



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

## Fact Sheet

Office of Public Affairs  
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### U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

#### *Suicide Among Women Veterans: Facts, Prevention Strategies, and Resources April 2019*

#### Overview

Suicide prevention is the highest priority for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Every Veteran suicide is a tragic outcome, and one Veteran suicide is too many. In recent years, VA has made great strides in preventing suicidal crises. We will not relent in our efforts to connect Veterans who are experiencing an emotional or mental health crisis with lifesaving support. Mental health and crisis support services are critical for people showing signs of suicide risk, but we must extend these services beyond traditional health care settings.

Women are the fastest-growing Veteran group, comprising about 9 percent of the U.S. Veteran population. That number is expected to rise to 15 percent by 2035. VA is committed to improving the health and well-being of women Veterans, including by addressing suicide risk and suicidal behaviors. This fact sheet summarizes what is known about suicide among women Veterans, highlights national resources available to assist women Veterans who are in crisis or at risk for suicide, and describes VA's national strategy for preventing Veteran suicide. **A more general fact sheet on suicide among all Veterans is available at [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide\\_prevention/data.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/data.asp).**

#### **VA National Suicide Data Report: 2016 Update**

In September 2018, VA released findings from its most recent analysis of 2005–2016 suicide rates for both Veterans and non-Veterans in the U.S. **More information on the VA National Suicide Data Report is available at [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide\\_prevention/data.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/data.asp).**

#### Key Findings

- **Women Veteran suicide counts and rates decreased from 2015 to 2016.** The women Veteran suicide count decreased from 283 deaths to 257 deaths and the women Veteran unadjusted suicide rate decreased from 15.5/100,000 in 2015 to 13.9/100,000 in 2016.
- **Women Veterans are more likely to die by suicide than non-Veteran women:** In 2016, the suicide rate of women Veterans was nearly twice the suicide rate of non-Veteran women, after accounting for age differences.
- **Women Veterans are more likely than non-Veteran women to use firearms as a method of suicide:**



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- In 2016, firearms were used in 41.2 percent of suicide deaths among women Veterans, compared to 32.4 percent of suicide deaths among non-Veteran women.
- Firearms are a particularly lethal method of suicide. The higher suicide rates among women Veterans as compared to non-Veteran women may, at least in part, be due to women Veterans' more frequent use of firearms as a means of suicide.

## **Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Resources for Women Veterans**

### **Resources for Veterans and Their Families**

- **Immediate support through the Veterans Crisis Line:** Caring, qualified Veterans Crisis Line responders are available 24/7/365 to provide support for Veterans at acute risk for suicide and for those calling on a Veteran's behalf. Call **1-800-273-8255 and Press 1**, text to 838255, or chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/Chat).
- **Local Suicide Prevention Coordinators (SPCs):** At least one full-time SPC (typically a nurse or social worker) is assigned to each VA medical center and to large community-based outpatient clinics. SPCs provide support for Veterans at a high risk for suicide — including patients who have attempted suicide and those who are experiencing suicidal ideation. SPCs help these Veterans obtain integrated care, tracking appointments and coordinating with the Veterans and their clinical providers.
- **Resource locator:** This online tool helps Veterans easily find VA resources in their area, including SPCs, crisis centers, VA medical centers, outpatient clinics, Veterans Benefits Administration offices, and Vet Centers.
- **Coaching Into Care:** This free, confidential service helps friends and family members encourage a Veteran in their life to seek care for mental health challenges.
- **Make the Connection:** This online resource contains hundreds of firsthand stories from women Veterans and connects Veterans, their family members and friends, and other supporters with solutions to challenges affecting their lives.

### **VA Mental Health Services for Women Veterans**

- **Outpatient mental health services:** These services include general outpatient, specialty, inpatient, and residential treatment options. through VA medical centers and community-based outpatient clinics, tele-mental health services, Vet Centers, and partnerships with local treatment providers across the country.
- **Residential treatment programs:** For Veterans who need more intensive treatment and support, VA has mental health residential programs that provide treatment and services for mental health issues, substance use disorders, medical conditions, and homelessness.
- **Inpatient mental health care:** VA has inpatient programs for acute care needs, such as such as psychiatric emergencies and stabilization, and medication adjustments.
- **Specialty mental health services:** Evidence-based therapies for posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and substance use disorders have been shown to decrease suicidal ideation and are available at every VA medical center.
- **Women's Mental Health Champions:** A national network of Women's Mental Health Champions is in place to disseminate information, facilitate consultations, and develop local resources in support of gender-sensitive mental health care.

## Services to Assist in Recovery From Military Sexual Trauma (MST)

Given the evidence of a relationship between MST and suicidal thoughts and behaviors, we want all Veterans to know that VA is committed to providing services to meet the needs of all Veterans, both women and men, who have experienced MST and may be at risk for suicide. All MST-related care is provided free of charge. Veterans **do not** need to have a VA disability rating (a service-connected disability) and **do not** need to have reported the MST experience at the time it occurred to get MST-related care. Veterans may be able to receive these services even if they are not eligible for other VA care. To learn more, Veterans can contact their local VA health care system [www.va.gov/directory](http://www.va.gov/directory) and ask to speak to the MST Coordinator or visit [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp).

### Health Services for Women

- **Comprehensive Primary Care:** VA provides full services to women Veterans, including comprehensive primary care, gynecology care, maternity care, specialty care, and mental health services.
- **Women Veterans Program Manager:** VA has a Women Veterans Program Manager at every VA medical center who acts as an administrative leader for the Women Veterans Health Program and an advocate for women Veterans.
- **Women's Health Providers:** Women Veterans can be assigned to trained and experienced Women's Health Providers, who provide primary care and gender-specific care as part of the patient-provider relationship.
- **Women Veterans Call Center:** This service provides women Veterans with information about relevant VA benefits and services and answers questions women Veterans may have about their benefits. Call or text **1-855-VA-WOMEN (1-855-829-6636)** to contact responders who can help with enrollment and appointments and make referrals to Women Veterans Program Managers, the Health Eligibility Center, the Veterans Benefits Administration, and crisis lines as needed. More information about the Women Veterans Call Center is available at <https://www.womenshealth.va.gov/programoverview/wvcc.asp>.

### National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide

As a national leader in suicide prevention, VA developed the [National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide](#) to guide VA personnel and stakeholders — including other federal agencies, state and local governments, health care systems, and community organizations — so that we, as a nation, can reduce suicide rates among Veterans. **More information is available at [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide\\_prevention](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention).**

**Free, confidential support is available 24/7 to Veterans in crisis and anyone concerned about a Veteran. Call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, text to 838255, or [chat online](#).**



Reporters covering this issue are strongly encouraged to visit <http://www.reportingonsuicide.org/> for guidance on how to safely and responsibly communicate about suicide.

For more information, please contact [VASPDataRequest@va.gov](mailto:VASPDataRequest@va.gov).

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