



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

VA's Approach to Suicide Prevention

*VA Office of Mental Health and
Suicide Prevention (OMHSP)*

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Drilling Down:

Recognizing Suicide Risk in the Veteran Population



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Important Figures



The rate of suicide was

1.8 *times higher among female Veterans*

compared with non-Veteran adult women.

* after accounting for differences in age



The rate of suicide was

1.4 *times higher among male Veterans*

compared with non-Veteran adult men.

* after accounting for differences in age



Male Veterans ages

18–34

experienced the highest rates of suicide.



Male Veterans ages

55 and older

had the highest count of suicide.

69% *of all Veteran suicide deaths resulted from a firearm injury.*



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Risk and Protective Factors

Risk

- Prior suicide attempt
- Mental health issues
- Substance abuse
- Access to lethal means
- Recent loss
- Legal or financial challenges
- Relationship issues
- Unemployment
- Homelessness

Protective

- Access to mental health care
- Sense of connectedness
- Problem-solving skills
- Sense of spirituality
- Mission or purpose
- Physical health
- Employment
- Social and emotional well-being



Goal: Minimize risk factors and boost protective factors



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VA Suicide Prevention Strategy

The Public Health Approach



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Public Health Approach to Suicide Prevention

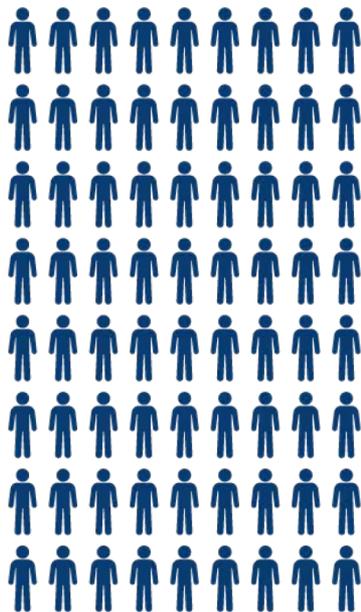
- The public health approach seeks to answer the foundational questions:
 - Where does the problem begin?
 - How could we prevent it from occurring in the first place?
- To answer these questions, public health uses a systematic, scientific method for understanding and preventing violence.



Suicide Prevention is Everyone's Business

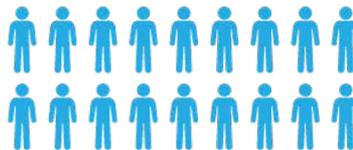


National Academy of Medicine (NAM) Classification



Universal (all)

Universal prevention strategies are designed to reach the entire Veteran population.



Selective (some)

Selective prevention strategies are designed to reach subgroups of the Veteran population that may be at increased risk.



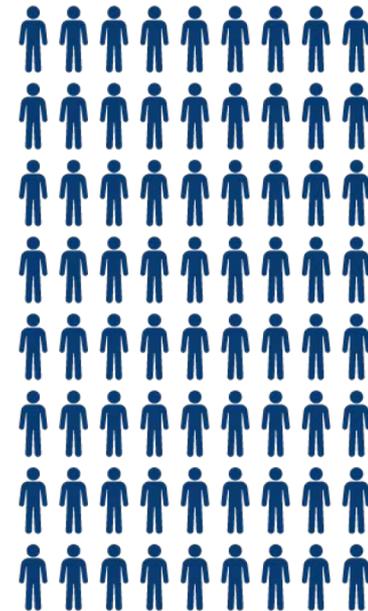
Indicated (few)

Indicated prevention strategies are designed to reach individual Veterans identified as having a high risk for suicidal behaviors.



Innovative Practices in Suicide Prevention: Universal (All)

- The **Mayor's Challenge** partnership with SAMHSA aims to develop and implement site-specific public health strategies to address Veteran suicide. Teams include collaborative groups of community, municipal, military, and other stakeholders.
- **S.A.V.E. is an online training**, offered in collaboration with PsychArmor Institute, that is available for free to the public. The 25-minute course helps learners develop a general understanding of suicide, learn how to identify a Veteran at risk for suicide, and know what to do if they identify a Veteran at risk.
<https://psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e/>



Universal (all)

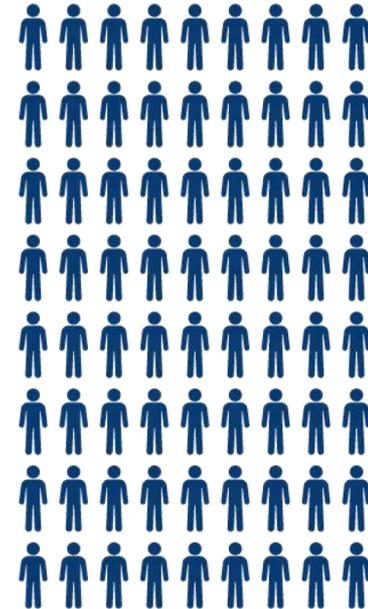
Universal prevention strategies are designed to reach the entire Veteran population.



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Innovative Practices in Suicide Prevention: Universal (All)

- The **#BeThere** suicide prevention initiative teaches members of the community how simple actions can help save the life of a Veteran in crisis. www.veteranscrisisline.net/bethere.aspx
- **Make the Connection** connects Veterans, their family members and friends, and other supporters with information on issues that affect Veterans. www.maketheconnection.net
- **Coaching Into Care (1-888-823-7458)** is a national telephone service from VA that aims to educate, support, and empower family members and friends who are seeking care or services for a Veteran. www.mirecc.va.gov/coaching



Universal (all)

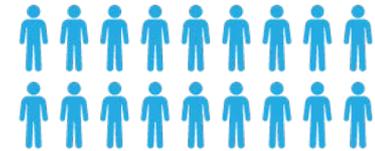
Universal prevention strategies are designed to reach the entire Veteran population.



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Innovative Practices in Suicide Prevention: Selective (Some)

- The **Rocky Mountain MIRECC TBI Toolkit** gives mental health clinicians information for addressing the needs of military personnel and Veterans with co-occurring TBI and mental health conditions. www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/tbi_toolkit
- To improve **lethal means safety**, VA is training providers in lethal means safety counseling and educating Veterans and their families about how safe storage of lethal means can save lives.



Selective (some)

Selective prevention strategies are designed to reach subgroups of the Veteran population that may be at increased risk.



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Innovative Practices in Suicide Prevention: Indicated (Few)

- **REACH VET** uses data to identify Veterans at high risk for suicide, notifies VA providers of Veterans' risk assessment, and enables providers to re-evaluate and enhance Veterans' care.
- The **VA Suicide Risk Management Consultation Program** provides a free, one-on-one consultation for any community or VA provider who works with Veterans. www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/consult
- The **Toolkit for Therapeutic Risk Management of the Suicidal Patient** uses clinical, medical, and legal best practices to inform a model for the assessment and management of suicide risk. www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/trm



Indicated (few)

Indicated prevention strategies are designed to reach individual Veterans identified as having a high risk for suicidal behaviors.

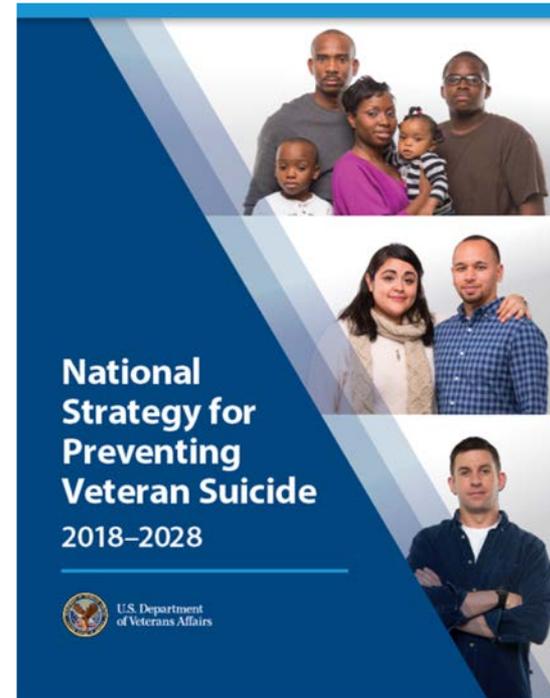


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National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide

Goal: Provide a framework for identifying priorities, organizing efforts, and contributing to a national focus on Veteran suicide prevention over the next decade.

- Aligns with the 2012 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention.
- Consists of 4 strategic directions, 14 goals, and 43 objectives.
- Leverages the public health approach to suicide prevention.
- Focuses on the importance of **collaboration** and **urgency**.



Download a copy at:
[Mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention)



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Leveraging the Public Health Approach



Partnerships and Suicide Prevention

- Not all Veterans get services from VA.
- Partnerships help VA amplify our **message**, extend to **populations** we wouldn't have reached, add **resources**, and enhance our **knowledge** and **data**.
- VA and its stakeholders must find innovative strategies to serve Veterans who do not – and may never – seek care, benefits or services from within its system.
- This requires VA to reach beyond the health care setting and empower local actors to prevent Veteran suicide in other sectors, including:
 - Non-VA health care
 - Veterans and Military Service Organizations
 - Faith communities
 - Higher learning
 - Law enforcement and criminal justice
 - Employment
 - Community service
 - Nonprofits and nongovernmental organizations
 - Media and entertainment
 - Private sector industries
 - Public-private partnerships
 - Federal, state and local government





VA Suicide Prevention Resources



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Learn to Recognize the Warning Signs

- Those in crisis often display **warning signs**:
 - Hopelessness; feeling like there's no way out
 - Anxiety, agitation, sleeplessness, or mood swings
 - Feeling like there is no reason to live
 - Rage or anger
 - Engaging in risky activities without thinking
 - Increasing alcohol or drug misuse
 - Withdrawing from family and friends
- The presence of the following signs requires **immediate attention**:
 - Thinking about hurting or killing themselves
 - Looking for ways to kill themselves
 - Talking about death, dying, or suicide
 - Self-destructive behavior such as drug misuse, carelessly handling weapons, etc.



Free, Confidential Support 24/7/365



1-800-273-8255 **PRESS 1**

• • • Confidential chat at VeteransCrisisLine.net or text to **838255** • • •

- Veterans
- Service members
- Family members
- Friends



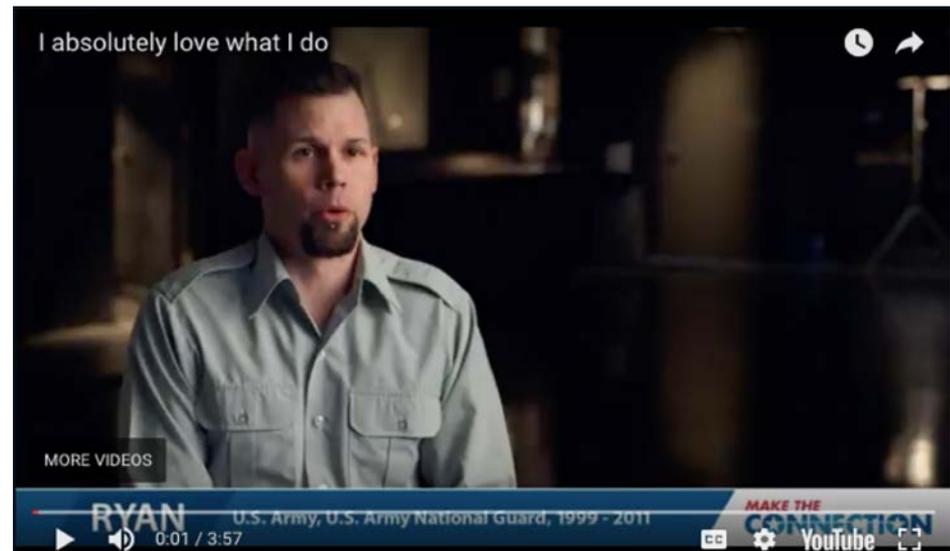
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Make the Connection

Online resource featuring hundreds of Veterans telling their stories about overcoming mental health challenges.

MAKE THE CONNECTION

www.MakeTheConnection.net



<https://maketheconnection.net/conditions/suicide>



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Coaching into Care

Program for families and loved ones of Veterans, helping them encourage the Veteran in their lives to seek support.



CALL 888-823-7458



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S.A.V.E. Training

- Suicide prevention training video that's available to everyone, 24/7
- Less than 25 minutes long
- Offered in collaboration with the PsychArmor Institute



Available online for free: psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e/



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Community Provider Toolkit

- Free online training on Veteran issues, including military culture, for health care providers
- Includes tips for screening clients for military service
- Military culture training can count for continuing education credits (CEUs):

<https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/communityproviders/military.asp>



Access the toolkit online:

www.mentalhealth.va.gov/communityproviders



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Questions?



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Thank you.



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