VA’s Suicide Prevention Program

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PREVENTS Executive Order Task Force
Drilling Down:

Suicide Risk in the Veteran Population
Suicide

- National public health problem (as defined by CDC)
  - 10th-leading cause of death in the U.S. (with around twice as many homicides)
  - 45,000 deaths per year (up almost 30 percent since 1999)
- Veteran and service member issue
- Veteran populations at risk
  - Younger Veterans
  - Women Veterans
  - Veterans in a period of transition
  - Veterans with exposure to suicide
  - Veterans with access to lethal means
  - “Other than honorable” discharges ("bad paper")
Suicide is preventable.
The rate of suicide was 1.8 times higher among female Veterans compared with non-Veteran adult women.

* after accounting for differences in age

Male Veterans ages 18–34 experienced the highest rates of suicide.

69% of all Veteran suicide deaths resulted from a firearm.
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
Suicide Prevention is Everyone’s Business

- Continue to increase impact of Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention
- Develop innovative prevention strategies
- Change the conversation about suicide
- Reach Veterans and their families
- Build community engagement
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 individuals in the Veteran population that are identified as having a high risk for suicidal behavior.
That’s where you come in.
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**
- **Recreation**
- **Health**
- **Faith Community**

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Mayor’s and Governor’s Challenges
24 Mayor’s Challenge Sites

Albuquerque, NM
Atlanta, GA
Austin, TX
Billings, MT*
Charlotte, NC
Clarksville, TN
Columbus, OH
Detroit, MI
Helena, MT*
Hillsborough, FL
Houston, TX
Jacksonville, FL
Kansas City, KS
Las Vegas, NV
Los Angeles, CA
Manchester, NH
Oklahoma City, OK
Phoenix, AZ*
Reno, NV
Richmond, VA
Suffolk County
Topeka, KS
Tulsa, OK
Warwick, RI

*Denotes one of
Governor’s Challenge

**Goal:** Develop state-wide plans based on the public health approach to prevent suicide.

- Partnership between VA and HHS Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
- Takes the Mayor’s Challenge to the state level, incorporating existing community strategic plans within their respective states
- State leaders are meeting to develop a plan to implement the National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide
Executive Order: National Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End Suicide
The President’s Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide – The PREVENTS Initiative

• “Executive Order on a National Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End Suicide,” signed on March 5, 2019 by President Trump.

• The Executive Order focuses on improving the quality of life of our nation’s veterans by developing a national public health roadmap to lower the Veteran suicide rate.

• Task Force Tasks:
  • Develop a comprehensive national public health roadmap to lower Veteran suicide rate – focused on community engagement
  • Design/proposal to Congress a program for grant-making to local communities to increase collaboration and outreach to Veterans
  • Develop a national research strategy to improve coordination, monitoring, and benchmarking and execution of Veteran suicide research.
Public Health Video

Public health is about working within communities
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U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration

Make the Connection

#BeThere