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of Veterans Affairs

# VA's Approach to Suicide Prevention

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Suicide Prevention (OMHSP)*

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*May 15, 2019*



*Drilling Down:*

# Recognizing Suicide Risk



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# Suicide Rates in the U.S. Workforce

- From 2000-2016, the suicide rate among U.S. workers (ages 16-64) **Increased 34%** (12.9 per 100,000 to 17.3 per 100,000)
- CDC analyzed suicide deaths by Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) for males
  - Construction and Extraction occupational group had the highest male suicide rate (43.6 per 100,000 in 2012, and 53.2 per 100,000, in 2015).
- CDC analyzed suicide deaths by Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) for females
  - Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports and Media group had the highest female suicide rate (11.2 per 100,000 in 2012, and 15.6 per 100,000 in 2015).
- Workplace Prevention Resources are available at <https://theactionalliance.org/>.



# 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

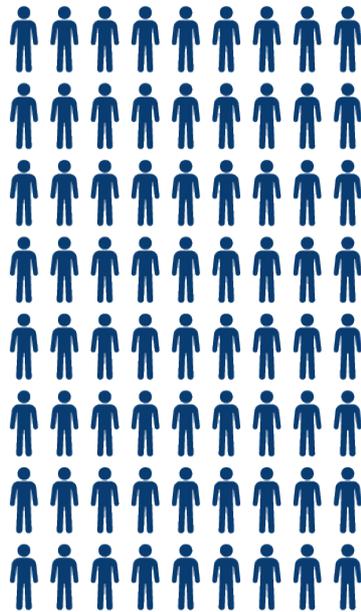
- The public health approach seeks to answer the foundational questions:
  - Where does the problem begin?
  - How could we prevent it from occurring in the first place?
- To answer these questions, public health uses a systematic, scientific method for understanding and preventing violence.



# 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)

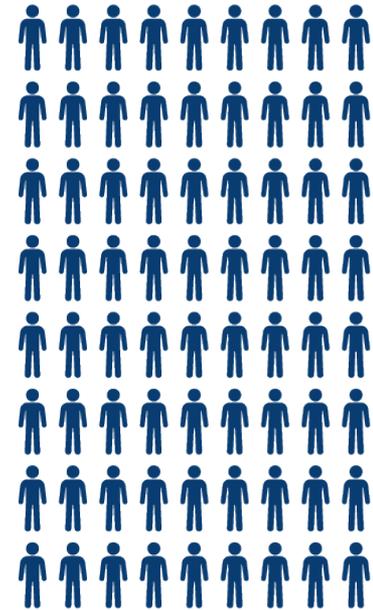
Indicated prevention strategies are designed to reach individual Veterans identified as having a high risk for suicidal behaviors.



# 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)

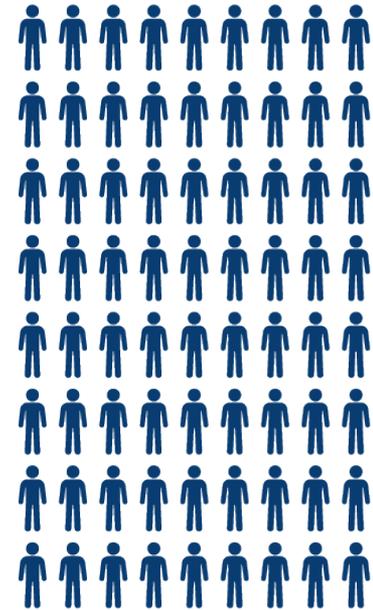
Universal prevention strategies are designed to reach the entire Veteran population.



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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](http://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](http://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](http://www.mirecc.va.gov/coaching)



## Universal (all)

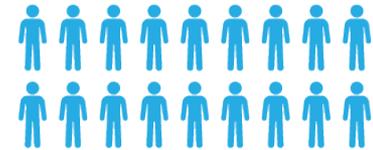
Universal prevention strategies are designed to reach the entire Veteran population.



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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](http://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](http://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](http://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.

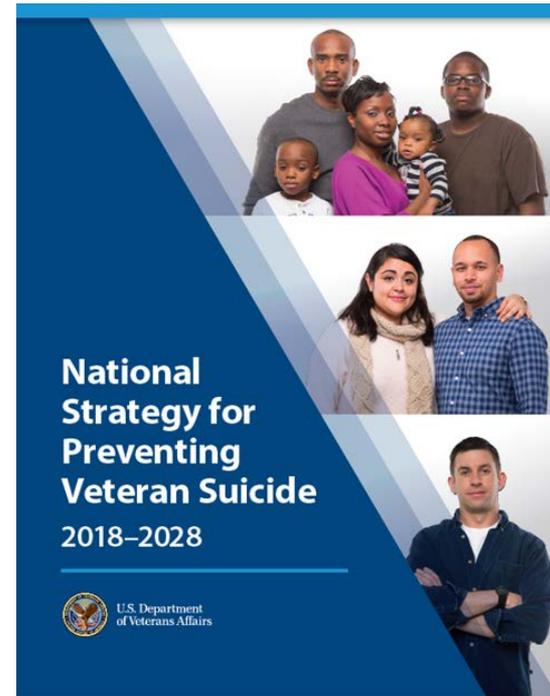


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# National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide

**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)



# Leveraging the Public Health Approach



Family

Health Care



Community

Faith



Workplace

Recreation



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# 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-

**PRESS 1**

• • • Confidential chat at [VeteransCrisisLine.net](https://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net) or text to **838255** • • •

- Veterans
- Family members
- Service members
- Friends

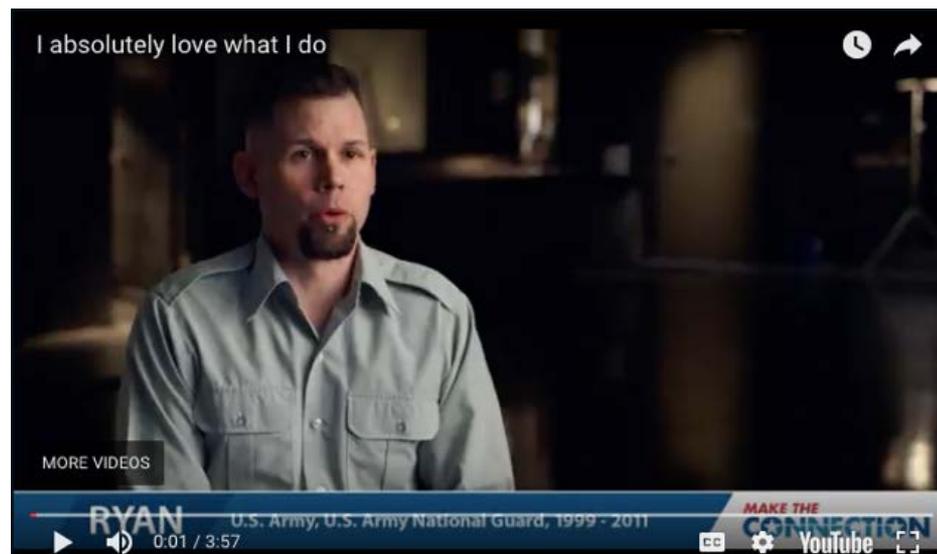


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# Make the Connection

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

**MAKE THE CONNECTION**



<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/](https://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](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/communityproviders)



# Questions?



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**Thank you.**



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