

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Suicide Prevention in Veteran Population: Overview and Resources

Veterans Healthcare System of the Ozarks

Suicide Prevention Program

Kate Rhames, LCSW

Agenda

- Suicide Prevention in Veteran Population: Overview and Resources
 - Suicide Prevention Coordinator Kate Rhames, LCSW
- Community Engagement Partnership Coordinators (CEPC) and VHA Public Health Approach to Suicide Prevention
 - CAVHS CEPC's Miranda Watkins, LCSW and Priscilla Buffington, LCSW
- Camp Connect: Connecting Service Members, Veterans, and Families to resources
 - Laura Hopkins

Before We Begin:

- Suicide is an intense topic for some people.
 - If you need to take a break, or step out, please do so.
 - Immediate Resources:
 - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988 or 1-800-273-8255
 - Service members and Veterans: Press 1 to connect with the Veterans Crisis Line.

Facts About Veteran Suicide

Suicide is a National Public Health Problem

- Suicide is a national issue, with rising rates of suicide in the general population.
- For every death by suicide, approximately 135 individuals are impacted.

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

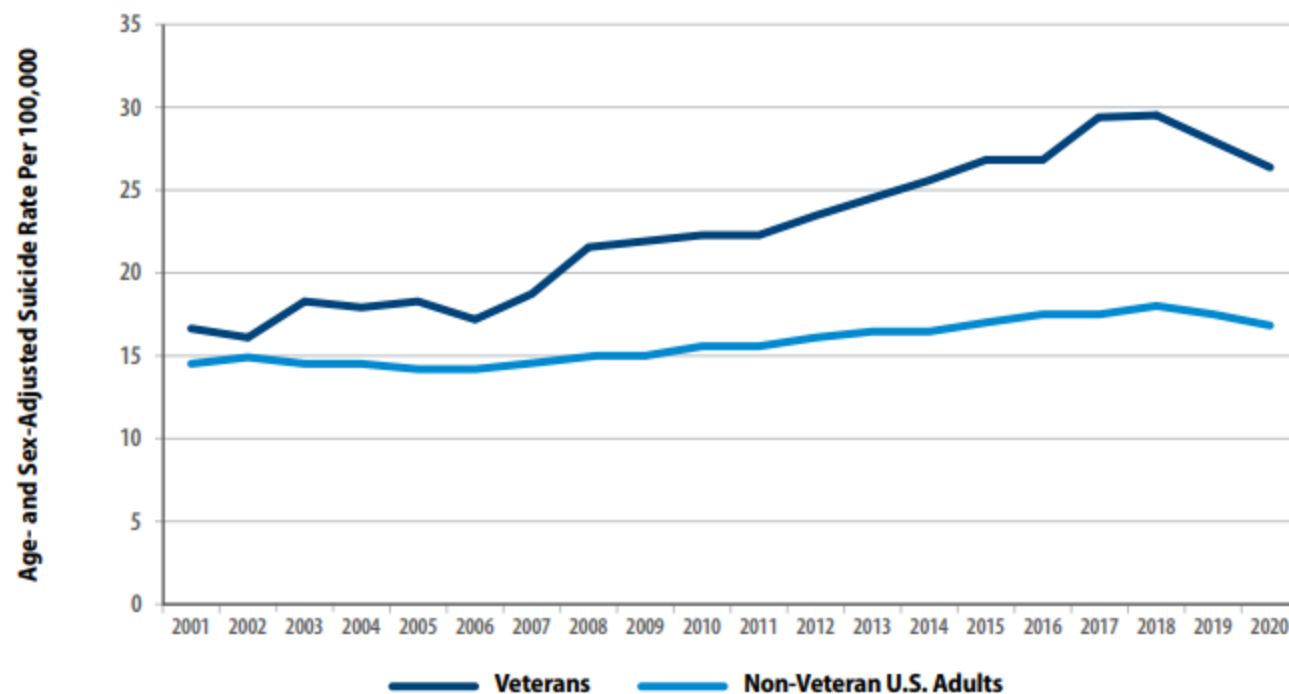
Protective

- 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



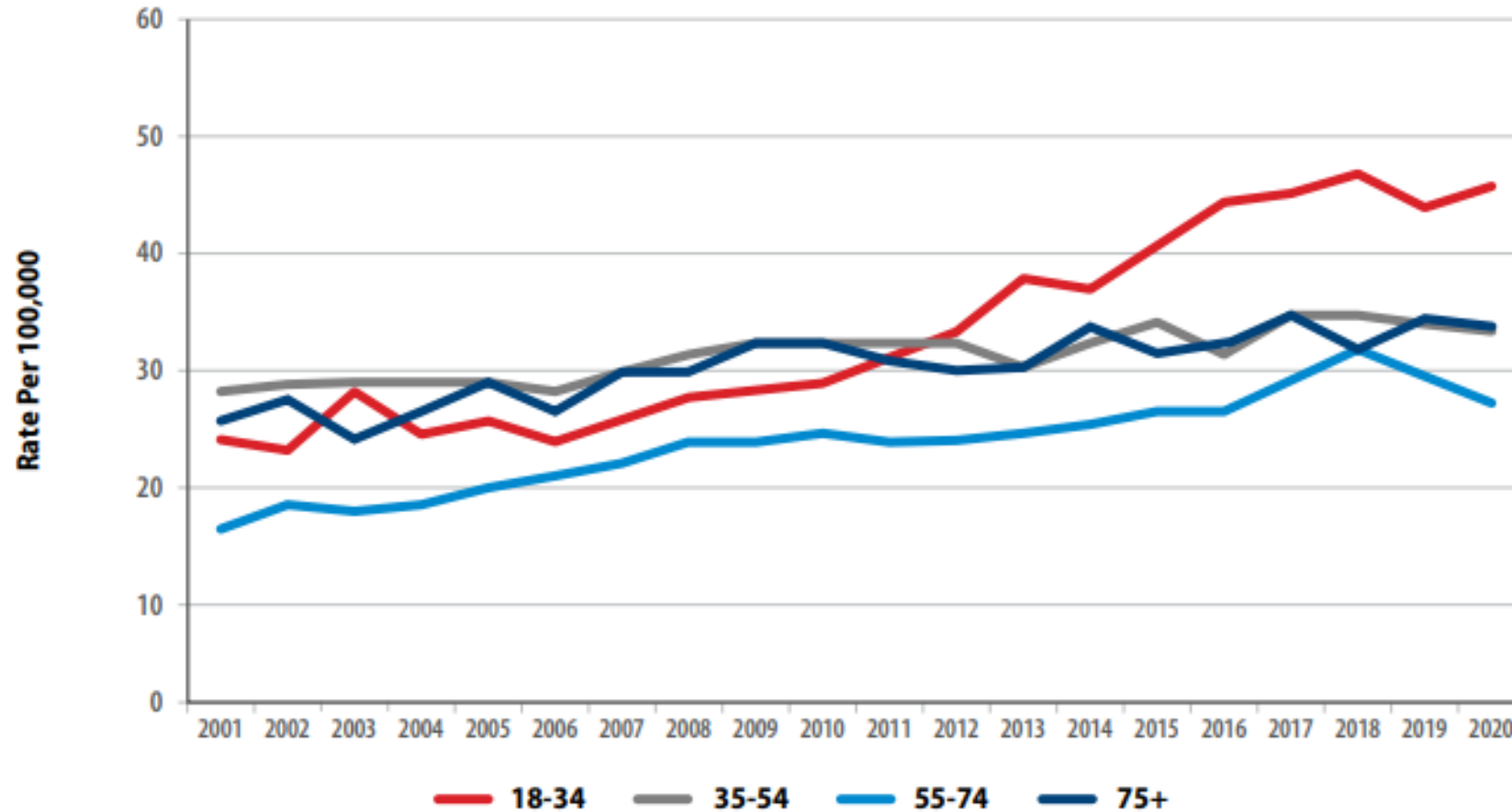
Goal: Minimize risk factors and boost protective factors

Age- and Sex-Adjusted Suicide Rates, Veterans and Non-Veteran U.S. Adults, 2001–2020

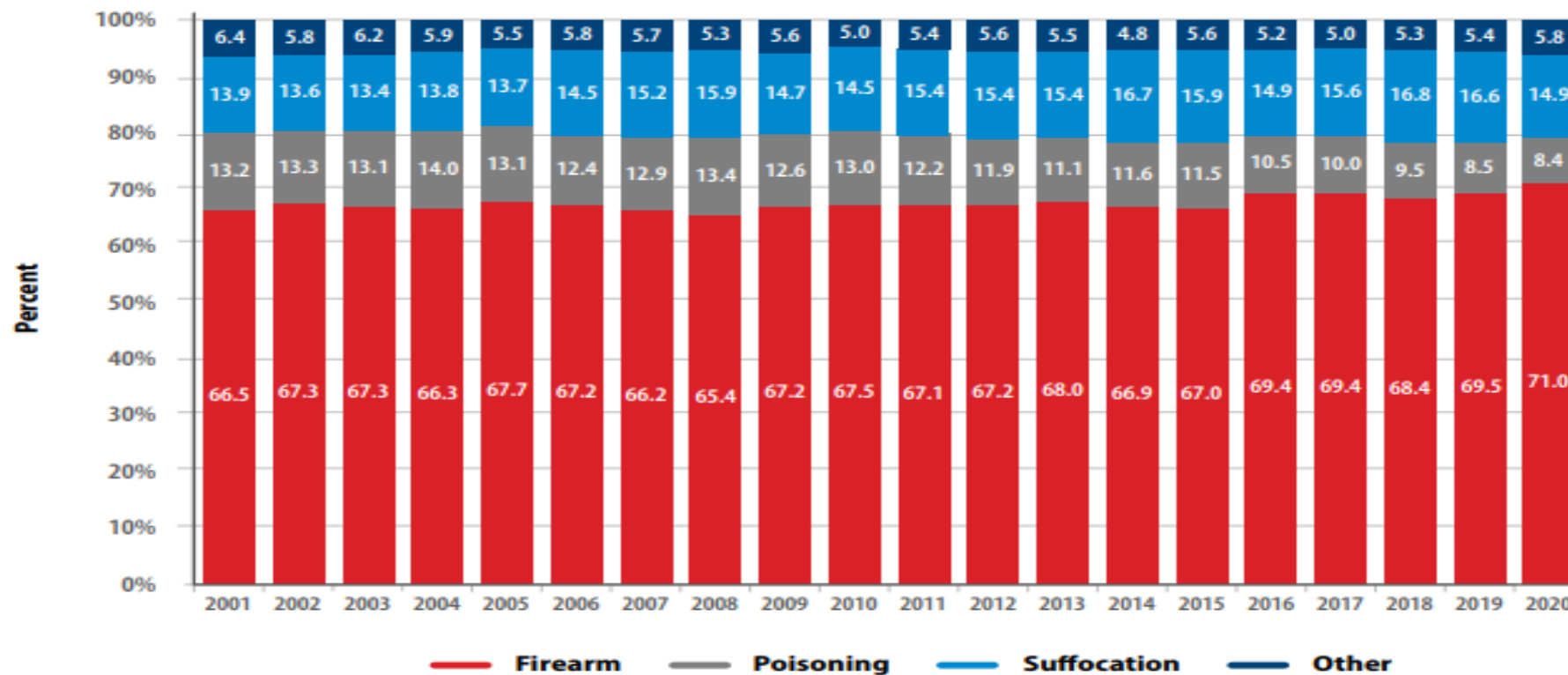


Suicide Rates by Age

Unadjusted Suicide Rate Per 100,000, Veterans, by Age Group, 2001–2020



Methods Involved, Percentage, Veteran Suicide Deaths, 2001–2020

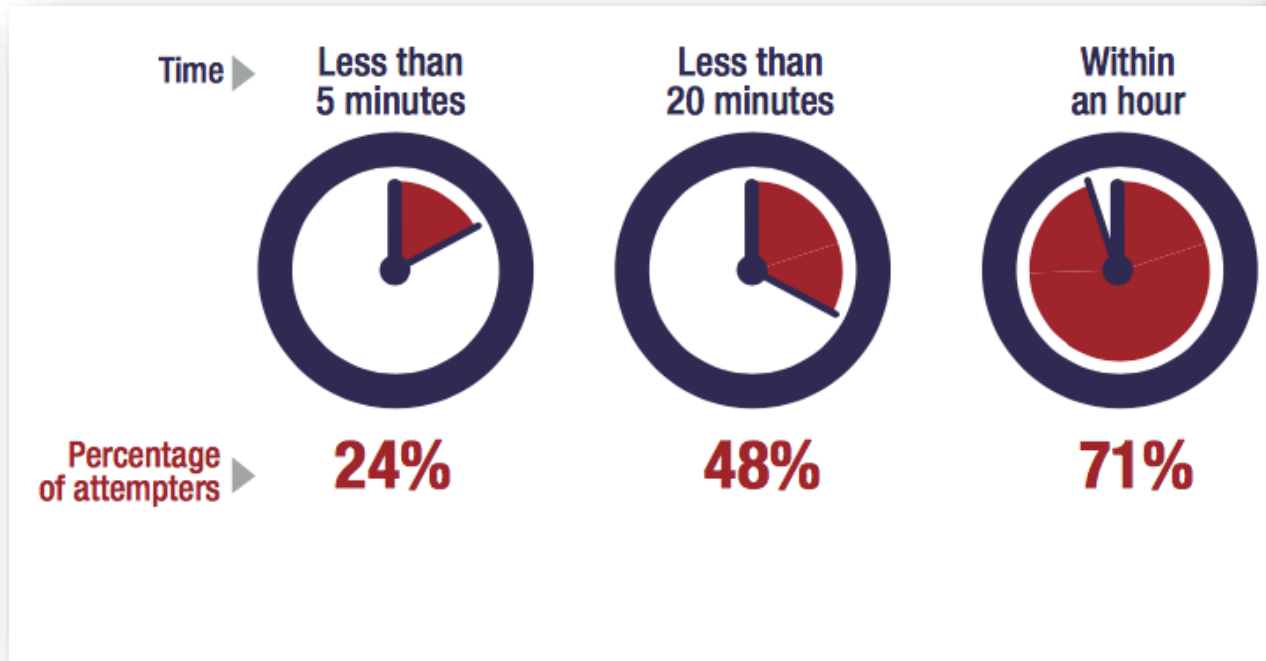


What is Lethal Means Safety?

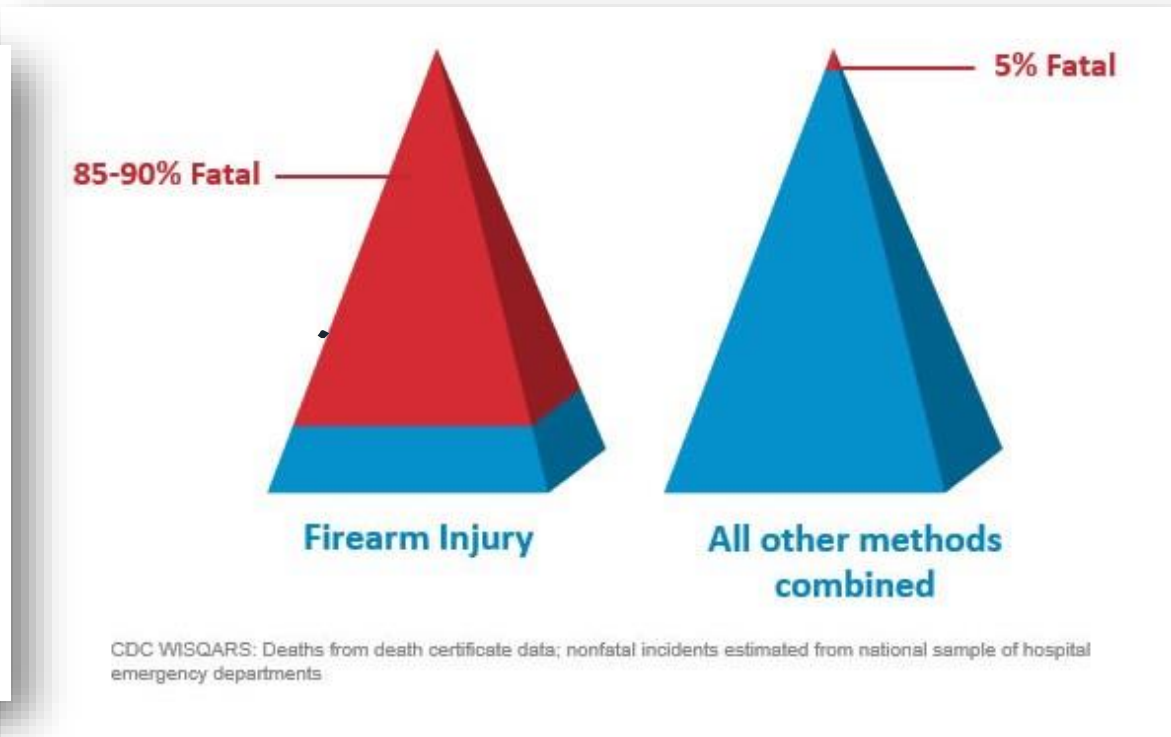
- In the context of suicide prevention, safe storage of lethal means is any action that builds in time and space between a suicidal impulse and the ability to harm oneself.
- Effective lethal means safety education and counseling is collaborative and Veteran-centered. It respects the important role that firearms and medications may play in Veterans' lives and is consistent with their values and priorities.

Most Suicidal Crises are Brief

Time from Decision to Action < 1 hour



Source: Simon, T.R., Swann, A.C., Powell, K.E., Potter, L.B., Kresnow, M., and O'Carroll, P.W. Characteristics of Impulsive Suicide Attempts and Attempters. SLTB. 2001; 32(sup):49-59.



Source: CDC WISQARS and US Dept. of Veterans Affairs
<https://www.mirecc.va.gov/lethalmeanssafety/facts/>

Lethal Means Safety Works

- Reducing access to lethal suicide methods is one of the few population level interventions that has been shown to decrease suicide rates.
- About **90 percent** of people who survive a suicide attempt do not go on to die by suicide.
- If we can collaborate with Veterans **ahead of time** to help them survive a suicidal crisis, we have likely prevented suicide for the **rest of their lives**.

Resources:

[Firearm Suicide Prevention & Lethal Means Safety - REACH \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov/reach)

[Lethal Means Safety Brochure \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov/lms)



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

Reducing Firearm & Other Household Safety Risks for Veterans and Their Families



Firearm safety is an important public health issue that can affect your health and your family's well-being.

If you own a firearm, or live in a household where there are firearms, the following information can help keep you and those around you safe. Similarly, reducing access to other household risks, like medications, can help ensure your family's safety.

Additional Safety Tips: Medication Storage

Taking medications is part of a healthy life for some Veterans and their family members, but medications should be safely and securely stored when they are not in use.

- ✓ Keep medications out of children's sight and reach.
- ✓ Other options for preventing intentional or unintentional overdose include:
 - Having a family member or friend help manage your medication dosages
 - Asking your doctor or pharmacist to limit the number of refills or the quantity of medication
 - Portioning out pills for a week and locking the rest away
- ✓ Check the date on everything in your medicine cabinet and dispose of medication if any of the following is true:
 - The medication is past its expiration date
 - You have not used the medication in the past 12 months
 - You no longer need the medication

Ask your doctor or pharmacist about options for safely storing medications or disposing of unused medications.

Talk to your primary care team about firearm, medication, and other safety concerns and the positive impact secure storage can have on the well-being of you and your loved ones.

Resources



www.nssf.org/safety

© 8/22 VHA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

**Suicide
is preventable.**

Suicide Prevention Coordinators in Community

VA S.A.V.E.: Teaching Communities How to Help Veterans at Risk for Suicide



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs



VA S.A.V.E. Training Supporting Our Veterans

What is VA S.A.V.E. Training?

VA S.A.V.E. Training will help you act with care and compassion if you encounter a Veteran who is in crisis or experiencing suicidal thoughts. The acronym S.A.V.E. helps you remember the important steps involved in suicide prevention:

- S** Signs of suicidal thinking should be recognized
- A** Ask the most important question of all — "Are you thinking of killing yourself?"
- V** Validate the Veteran's experience
- E** Encourage treatment and Expedite getting help

You can prevent Veteran suicide. Start by learning the VA S.A.V.E. acronym.

08/2022

Supporting Our Veterans

You can support a Veteran through a crisis. Keep these tips in mind when talking with a Veteran who may be at risk for suicide:

- Remain calm
- Listen more than you speak
- Maintain eye contact
- Act with confidence
- Do not argue
- Use open body language
- Limit questions — Let the Veteran do the talking
- Use supportive, encouraging comments
- Be honest — There are no quick solutions, but help is available

Additional Resources

VA Mental Health Services: Get information about inpatient and outpatient services available through VA at www.mentalhealth.va.gov.

Online Resource Locator: Find VA facilities, Vet Centers, suicide prevention coordinators, and other VA resources at www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator.

Don't wait. Reach out.: Use this site to find support and resources designed specifically for Veterans. If you're a family member or a friend, you can also find resources for the Veteran in your life. VA.gov/REACH

Make the Connection: Veterans and their loved ones can find out how to connect with VA resources at www.MakeTheConnection.net.

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Program: Locate the VA PTSD program nearest you at www.ptsd.va.gov.



DIAL 988 then PRESS 1

Confidential chat at

VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat or text 838255

VA S.A.V.E. TRAINING: SUPPORTING OUR VETERANS

Signs of Suicidal Thinking

There are behaviors that may be signs a Veteran needs support. Learn to recognize these warning signs:

- Hopelessness, feeling like there is 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 use
- Withdrawing from family and friends

The presence of the following signs in a Veteran requires immediate attention:

- When asked, they express a desire to hurt or kill themselves.
- When prompted, they reveal they are looking for ways to kill themselves.
- They talk about death, dying, or suicide.
- They begin to exhibit self-destructive behavior, such as increased drug or alcohol use, talking about acquiring/using weapons for self-harm, and stockpiling medication.

Ask the Question

There are behaviors that may be signs a Veteran needs support. Know how to ask the most important question of all:

"Are you thinking of killing yourself?"

Other ways to ask the question include:

"Are you thinking of suicide?"

"Have you had thoughts about taking your own life?"

When asking the question, remember:

- **DO** ask the question if you've identified warning signs or symptoms
- **DO** ask the question in such a way that is natural and flows with the conversation
- **DO NOT** ask the question as though you are looking for a "no" answer ("You're not thinking of killing yourself, are you?")
- **DO NOT** wait to ask the question until he or she is halfway out the door

Validate the Veteran's Experience

As you listen to the Veteran, ask him or her to do the talking and use supportive, encouraging comments. Use the following steps to let the Veteran know that you are listening and acknowledge his or her experience:

- Talk openly about suicide
 - Be willing to listen and allow the Veteran to express his or her feelings
- Recognize the situation is serious
- Do not pass judgement
- Reassure them that help is available

Encourage Treatment and Expedite Getting Help

If a Veteran is having suicidal thoughts, remain calm and reassure them that help is available:

- **DO NOT** keep the Veteran's suicidal behavior a secret
- **DO NOT** leave him or her alone
- Try to get the person to seek immediate help from his or her doctor or the nearest hospital or emergency room, OR
- Call 911

You can also call the confidential Veterans Crisis Line: Dial 988 then Press 1.

Safety is Important

Never negotiate with someone who has a gun. Get to safety and call 911. If the Veteran has taken pills, cut himself or herself, or has done harm to himself or herself in some way, call 911.



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Safety Planning

Safety Plans can be completed whenever clinically indicated.

Safety Planning should be a collaborative process.

Resource:

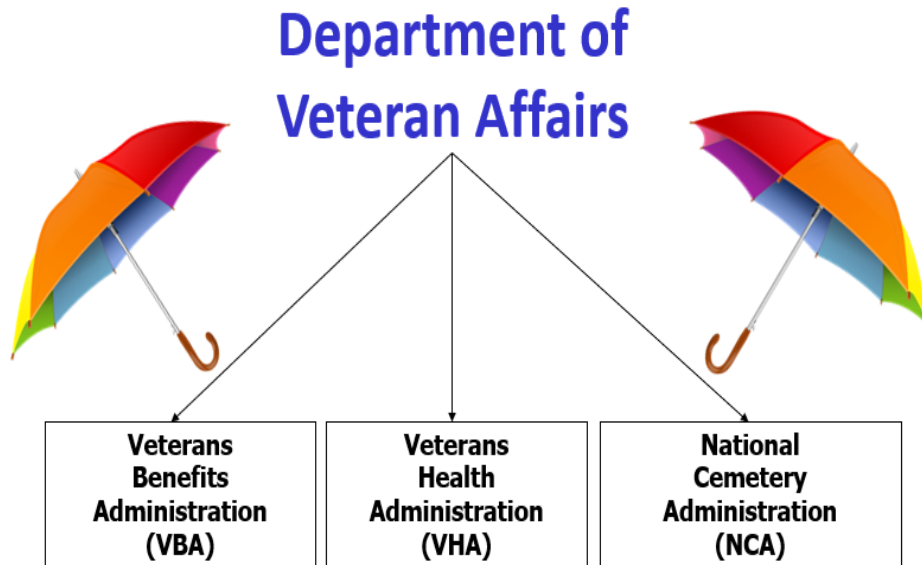
[Start the Conversation: Safety Planning \(veteranscrisisline.net\)](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net)



Resources

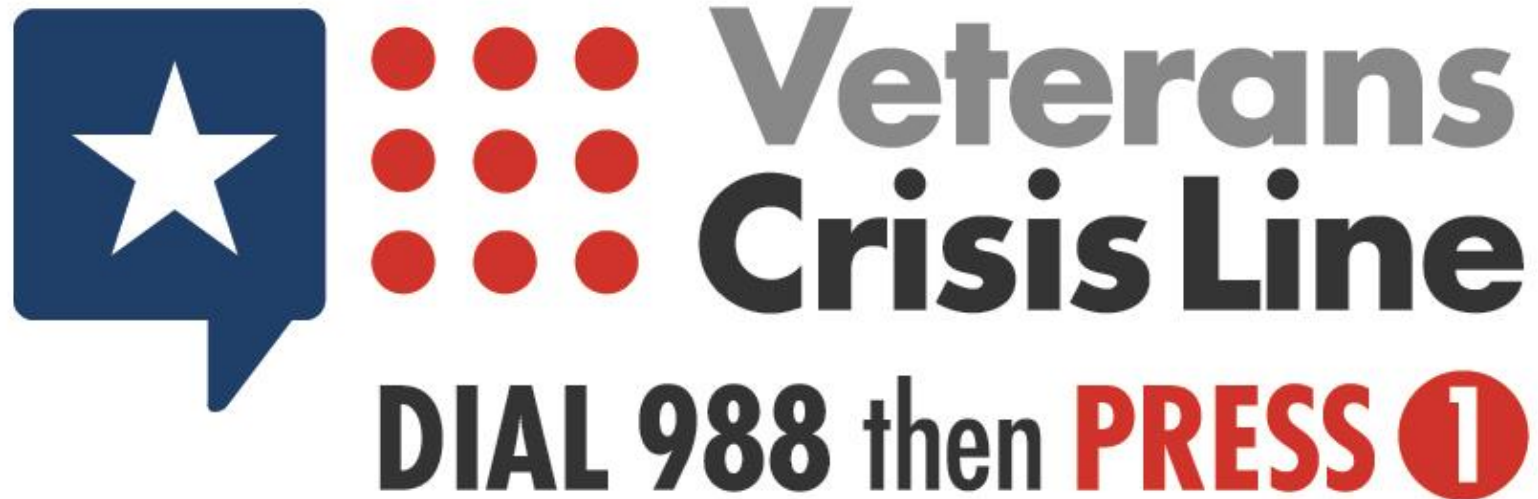
Knowing the Next Right Number ...

- VHA Eligibility Line: 1-877-222-8387
- VHSO Registration Line: 1-855-488-8440
- Website: [Eligibility For VA Health Care | Veterans Affairs](#)
- [Find a VHA Clinic, VBA location, etc.](#)



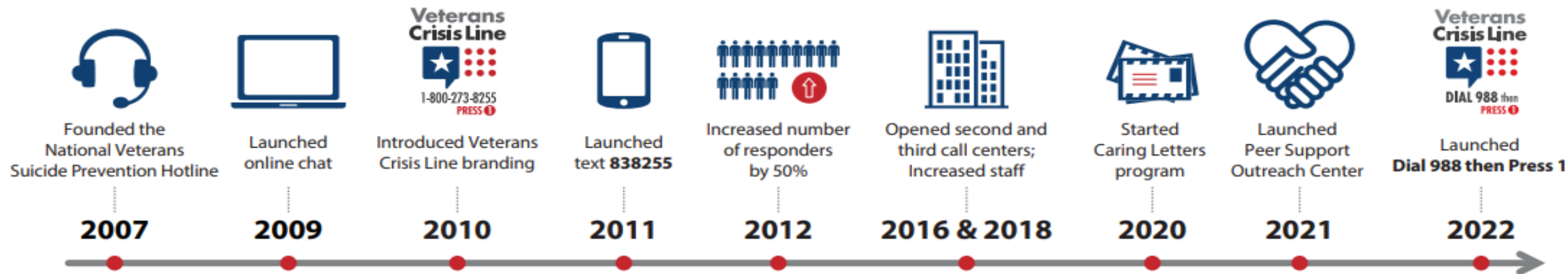
VHSO Mental Health Locations, Arkansas			
<u>VA Medical Center</u> 1100 N College Ave Fayetteville, AR 72703 Building 44 479-444-5048	<u>Harrison CBOC</u> 814 US-62 Harrison, AR 72601 417-243-2300 ext. 6227	<u>Fort Smith CBOC</u> 5700 Phoenix Place Fort Smith, AR 72903 479-441-2600 ext. 42704	<u>Ozark CBOC</u> 2713 West Commercial Ozark, AR 72949 479-508-1000 ext. 60965

Free, Confidential Support 24/7/365



- Veterans
- Family members
- Service members
- Friends

The Veterans Crisis Line is a free, confidential resource available to any Veteran, even if they are not enrolled in VA health care or registered with VA. Care does not end when the conversation is over. The Veterans Crisis Line can connect Veterans to their local suicide prevention coordinators, who will follow up and coordinate care.



More than
6.2 million
calls



More than
253,000
texts



More than
739,000
chats



More than
1.1 million
referrals

to VA Suicide Prevention Coordinators

More than
233,000
dispatches of
emergency services

Find a Local VA SPC at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/ResourceLocator)

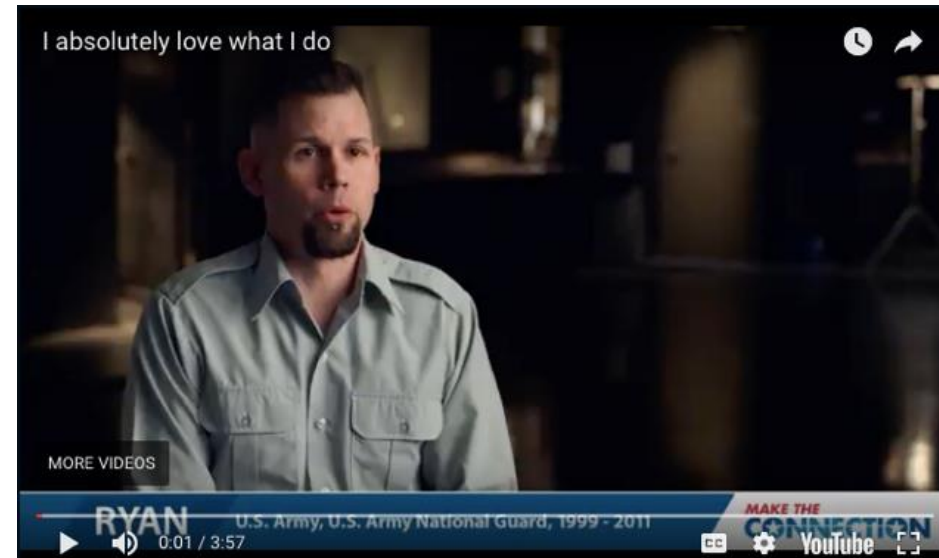
More than 400 SPCs nationwide.



Make the Connection

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

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**
www.MakeTheConnection.net



<https://maketheconnection.net/conditions/suicide>

Practice safe storage of firearms, medications and other lethal means

- Visit www.KeepItSecure.net to learn more about the importance of firearm and other lethal means safety.
- Nearly half of all Veterans own a firearm, and most Veteran firearm owners are dedicated to firearm safety.
- Firearm injuries in the home can be prevented by making sure firearms are **unloaded**, **locked**, and **secured** when not in use, with ammunition stored in a separate location
- There are several effective ways to safely secure firearms. Learn more and find the option that works best for you and your family from the National Shooting Sports Foundation at www.nssf.org/safety

VA » Health Care » REACH » Firearm Suicide Prevention & Lethal Means Safety

REACH

► Mental Health
► More Health Care

QUICK LINKS

Hospital Locator
Zip Code Go

Health Programs

Protect Your Health

A-Z Health Topics

Veterans Crisis Line
1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1

My healthvet
My Health, My Care: 24/7 Access to VA

FIREARM SUICIDE PREVENTION & LETHAL MEANS SAFETY

KeepItSecure.net

PRACTICE SAFE STORAGE OF FIREARMS, MEDICATION & OTHER LETHAL MEANS

Lethal means are objects like guns, medications, alcohol, opioids or other substances, ropes, cords, or sharp objects that can be used during a suicidal crisis. If a Veteran is in crisis or having suicidal thoughts, these items can become deadly when they are easily accessible. For example, nearly 7 out of every 10 Veteran deaths by suicide are the result of firearm injuries (Dept. of Veteran Affairs, 2018).

Increasing the time and distance between someone in a suicidal crisis and access to lethal means can reduce suicide risk and save lives. There are simple steps you can take to protect yourself and your family. On this page, you'll find:

- How to identify and handle a suicidal crisis
- Helpful tips for storing guns, medications, and other lethal means
- Additional resources about safe storage

Mental Health Mobil Apps. Mobile Apps - PTSD: National Center for PTSD (va.gov)

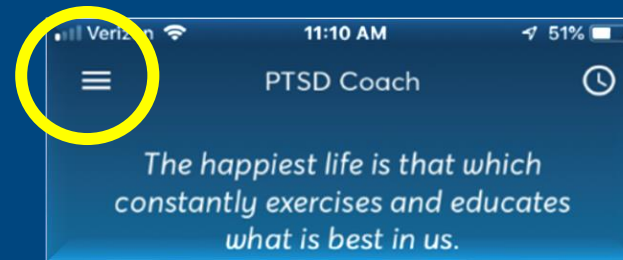
<p>Self-Help</p> <p>These apps provide support and guidance in living with PTSD.</p>				
	PTSD Coach	PTSD Family Coach	Beyond MST	Mindfulness Coach
<p>Treatment Companions</p> <p>These apps offer additional help for PTSD treatments.</p>				
	CPT Coach	PE Coach	CBT-i Coach	ACT Coach
<p>Related</p> <p>These apps help with related issues affecting people with PTSD.</p>				
	COVID Coach	Couples Coach	Insomnia Coach	StayQuit Coach

Safety Plan now in PTSD Coach!



To access the Safety Plan:

1. Download* and open PTSD Coach
2. Tap the lateral menu
3. Tap Safety Plan



National Center for PTSD website:

https://www.ptsd.va.gov/appvid/mobile/ptsdcoach_app.asp

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





Supporting Providers Who Serve Veterans

Free consultation and resources for any provider in the community or VA who serves Veterans at risk for suicide.

Request a consult: srmconsult@va.gov

#NeverWorryAlone



Provider support after a suicide loss (Postvention)



Risk assessment



Lethal means safety counseling



Conceptualization of suicide risk



Best practices for documentation



Strategies for how to engage Veterans at high risk

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Postvention Resources



COMMUNITY

PROVIDERS

WORKPLACE



Films



Infographics



Podcasts

Uniting for Suicide Postvention (USPV): <https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/postvention/>

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

VA S.A.V.E. Training

This free suicide prevention training video is less than 25 minutes long and available to everyone, 24/7. It's offered in collaboration with the PsychArmor Institute.



Available online for free: <https://psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e/>



VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Thank You

Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System Community Engagement and Partnership Coordinators

Priscilla Buffington, LCSW and Miranda Watkins, LCSW

Suicide Prevention 2.0 Public Health Strategy

Suicide Prevention is Everyone's Business





Public health is about working within communities.

Public Health Strategy

VA's public health strategy combines partnerships with communities to implement tailored, local prevention plans while also focusing on evidence-based clinical strategies for intervention. Our approach focuses on both what we can do now, in the short term, and over the long term, to implement VA's [National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide](#).



KEY TENETS

1

Suicide is preventable.

2

Suicide prevention requires a public health approach, combining clinical and community-based approaches.

3

Everyone has a role to play in suicide prevention.

Suicide Prevention Team Integration and Coordination

Community Engagement and Partnership Coordinators (CEPC)

- Establish New Community Coalitions / Support Existing Coalitions
- Facilitate Community, Regional, and State-Level Efforts to Implement Evidence-Informed Community-Based SP Practices
- Bolster the public health approach through:
Community engagement, coalition building, needs assessment and environmental scans, action planning, implementation of systems and community-level change initiatives, program evaluation, and sustainment of community efforts/coalitions



Suicide Prevention Coordinators (SPC)

- Enhanced Care Management of Veterans at High Risk of Suicide
- Facility Suicide Prevention Program Coordination and Implementation of Clinical Evidence-Based Practices for SP
- Veterans Crisis Line Facility Consultant
- Community Outreach and Education
- Facility Suicide Prevention Training

Both SPCs and CEPCs work together to fully implement the public health approach combining community and clinical interventions to reach all Veterans across the universal, selective and indicated populations.

Community Engagement and Partnership Coordinator (CEPC) Overview

**Enhance
& Expand**
Current VA
Suicide
Prevention
efforts

Active Member
of the local VA
Suicide
Prevention
team

**Non-Clinical
Role**
100%
Administrative

**Educate on
Suicide
Prevention**
Strategies, crisis
management
and program
evaluation

**Coalition
Building**
Actively work
with key
partners at the
community,
state & VISN
levels

Public Health
Planning,
Partnership &
Collaboration
for suicide
prevention

Community Engagement and Partnership Coordinator

The CEPC serves a subject matter expert of public health approaches, coalition development and facilitation, and other community-based models for Veteran suicide prevention.

Key roles of the CEPC:

- Develop, facilitate, and strengthen evidence-informed practices at community, state, and VISN levels
- Collaborate with VA programs and community partners
- Provide leadership for coalition management
- Disseminate program evaluation and surveillance data

We invite you to partner with us to prevent suicide in your community.

CONTACT US

Suicide Prevention
Community Engagement and
Partnership Coordinators (CEPCs):

Miranda Watkins, LCSW
Miranda.watkins@va.gov
Cell: 501-218-3264

Priscilla Buffington, LCSW
Priscilla.buffington@va.gov
Cell: 501-398-9467



WORKING TOGETHER TOWARD PREVENTING SUICIDE

EVERYONE HAS A ROLE IN SUICIDE PREVENTION

And it starts in your community.

Suicide Prevention looks different for each community. CEPCs can help you with:

- Forming a group or coalition of people in your community interested in prevention
- Assessing your community to identify what Veterans are needing most to keep them healthy and safe
- Action planning to meet those needs
- Suicide prevention education and trainings
- Outreach and evaluation to help keep your group sustainable

WHAT WE DO

We invite groups to partner with us to expand suicide prevention in your Arkansas community.

GROUPS WE HELP

- Businesses
- Non-profits
- Veteran organizations
- Gun shop owners
- Healthcare professionals
- Local leaders
- Friends and family affected by suicide
- And anyone interested in suicide prevention in Arkansas

WHY YOUR COMMUNITY

We partner with a variety of community members because 65% of Veterans who die by suicide are not engaged in VA care. By working together, we stand a greater chance of ending Veteran suicide.

Find a Community Engagement and Partnership Coordinator at a Facility Near You

VA Medical Center

- Fayetteville: Veterans Health Care System of the Ozarks
- Little Rock: Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System John L. McClellan Memorial Veterans Hospital
- North Little Rock: Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System Eugene J. Towbin Healthcare Center

Community Based Outpatient Clinic

- Conway: Conway CBOC
- El Dorado: El Dorado CBOC
- Fort Smith: Ft Smith CBOC
- Harrison: Harrison CBOC
- Helena: Helena, Arkansas CBOC
- Hot Springs: Hot Springs CBOC
- Jonesboro: Jonesboro, Arkansas CBOC
- Mena: Mena CBOC
- Mountain Home: Mountain Home CBOC
- Ozark: Ozark CBOC
- Paragould: Paragould Community-Based Outpatient Clinic
- Pine Bluff: Pine Bluff CBOC
- Pocahontas: Pocahontas Community-Based Outpatient Clinic
- Russellville: Russellville CBOC
- Searcy: Searcy CBOC
- Texarkana: Texarkana CBOC

Vet Center

- Fayetteville: Fayetteville, AR Vet Center
- North Little Rock: Little Rock Vet Center

Thank You

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Questions?
