VA’s Approach to Suicide Prevention

VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (OMHSP)

Dr. Gloria Workman

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Drilling Down:

Recognizing Suicide Risk
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.

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.
## 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
VA Suicide Prevention Strategy

The Public Health Approach
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

- Continue to increase impact of Office for Suicide Prevention
- Reach Veterans and their families
- Develop innovative prevention strategies
- Build community engagement
- Change the conversation around suicide
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://psycharm.org/courses/s-a-v-e/](https://psycharm.org/courses/s-a-v-e/)
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.
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.
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)
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.

- 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](Mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention)
Leveraging the Public Health Approach

- Family
- Community
- Workplace
- Health Care
- Faith
- Recreation
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
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 or text to 838255

- Veterans
- Service members
- Family members
- Friends
Make the Connection

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

https://maketheconnection.net/conditions/suicide
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
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/
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
Questions?
Thank you.