
NCSL NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SUMMIT 2019

THE BATTLE WITHIN: PREVENTING VETERAN SUICIDE

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WHAT'S COVERED TODAY?

- Prevalence of suicide in the United States
- Suicide among Veterans in the United States
- Prevention strategies
 - State examples
- Resources for legislators

SUICIDE IN THE UNITED STATES

In 2017...

- Suicide was the 10th leading cause of death
- Suicide accounted for 47,000 deaths
- 9.8 million American adults seriously thought about suicide
- 2.8 million made a suicide plan
- 1.4 million made a suicide attempt
- \$70 billion in direct medical and work loss costs

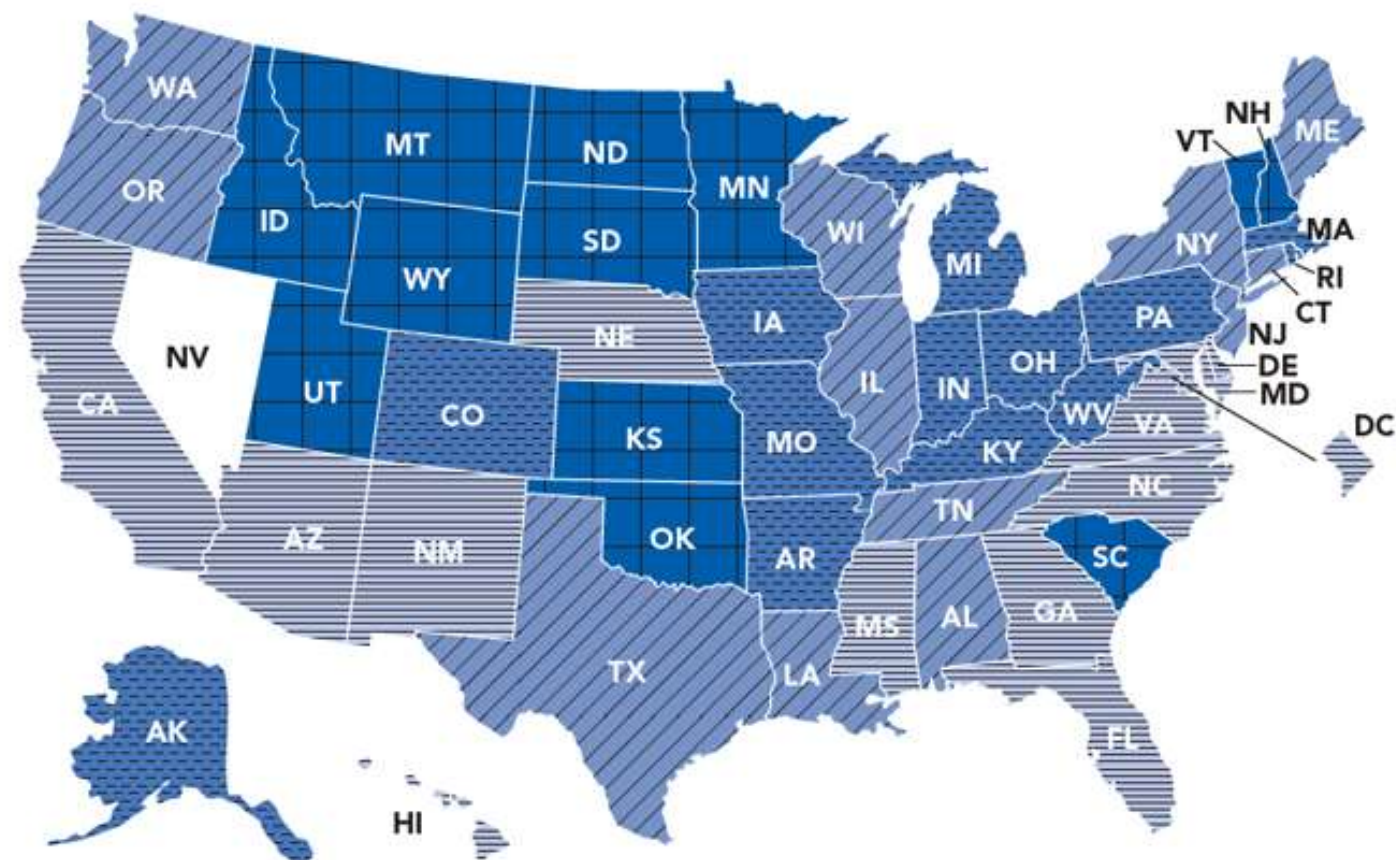


WHO DIES BY SUICIDE IN THE UNITED STATES?

- Middle-aged, white men are most at risk of dying by suicide.
 - Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death in this age group.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Americans under the age of 25.
- Rural communities and communities with distressed economic conditions.
- Other vulnerable populations include:
 - Veterans
 - American Indian/Alaskan native communities
 - LGBT+ Youth
 - First Responders
- Other Risk Factors

DEATH BY SUICIDE IS INCREASING

Suicide rates rose across the US from 1999 to 2016.



SOURCE: CDC's National Vital Statistics System;
CDC Vital Signs, June 2018.

PREVALENCE OF SUICIDE AMONG VETERANS

2016 Key Data Points



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.*

Source: Department of
Veteran's Affairs



NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES

ZERO SUICIDE INITIATIVE

- The Zero Suicide framework is a system-wide, organizational commitment to safer suicide care in health and behavioral health care systems.
- Colorado and Louisiana are the only to states with Zero Suicide initiatives in place legislatively.
 - The legislation in both states requires the states' respective health departments to work in coordination with the healthcare sector to adopt the tenants of the Zero Suicide model into their operations.
- More information can be found at www.zerosuicide.sprc.org.



MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

- Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is intensive training to identify and intervene in people experiencing suicidal thoughts.
- States have implemented MHFA in different ways, including requiring first responders, teachers and other professions to receive training.



MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID- CONTINUED

- Key components of Mental Health First Aid for Veterans include:
 - A discussion of military culture and its relevance to the topic of mental health
 - A discussion of the specific risk factors faced by many service members and their families, such as trauma (both mental and physical), stress, and separation
 - A review of common mental health resources for service members, their families and those who support them
- State examples:
 - Colorado- Requires training for educators, first responders, law enforcement, military service personnel.
 - Connecticut- Creates a training program for judges regarding mental health and post-traumatic stress disorder issues affecting veterans who are involved in the criminal justice system.
 - Nebraska- Provides \$100,000 in grants for school districts, first responders, medical professionals and professionals who work with veterans.



ADDRESSING HIGHLY LETHAL MEANS

- Stresses the importance of reducing access to highly lethal means of suicide, such as firearms and dangerous medications, for individuals considering suicide
- Example: Means Matter Campaign- encourages use of lethal means counseling

Firearms

- “Gun Shop” Project- New Hampshire:
 - Provides gun stores and firing ranges with suicide prevention materials tailored to their customers
 - There are 20 states currently participating

Potentially Lethal Drugs & Medications

- Opioids-
 - Increased risk in the months after starting and stopping an opioid prescription
- Alcohol, benzodiazepines, amphetamines, antidepressants and anti psychotics also associated with suicide deaths



VETERAN'S CRISIS HOTLINE

- Free, confidential resource staffed by responders specially trained and experienced in helping Veterans of all ages and circumstances.
- Interacting with a crisis hotline can reduce suicidal thoughts and symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- It is difficult to determine long-term effectiveness due to anonymous nature of the hotlines.



VETERAN'S CRISIS HOTLINE- CONTINUED

- Existing suicide prevention coalitions can leverage existing relationships and resources to connect veterans with hotlines or other intervention services.
- For example: County-level health departments in Wisconsin have distributed coasters to area bars and taverns with links to headsupguys.org.



OTHER STATE ACTIONS ON PREVENTION

- Nevada- SB 483 (2019)
 - Includes family members of veterans, members of the military and other persons at risk of suicide in the list of persons for whom the Department of Health and Human Services must provide suicide prevention training opportunities.
- Texas- SB 27 (2017)
 - Provides for a veteran suicide prevention action plan, requires the action plan to provide measures to expand public-private partnerships to ensure access to quality, timely mental health services, including access to peer-service coordinators.
- Wisconsin- AB 732 (2018)
 - Establishes a pilot program to provide outreach, support, and mental health and substance abuse services for Veterans.

RESOURCES- CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

- The CDC provides an online overview of suicide prevention and prevention resources. Resources include State Suicide Planning: A CDC Research Brief, which examines successful state-based suicide prevention programs and a “technical package” that provides a several policy recommendations.
- The Department of Veteran’s Affairs National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide offers guidance to other federal agencies as well as state and local governments on its coordinated strategy to prevent veteran suicide. The VA also annually publishes a National Suicide Data Report highlighting important trends in veteran suicide.

QUESTIONS?

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