

VAU.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs**Fact Sheet**Office of Public Affairs
Media RelationsWashington, DC 20420
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www.va.gov**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (OMHSP)*****Facts About Veteran Suicide: August 2017*****Overview**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) believes every Veteran suicide is a tragic outcome. Regardless of the numbers or rates, one Veteran suicide is one too many. VA is spreading the word throughout VA that *suicide prevention is everyone's responsibility*. These new data about Veteran suicide will inform our suicide prevention programs and policies, especially for groups at elevated risk for suicide, including older and female Veterans. VA is addressing Veterans' needs through strategic partnerships with community and federal allies and seeks to enhance these partnerships. Meanwhile, we continue to serve as a leader in evidence-based care for suicide prevention.

VA relies on multiple sources of information to identify deaths that are likely due to suicide and has undertaken the most comprehensive analyses of Veteran suicide rates in the U.S. We have examined over 55 million records from 1979 to 2014 from all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. This effort extends VA's knowledge from the previous report issued in 2010, when over 3 million records from 20 states were available.

Veteran Suicide Statistics 2014

- An average of 20 Veterans died by suicide each day. Six of the 20 were users of VA health services in 2013 or 2014.
- Veterans accounted for 18% of all deaths by suicide among U.S. adults, while Veterans constituted 8.5% of the U.S. population.
- Approximately 67% of all Veteran deaths by suicide were the result of firearm injuries.
- The suicide rate among middle-aged and older adult Veterans remains high. In 2014, approximately 65% of all Veterans who died by suicide were age 50 or older.
- After adjusting for differences in age and sex, risk for suicide was 22% higher among Veterans when compared to U.S. civilian adults.
- After adjusting for differences in age, risk for suicide was 19% higher among male Veterans when compared to U.S. civilian adult men.
- After adjusting for differences in age, risk for suicide was 2.5 times higher among female Veterans when compared to U.S. civilian adult women.

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Overview of Data for 2001–2014

- In 2014, the rate of suicide among all Veterans was 35.6 per 100,000.
 - Since 2001, the age-adjusted rate of suicide among U.S. Veterans has increased by 31.1%.
- In 2014, the rate of suicide among U.S. civilian adult men was 25 per 100,000.
 - Since 2001, the age-adjusted rate of suicide among U.S. civilian adult men has increased by 2.6%.
- In 2014, the rate of suicide among U.S. male Veterans was 37.2 per 100,000.
 - Since 2001, the age-adjusted rate of suicide among U.S. male Veterans has increased by 29.7%.
- In 2014, the rate of suicide among U.S. civilian adult women was 7.2 per 100,000.
 - Since 2001, the age-adjusted rate of suicide among U.S. civilian adult women has increased by 40.1%.
- In 2014, the rate of suicide among U.S. female Veterans was 19 per 100,000.
 - Since 2001, the age-adjusted rate of suicide among U.S. female Veterans has increased by 62.4%.

VA Aggressively Undertaking New Measures to Prevent Suicide

Veterans Crisis Line Expansion

- The 24/7 Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) provides immediate access to mental health crisis intervention and support. Veterans can call the Veterans Crisis Line — 1-800-273-8255 and then press 1 — to reach highly skilled responders trained in suicide prevention and crisis intervention. The VCL also includes a chat service and texting option. We have modified phone systems to allow for direct connection to the VCL by dialing “7” when calling a VA medical center (VAMC).
- Each responder receives intensive training on a wide variety of topics in crisis intervention, substance use disorders, screening, brief intervention, and referral to treatment.
- Since its establishment and through June 2017, the VCL has:
 - Answered nearly 3 million calls, made nearly 354,000 chat connections, and responded to more than 75,000 texts.
 - Initiated the dispatch of emergency services to callers in imminent suicidal crisis nearly 82,000 times.
 - Provided more than 475,000 referrals to a VA Suicide Prevention Coordinator (SPC), thus ensuring Veterans are connected to local care.

Using Predictive Analytics to Identify Those at Risk and Intervene Early

- Screening and assessment processes have been set up throughout the system to assist in the identification of patients at risk for suicide.
- VA will use predictive modeling to determine which Veterans may be at highest risk of suicide so providers can intervene early.



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- Veterans in the top 0.1% of risk (who have a 43-fold increased risk of death by suicide within a month) are identified before clinical signs of suicide are evident in order to save lives before a crisis occurs.
- Patients who have been identified as being at high risk receive an enhanced level of care, including missed appointment follow-ups, safety planning, follow-up visits, and individualized care plans that directly address their suicidality.

Bolstering Mental Health Services for Women

Since 2005, VA has seen a 154% increase in the number of women Veterans accessing VHA mental health services. In fiscal year (FY) 2015, 182,107 women Veterans received VA mental health care.

- VA has enhanced provision of care to women Veterans by focusing on training and hiring Designated Women's Health Providers (DWHPs) at every site where women access VA, with 100% of VAMCs and 90% of community-based outpatient clinics having DWHPs.
- VA has trained nearly 2,500 providers in women's health and continues to train additional providers to ensure that every woman Veteran has the opportunity to receive primary care from a DWHP.
- VA now operates a Women Veterans Call Center (WVCC), created to connect with women Veterans to inform them about eligible services. As of February 2016, the WVCC received 30,399 incoming calls and made about 522,038 outbound calls, successfully reaching 278,238 women Veterans.

Expanding Telemental Health Services

- VA is leveraging telemental health care by establishing 10 regional telemental health hubs across the VA health care system.
- In FY 2015, 12% of all Veterans enrolled for VA care received telehealth-based care, totaling more than 2 million telehealth visits by 677,000 Veterans, including 380,000 telemental health visits.
- Since FY 2003, VHA has provided more than 2 million telemental health encounters, expanding its role as a world leader in telehealth and telemental health services, including services provided directly to Veterans' homes.

Free Mobile Apps to Help Veterans and Their Families

VA has deployed a suite of 13 award-winning mobile apps to support Veterans and their families, with tools to help them manage emotional and behavioral concerns. These include:

- **PTSD Coach** (released 2011; 233,000 downloads in 95 countries) is a widely acclaimed VA and Department of Defense (DoD) joint project, winning numerous awards. It is a tool for self-management of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and includes a self-assessment tool; educational materials about PTSD symptoms, treatment, and related conditions; relaxation and focusing exercises designed to address symptoms; and immediate access to crisis resources, personal support contacts, or professional mental health care.



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- **CBT-i Coach** for insomnia (released 2013; 86,000 downloads in 87 countries) was a collaborative effort between the VA National Center for PTSD (NCPTSD), Stanford University Medical Center, and the DoD's National Center for Telehealth and Technology (T2). CBT-i Coach is a mobile phone app designed for use by people who are having difficulty sleeping and are participating in cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia, guided by a health care professional.
- **ACT Coach** for depression (released 2014; 23,000 downloads in 93 countries) supports people currently participating in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) who want to use an app in conjunction with their therapist to bring ACT practice into daily life.
- **Mindfulness Coach** (released 2014; 39,000 downloads in 95 countries) provides tools to assist users in practicing mindfulness meditation.
- **Moving Forward** (released 2014; 5,400 downloads in 54 countries) teaches problem-solving skills and can be used in a stand-alone fashion or while participating in problem-solving training.

Leveraging VA Vet Centers and Readjustment Counselors

Vet Centers are community-based counseling centers that provide a wide range of social and psychological services. These services include professional readjustment counseling to Veterans and active duty Servicemembers, including members of the National Guard and Reserve components who served on active military duty in any combat theater or area of hostility.

- There are 300 community-based Vet Centers and 80 mobile Vet Centers located across the 50 states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands (www.vetcenter.va.gov).
- In FY 2015, the Vet Centers accommodated over 1,664,000 visits for more than 228,000 Veterans, Servicemembers, and families.
- To use Vet Center services, Veterans or Servicemembers:
 - Do not need to be enrolled with VA medical centers.
 - Do not need a disability rating or service connection for injuries from either VA or the DoD.
 - Can access Vet Center services regardless of discharge character.
- The Vet Center Combat Call Center is an around-the-clock confidential call center where combat Veterans and their families can talk with fellow combat Veterans from several eras. In FY 2015, the Vet Center Combat Call Center took over 113,000 calls from Veterans, Servicemembers, their families, and concerned citizens.

Telephone Coaching for Families of Veterans

Coaching Into Care (www.va.gov/coachingintocare) assists family members and friends in helping a Veteran seek care. It provides a motivational coaching service for family and friends of Veterans who see that a Veteran in their life needs help.

Coaching involves helping the caller figure out how to motivate the Veteran to seek services. The service is free and provided by licensed clinical social workers and psychologists. From the inception of the service in January 2010 to December 2016, Coaching Into Care has logged 33,900 total initial and follow-up calls.



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Innovative Public-Private Partnerships to Reach Veterans

VA is working with public and private partners across the country with the goal of ensuring that wherever a Veteran lives, he/she can access quality, timely mental health care.

VA is working with universities, colleges, and health professional training institutions across the country to expand their curricula, addressing new science related to meeting the mental and behavioral health needs of our Nation's Veterans, Servicemembers, and their families.

- VA has recently partnered with the University of Michigan Health System and its Military Support Programs and Networks to support student Veterans as they transition from military to student life. Its Peer Advisors for Veteran Education program, which is expanding to 42 campuses across the country, and VA's Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership program and Peer Support Program will coordinate referrals and share resources. Together, they will collaboratively help student Veterans successfully navigate college life.

VA is also supporting community provider organizations through innovative partnerships:

- VA recently partnered with the Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation to share subject matter expertise across a range of topics relevant to Veterans and their families, including student Veteran programs, caregiver training programs, faith/chaplain/spirituality-based mental health programs, and other mental health and well-being programs.
- VA has also recently partnered with Give an Hour (GAH) to share training resources on various mental health topics to be disseminated to GAH's provider network, so more Veterans have access to evidence-based mental health care and are competent in military culture. In addition, VA's ***Make the Connection*** (MakeTheConnection.net) Veteran-focused outreach campaign is collaborating with GAH's Change Direction Campaign to reduce negative perceptions associated with seeking mental health care and promote mental health literacy among Veterans and the general public.
- VA has also partnered with Psych Armor Institute (PAI) to share subject matter expertise on a range of mental health and caregiving topics to help civilians better serve Veterans. PAI is delivering training free of charge to the public and VA.
- VA Campus Toolkit (www.mentalhealth.va.gov/studentveteran) is a resource that helps faculty, staff, and administrators find resources to support student Veterans and learn about their strengths, skills, and needs.
- VA is hosting annual Community Mental Health Summits at each VAMC. Each facility will focus on building new partnerships and strengthening existing ones to meet the needs of Veterans and Veterans' families residing in their catchment areas.
- Each VAMC has appointed a Community Mental Health Point of Contact to provide ready access to information about VA eligibility and available clinical services, ensure warm handoffs at critical points of transition between care systems, and serve as a liaison between VA and community partners.

Maintaining the High Quality of VA Mental Health Care

The Altarum/RAND Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Mental Health Program Evaluation (2011) concluded that "timeliness for mental/behavioral health care in VHA is as good as or better than in commercial and public plans."



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A recent publication comparing VA mental health care to private sector care examined medication treatment for mental disorders, finding:

- Across seven performance indicators, VA “performance was superior to that of the private sector by more than 30%.”
- In conclusion, the authors wrote: “Findings demonstrate the significant advantages that accrue from an organized, nationwide system of care. The much higher performance of the VA has important clinical and policy implications.”
(ps.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ps.201400537)

Proactive Outreach to Reach Veterans Needing Care

- VA works proactively to connect Veterans and their families with the resources they need. In addition to VA’s ***Make the Connection*** outreach campaign and extensive suicide prevention outreach, many specific mental health programs and services have outreach as part of their efforts. SPCs are required to conduct at least five outreach activities per month in all of their local communities and are able to provide a community version of Operation S.A.V.E. to Veterans and others.
- Partnering with community organizations has broadened VA’s outreach efforts and promotes more positive outcomes from community providers.
- ***Make the Connection*** is VA’s award-winning mental health public awareness campaign. Its primary objectives are to highlight Veterans’ true and inspiring stories of mental health recovery, reduce negative perceptions about seeking mental health care, and connect Veterans and their family members with local mental health resources.
- Over the past four years, ***Make the Connection*** has seen tremendous engagement with Veterans, Veterans’ family members, and supporters. Through November 2016, ***MakeTheConnection.net***, the campaign’s outreach efforts, and social media properties including Facebook and YouTube have earned a total of:
 - 11.7 million website visits
 - 373,000 resource locator uses (for local VA and other community sources of support)
 - 16.9 million video views
 - 27,000 YouTube subscribers
 - 3.5 million total “likes” on the Facebook page, making it one of the largest government Facebook communities in the country
 - 44.4 million engagements on Facebook (“likes,” comments, and shares)
 - More than 1.8 billion impressions of the campaign’s public service announcements, earning free, donated airplay with a paid media value of more than \$29 million
 - More than 245 organizations broadcasting campaign messaging through their communication platforms
 - More than 1.9 million pieces of material distributed nationwide



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For more information, Veterans currently enrolled in VA health care can speak with their VA mental health or health care provider. Other Veterans and interested parties can find a complete list of VA health care facilities, Vet Centers, their local Suicide Prevention Coordinators, and other resources under the resource section of VeteransCrisisLine.net or at www.va.gov.

For more information about this fact sheet, contact Dr. David Carroll, Executive Director of VA's Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, at 202-461-4058.



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