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If Veterans don't help Veterans, who will?

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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

VA's Efforts to Prevent Veteran Suicide: September 2018

Part I: VA Releases 2016 Veteran Suicide Data

Overview

Suicide is a public health issue that affects people from all walks of life, regardless of whether they have served in the military. Veteran suicide represents an urgent crisis that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and its partners must address. While VA is a national leader in suicide prevention, VA by itself cannot adequately confront the issue of suicide. Because many Veterans do not use VA services and benefits, we must build networks of support, communication, and care across the communities where Veterans live and thrive.

Suicide prevention is VA's highest priority, and we have made great strides in crisis intervention. 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 go beyond our traditional health care settings. At VA, our goal is to prevent suicide among *all* Veterans — even those who do not and may never seek care within VA's system. To prevent Veteran suicide, VA has embraced a public health approach that looks beyond the individual to involve peers, family members, and the community.

VA National Suicide Data Report: 2016 Update

Data is an integral part of VA's public health strategy and enables VA to tailor suicide prevention initiatives to reach diverse groups of Veterans. In September 2018, VA released findings from its most recent analysis of 2005–2016 suicide rates for both Veteran and non-Veteran populations. These findings underscore the fact that suicide is a national public health issue that affects communities everywhere. **More information on the VA National Suicide Data Report is available at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/data.asp.**

Key findings from the report include the following:

- In 2016, Veterans accounted for 14.0 percent of all deaths by suicide among U.S. adults and constituted 8.1 percent of the U.S. adult population (ages 18 and up).
 - From 2015 to 2016, the overall Veteran suicide count decreased from 6,281 to 6,079 deaths and the Veteran unadjusted suicide rate decreased from 30.5/100,000 to 30.1/100,000.



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Veterans Health Administration
Office of Mental Health & Suicide Prevention

- The frequency of firearm use as a method of suicide remains high. In 2016, the percent of suicide deaths that involved firearms was 69.4 percent.
- The rate of suicide in 2016 was:
 - 1.5 times higher among Veterans compared with non-Veteran adults, after adjusting for age and sex.
 - 1.4 times higher among male Veterans compared with non-Veteran adult men, after adjusting for age.
 - 1.8 times higher among female Veterans compared with non-Veteran adult women, after adjusting for age.
- The rate of suicide among 18–34 year-old Veterans continues to increase.
- In 2016, rates of suicide were highest among younger Veterans (ages 18–34) and lowest among older Veterans (age 55 and older). Veterans age 55 and older nonetheless accounted for 58.1 percent of Veteran suicide deaths in 2016.

Part II: Putting Data Into Action

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 *all* Veterans. **More information is available at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention.**

Undertaking New Measures to Prevent Veteran Suicide

Veteran suicide prevention is VA’s top priority, and VA has undertaken substantial Veteran suicide prevention efforts in recent years by:

- [Expanding the Veterans Crisis Line](#) to three call centers and more than 700 employees, increasing our ability to provide 24/7 support.
- **Hiring a Suicide Prevention Coordinator** at every VA facility to deliver targeted care to at-risk patients.
- **Creating new cross-sector partnerships** to involve peers, family members, and the community in preventing Veteran suicide.
- [Launching the S.A.V.E. online suicide prevention video](#) to help everyone play a role in preventing Veteran suicide.
- [Implementing the Mayor’s Challenge](#) to empower cities nationwide to build coalitions to prevent Veteran suicide.
- **Launching the REACH VET (Recovery Engagement and Coordination for Health – Veterans Enhanced Treatment) predictive analytics program** to identify Veterans who may be at risk for suicide.
- **Adding “high-risk” flagging to Veterans Health Administration patient charts** to integrate suicide prevention with clinical care and provide enhanced care to patients flagged as “high risk.”
- **Expanding access to mental health care** to ensure that all Veterans can get the care they need.

- **Partnering with the departments of Defense and Homeland Security**, as mandated by [executive order](#), to support Veterans during their transition from military to civilian life.

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

Reporters covering this issue are strongly encouraged to visit www.reportingonsuicide.org for guidance on how to communicate about suicide.

For more information, please contact VASPDataRequest@va.gov.