans Foundation, along with the development resources to tailor it for the project.

With an average of 20 suicide related deaths per day in the US, Veteran suicide rates are at an unacceptable level. Early detection and intervention still remains the most successful means of suicide prevention, however identifying symptoms and providing timely outreach remains an ongoing challenge.

The NVF, Dr. Joe Franklin and Zenti have combined resources to tackle this epidemic of Veteran suicide, by using the best on-the-ground expertise with cutting edge psychological research and machine learning intelligence. Zenti has worked with Dr. Joe Franklin on projects to develop tools for identification of suicide decedents and prediction of future suicidal behaviors. By using leading social media as a data source, Dr. Franklin's team has the opportunity to immediately and directly intervene with individuals.

"We've been working on developing our software for suicide prevention for two years," said Zenti CEO Steven Cracknell. "We are very excited to collaborate with the National Veterans Foundation on the work of preventing Veteran suicides. The NVF has been helping Veterans for more than 30 years, and is led by Shad Meshad, the Veteran who founded the VA's Vet Center program and pioneered treatment for combat related PTSD. Veterans deserve the best treatment options possible. Veterans often, like many people, don't reach out for help until it's too late. This alliance will allow us to identify and communicate with Veterans as soon as their social media messages show they are at high risk for self-harm." Zenti has published [a case study](#) on its website on the use of its technology in identifying Veterans at-risk for suicide.

"This work with Zenti promises to be groundbreaking," said NVF President & Founder Shad Meshad. "We, like all hotlines, normally have to wait until a Veteran calls us for help. When they make that call because they are suicidal, it's at 'stage 4', the final stage of suicide ideation,

which is sometimes too late. Zenti's technology will allow us to find them and reach out to them at earlier stages. This process will begin online, with Zenti's software, which our counselors will be monitoring, and the goal is to transition the Veteran offline, so he or she can talk with one of our Veteran counselors. Veterans respond best to contact with another vet, with someone who understands what it's like to be in the military, serve in combat, and then get dropped back into the civilian world with very little transition."

Zenti's software combines human contextual pattern recognition with machine intelligence. The result is a tool capable of understanding communication in context, categorizing information in subject matter classes and identifying human emotion and intent. Zenti can do this in real-time, on any volume of data and in any language.

Dr. Joe Franklin, a professor at Florida State University, and previously Vanderbilt University, has done extensive research on risk factors for future suicide ideation. Joe earned his B.A. in psychology at Wake Forest University in 2005, and his M.A. (2009) and Ph.D. (2013) from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In 2015, he began as an Assistant Professor in the Clinical Science program in the Department of Psychology at Vanderbilt University. Joe's work has been supported by the National Institutes of Mental Health, the U.S. Department of Defense, and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, among others.

Since 1985, the [National Veterans Foundation](#) has helped over 400,000 Veterans and their families with crisis and information services through the nation's first toll-free, vet-to-vet hotline for all U.S. Veterans and their families, the Lifeline for Vets. The NVF's all-Veteran counselors provide Veterans and their families with information, counseling and service referrals for a whole range of transitional issues.

"Not every call the NVF takes is a suicide crisis call," said Meshad, "but every call is potentially a suicide prevention call. That's because helping Veterans get jobs is suicide prevention. As is helping them find or keep housing, access their benefits, get medical care, financial help and counseling. Because becoming suicidal is a process, a process that can take years. The stability that our transitional services provide puts Veterans on a different path than the one that ends with them taking their own lives. This new technology will allow us to intervene with Veterans before they reach the final stages of suicide ideation. On this project, as with all the work we do, Veterans' privacy will be strictly protected."