

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# VA S.A.V.E. Training

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Suicide Prevention Team

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## Before We Begin:

- Suicide is an intense topic for some people.
  - If you need to take a break, or step away, 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.

# Overview

- Objectives
- Facts about Veteran Suicide
- Common Myths vs. Realities
- VA S.A.V.E. Steps
- Resources

# Objectives

**By participating in this training, you will:**

- Have a general understanding of the scope of Veteran suicide within the United States.
- Know how to identify a Veteran who may be at risk for suicide.
- Know what to do when you identify a Veteran at risk.

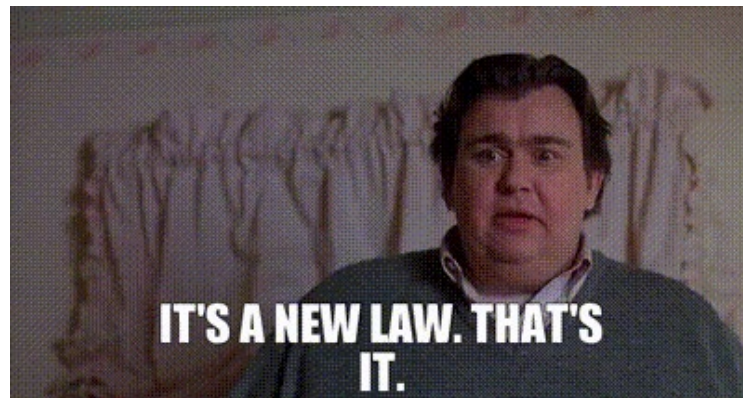
# COMPACT Act – Emergency Suicide Care & Treatment



- What it is:  
Veterans in suicidal crisis can go to any health care facility, **at VA or in the community**, for emergency health care – including ambulance transportation and related prescriptions – inpatient or crisis residential care for **up to 30 days** and crisis-related outpatient care for **up to 90 days** at no out-of-pocket cost.
- Eligibility:  
You are eligible if you were discharged from the military under a condition that is not dishonorable or the result of a general court martial and served prior to September 7, 1980.
- If you enlisted or were commissioned after September 7, 1980, or entered active duty after October 16, 1981:
  - You were discharged for a disability that was caused or made worse – by your active-duty service.
  - You were discharged for a hardship or “early out.”
- If you were discharged under other than honorable conditions, you are eligible if you:
  - Served 100 cumulative days in a combat zone or in support of a contingency operation either directly or by operating an unmanned aerial vehicle from another location.
  - Were the victim of a physical assault of a sexual nature, a battery of a sexual nature, or sexual harassment while serving in the armed forces

# COMPACT Act – Emergency Suicide Care & Treatment

- VA Emergency Care Website: [Emergency Medical Care - Community Care \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov/ehc/)
- VA Centralized Emergency Care Reporting Center
  - VA 72-Hour Notification Hotline: 1-844-724-7842
  - VA Emergency Care Reporting Portal
    - [Veterans Health Administration - Community Care \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov/vha/)
- VA Compact Act Fact Sheet: [FactSheet\\_20-48.pdf \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov/ehc/fact-sheet/)



# Ask the Question

“Did you serve in the military?”

Some persons who served in the military might not identify as being a “Veteran”, ex:

- Female members of the military
- Younger personnel
- Were not in combat
- Were not stationed overseas
- Were not deployed

## Take a moment to consider:

What are your biggest questions around suicide and talking to people in crisis?





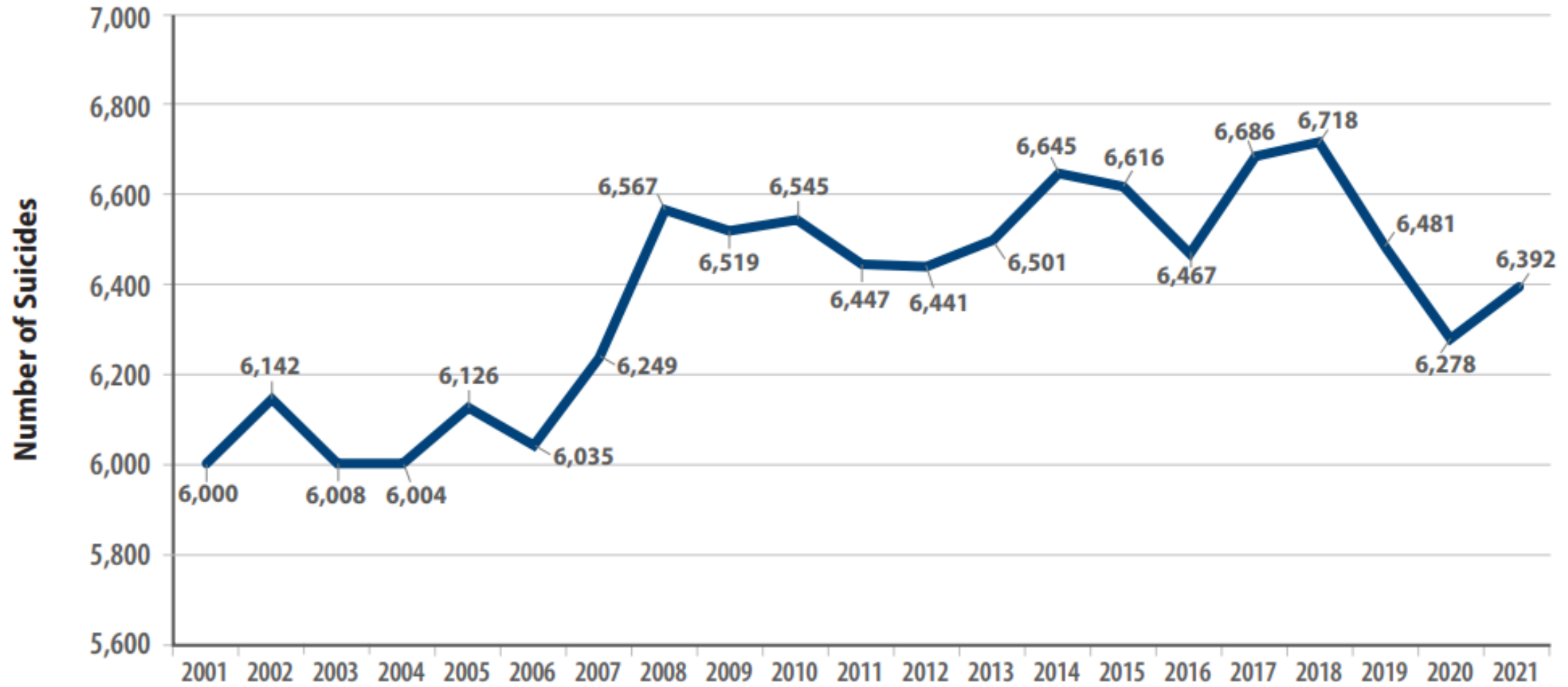
# Facts About Veteran Suicide

# 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.

# Key Findings: 2023 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report

**Figure 2: Veteran Suicide Deaths, 2001–2021**



# Key Findings: 2023 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Report

**6,392** Veteran suicide deaths in 2021

**33.9 suicides per 100,000**  
Veterans in 2021  
(up from 32.6 per 100,000 in 2020)

**6,042** suicide deaths among Veteran men

**350** suicide deaths among Veteran women

# Heavily Impacted Groups in 2021

## Heavily Impacted Groups in 2021



### Women Veterans

- 24.1% increase in the age-adjusted suicide rate from 2020–2021



### American Indian/Alaska Native Veterans

- Unadjusted suicide rate was 46.3 per 100,000
- 51.8% increase in the unadjusted suicide rate from 2020–2021



### Recent Veteran VHA Users with Homelessness

- 112.9 per 100,000 suicide rate in 2021, the highest observed from 2001–2021
- Suicide rate increased 38.2% since 2020
- Suicide rate was 186.5% higher than for those not homeless



### Recent Veteran VHA Users with Justice Program Services

- Suicide rate of 151.0 per 100,000 was the highest over this period
- Suicide rate increased 10.2% since 2020

# Veterans Experiencing Homelessness (1 of 2)

Veterans who have experienced homelessness are at increased risk for suicide. The suicide rate for Veterans who accessed VA health care and have signs of homelessness is higher than for those without signs of homelessness. The suicide rate among this group increased **38.2%** from 2020 to 2021.



## **The Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grants Program (SSG Fox SPGP)**

This program awarded \$52.5 million in community-based grants. In 2023, these grants reached more than 16,000 Veterans and included more than 6,000 connections to employment, financial, legal and clinical support services to reduce suicide risk and prevent Veteran homelessness.



## **Identifying Suicidal Risk Among Veterans Experiencing Homelessness**

VA is improving methods to identify suicide risk in homeless populations. In 2023, VA also launched Homeless Safety Planning in emergency departments. Veterans experiencing homelessness are more likely to obtain care in emergency departments and assessing suicide risk at the time of visit may improve the likelihood of early identification of suicide risk and connections to care.

# Veterans Experiencing Homelessness (2 of 2)



## Providing Housing

As of September 2023, VA has permanently housed 35,148 Veterans, on pace to exceed its goal of housing 38,000 homeless Veterans in 2023. These goals build upon VA's success in housing more than 40,000 homeless Veterans in 2022. Additionally, VA awarded more than \$1 billion in grants for operations starting this year to help Veterans who are experiencing homelessness and at risk of homelessness through the Supportive Services for Veteran Families Homeless Prevention (SSVFHP) program's Grant and Per Diem (GPD) program.



# Suicide is a Complex Issue with No Single Cause

- Suicide is often the result of a complex interaction of risk and protective factors at the individual, community, and societal levels.
- Risk factors are characteristics that are associated with an increased likelihood of suicidal behaviors. Protective factors can help offset risk factors.
- To prevent Veteran suicide, we must maximize protective factors while minimizing risk factors at all levels, throughout communities nationwide.

# Suicide can be preventable

# 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

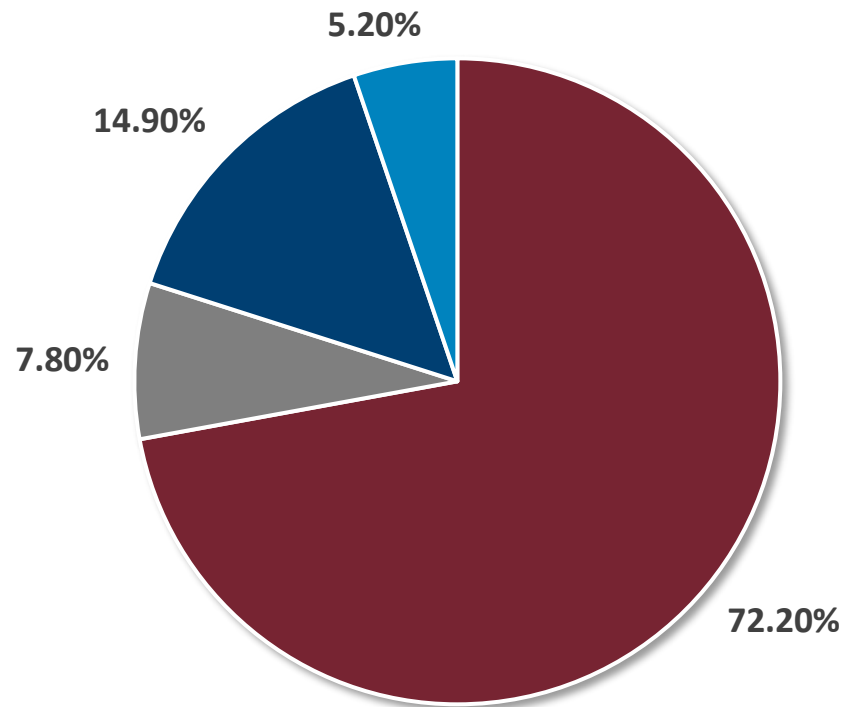


**Goal:** Minimize risk factors and boost protective factors

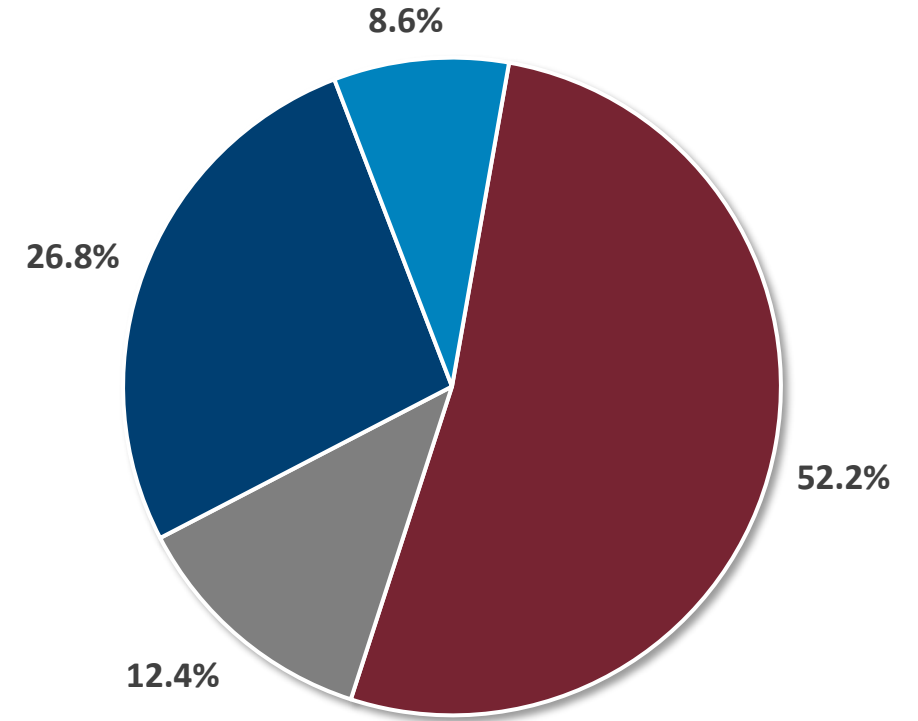
# Access to Lethal Means is a Risk Factor

# U.S. Veterans and Suicide Methods (2023)

## Veterans



## Non-Veteran U.S. Adults

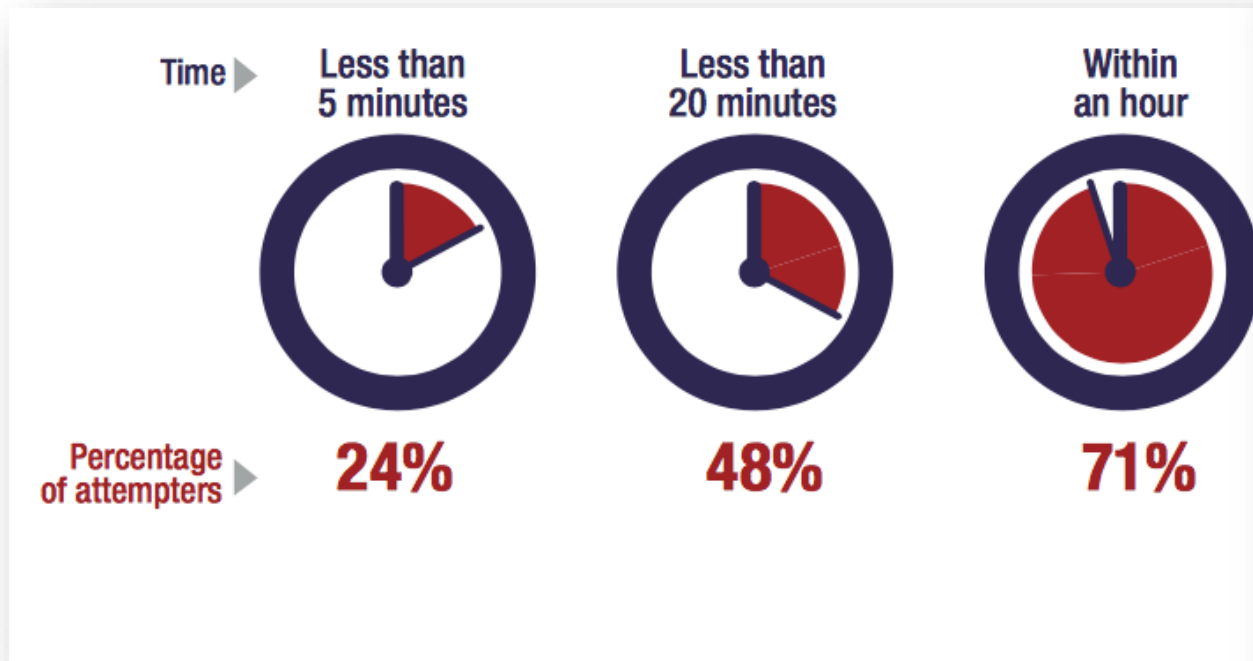


- Firearms
- Poisoning
- Suffocation
- Other

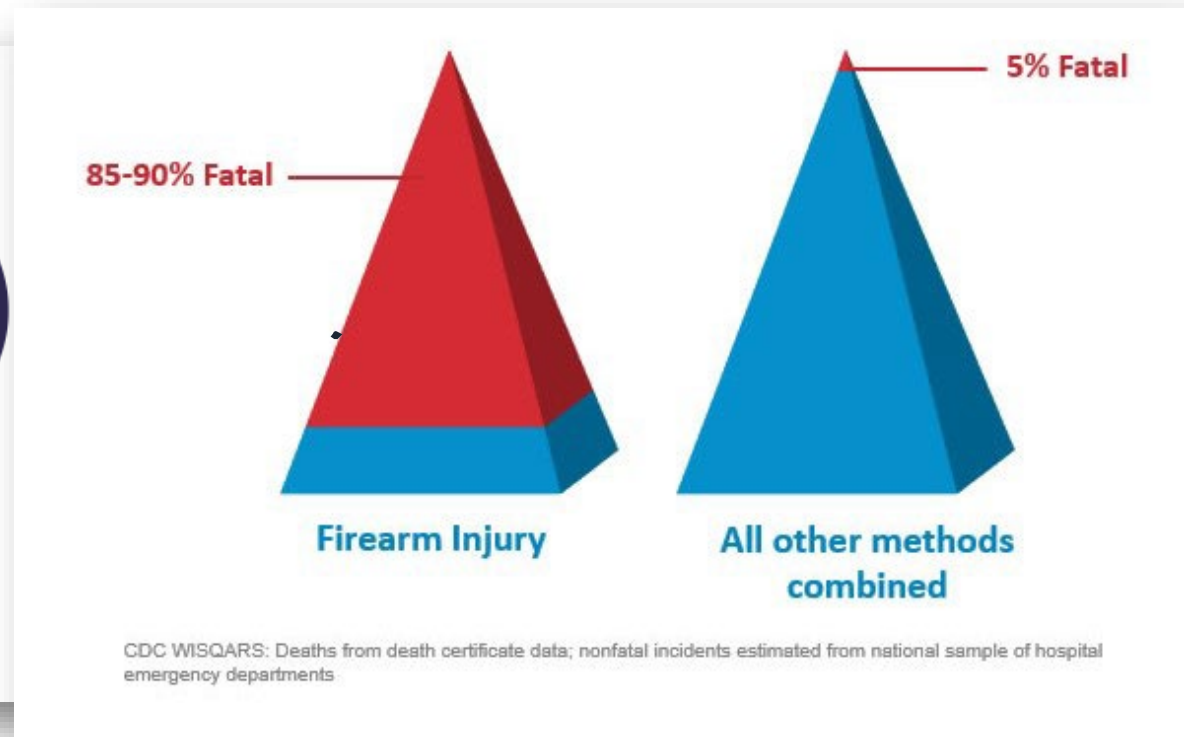
# What is Lethal Means Safety?

- In the context of suicide prevention, safe storage of lethal means is any action that builds in time and space between a person with thoughts of suicide and a suicide method.
- 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 Suicide 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(supp):49-59.



Source: CDC WISQARS and US Dept. of Veterans Affairs  
[Lethal Means Safety and Suicide Prevention](#)

# Lethal Means Safety Works

- Reducing access to lethal suicide methods is one of the few population 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 suicide crisis, we have likely prevented suicide for the **rest of their lives**.



# Common Myths vs. Realities

## Common Myths vs. Realities (1 of 4)

Myth	Reality
<p data-bbox="759 725 1788 902">People who talk about suicide are just seeking attention.</p>	

## Common Myths vs. Realities (2 of 4)

Myth	Reality
	<p>No matter how casually or jokingly said, suicide threats should never be ignored and may indicate serious suicidal feelings. Someone who talks about suicide provides others with an opportunity to intervene before suicidal behaviors occur.</p>

## Common Myths vs. Realities (3 of 4)

Myth	Reality
<p>The only one who can really help someone who is suicidal is a mental health counselor or therapist.</p>	

## Common Myths vs. Realities (4 of 4)

Myth	Reality
	<p>Special training is not required to safely raise the subject of suicide. Helping someone feel included and showing genuine, heartfelt support can also make a big difference during a challenging time.</p>



**But I did stay at a Holiday Inn Express Last Night...**

# The Steps of VA S.A.V.E.

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

**VA S.A.V.E.** will help you act with care and compassion if you encounter a Veteran who is in suicidal crisis.

- **S**igns of suicidal thinking should be recognized.
- **A**sk the most important question of all.
- **V**alidate the Veteran's experience.
- **E**ncourage treatment and **E**xpedite getting help.



# S

## Signs of Suicidal Thinking

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



## Signs of Suicidal Thinking

**The presence of any of the following signs requires immediate attention:1**

- Thinking about hurting or killing themselves
- Looking for ways to die
- Talking about death, dying, or suicide
- Self-destructive or risk-taking behavior, especially when it involves alcohol, drugs, or weapons



## Asking the Question (1 of 3)

**Know how to ask  
the most important question of all...**



## Asking the Question (2 of 3)

“Are you thinking about killing yourself?”

“Are you having thoughts of suicide?”

“Are you having thoughts about taking your life?”

# A

## Asking the Question (3 of 3)

Do's	Don'ts
<p><b>DO</b> ask the question if you've identified warning signs or symptoms.</p>	<p><b>DON'T</b> ask the question as though you are looking for a "no" answer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "You aren't thinking of killing yourself, are you?"</li></ul>
<p><b>DO</b> ask the question in a natural way that flows with the conversation.</p>	<p><b>DON'T</b> wait to ask the question when someone is halfway out the door.</p>

# A

## Asking the Question: Check-In and Practice

- What are your thoughts about “Asking the question”?
- What initial concerns do you have?
- Let me demonstrate a few ways of asking the question — both good and bad — and you can tell me which ones you think are most effective and direct.

# V

## Validate the Veteran's Experience

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





## Validate the Veteran's Experience: Check-In & Practice

- Who can share with me a validating statement?
- Turn to a partner and practice the following:
  - In response to an “invitation statement” such as, “Everything is so hard. I feel like a drag on my friends.”
    - Start by telling your partner, “Everything will be fine.” (Partner should respond.)
    - Shift instead to a statement that validates their feelings. (Partner should respond.)
- What did you notice?



# E

## Encourage Treatment and Expedite Getting Help

- What should I do if I think someone is suicidal?
  - Don't 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 emergency room.
  - Call 911. Reassure the Veteran that help is available.
- Call the Veterans Crisis Line at **1-800-273-8255 and Press 1.**

# What to Do if a Veteran Expresses Suicidal Ideation During a Phone Call

- Keep the caller on the line (do not hang up or transfer).
- Remain calm.
- Obtain identifying information on the caller (name, phone number, and current location).
- Conference call to VCL (don't hang up until VCL responder has the call).
- Enlist co-workers for assistance via Instant Messaging in Teams.
- If caller disconnects, call back immediately.  
If no answer, dial 911 and VCL (**1-800-273-8255 and Press 1.**).

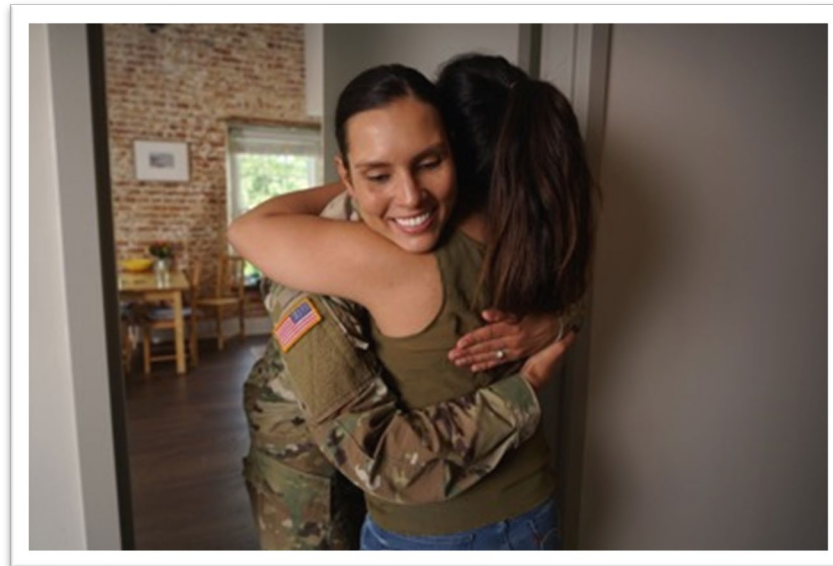
**Tip:** Practice conferencing in calls at your desk with coworkers.

# When Talking with a Veteran 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 — let the Veteran know that there are no quick solutions, but help is available.

## Practice Session (1 of 2)

- **Goal:** To develop a level of comfort and confidence in asking about suicide and helping a Veteran who is thinking about suicide.



## Practice Session (2 of 2)

Imagine that you are talking to a friend, family member, or co-worker whom you know well. You also know this person has been having a lot of personal problems lately and seems to be withdrawing from activities, and overall seems “down” much of the time. They mention that everything feels “hopeless.”

- **Step 1:** As you begin your conversation with them, listen for the problems that they believe suicide would solve and listen for a **sign** — an invitation statement. When you hear a warning sign, find a way to **ask** the question, e.g., “You seem very overwhelmed right now. Are you thinking about suicide?”
- **Step 2:** As you listen, make sure to **validate** their experience or feelings. Continue to listen and try to **expedite** them to the appropriate level of care.
- **Switch roles.**

# Remember

## VA S.A.V.E.

**S**

**S**igns of suicidal thinking should be recognized.

**A**

**A**sk the most important question of all.

**V**

**V**alidate the Veteran's experience.

**E**

**E**ncourage treatment and Expedite getting help.



## Signs of Suicidal Thinking

What signs did you identify?



## Asking the Question

What did you notice about your “ask?”





## Validate the Veteran's Experience

What did your partner do or say that was validating?



**E**

## Encourage Treatment and Expedite Getting Help

What did you do to expedite getting help?  
How comfortable would you be recommending resources?

# Debrief

Thought, feelings, or questions about the exercise?

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# Questions?

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# Resources

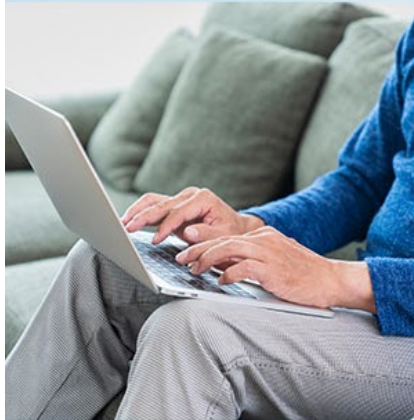
# Free, Confidential Support 24/7/365

- Veterans
- Service members
- Family members
- Friends



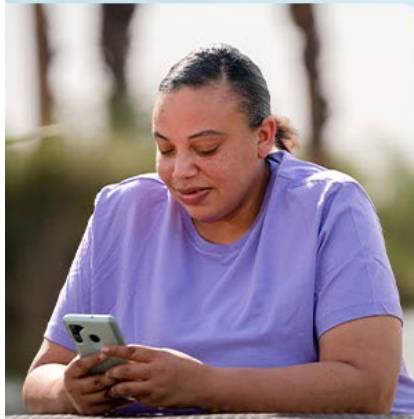
**CALL**

Dial 988 then Press 1



**CHAT**

[VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](https://VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat)

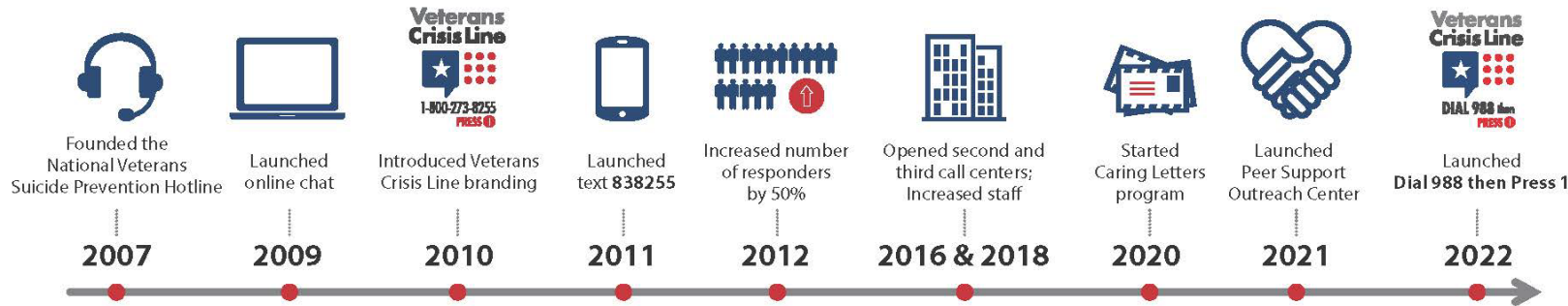


**TEXT**

838255



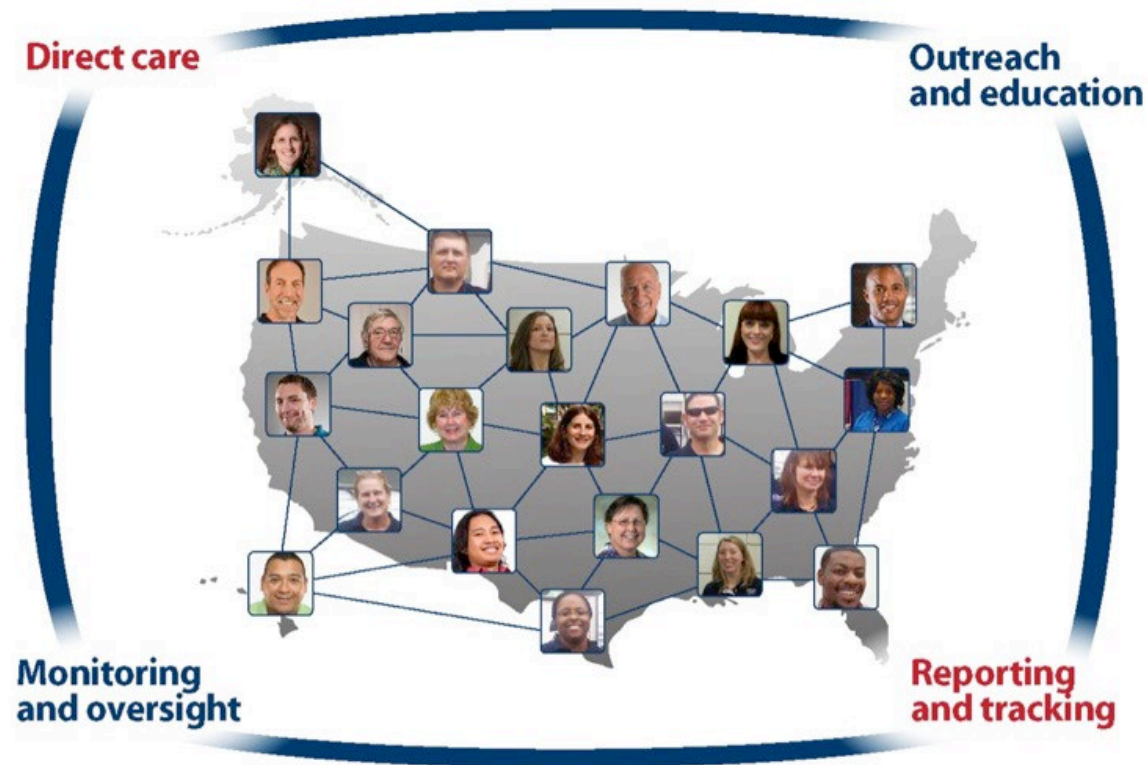
The Veterans Crisis Line is a free, confidential resource available to any Veteran, even if they are not enrolled in VA health care or registered with VA. Care does not end when the conversation is over. The Veterans Crisis Line can connect Veterans to their local suicide prevention coordinators, who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



Graphic can be found at [Spread the Word \(veteranscrisisline.net\)](https://veteranscrisisline.net)

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

More than 400 SPCs nationwide.





# VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator

The screenshot shows the homepage of VeteransCrisisLine.net. At the top left is the logo with a star and the text "Veterans Crisis Line" and "DIAL 988 then PRESS 1". To the right are buttons for "Dial 988 then Press 1" and "Chat", with "or Text 838255" below. A navigation menu includes "How We Help", "Signs of Crisis", "Resources and Support", and "About". Below the menu, it says "Home > Local Resources". The main heading is "Local Resources" with a sub-heading "Are you looking for clinical care or counseling? Assistance with benefits? No matter what you're experiencing, we're here to connect you with resources and support systems to help." At the bottom is a search section titled "Search Local VA Resources" with a "Find a Resource" input field, a "Within:" dropdown set to "50 Miles", and a "Search" button. A "Use Current Location" link is also present.

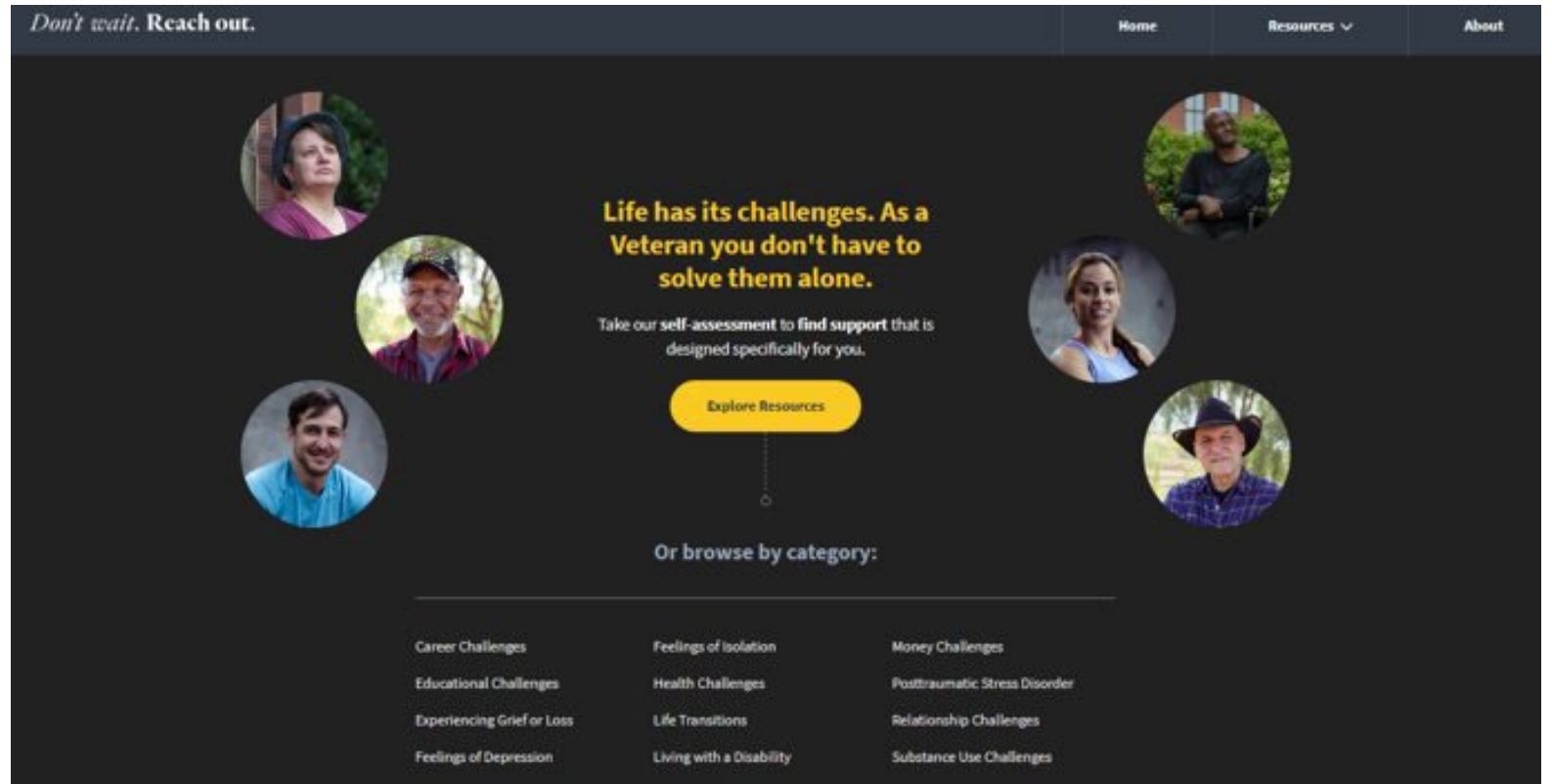


The screenshot shows the search results page. The heading is "Search Local VA Resources". On the left, under "Find a Resource", there is an input field for "Enter City, State, or ZIP", a "Use Current Location" link, and a "Within:" dropdown set to "50 Miles". Below this is a list of resource types with checkboxes: "Suicide Prevention Coordinators", "VA Medical Centers", "Outpatient Clinics", "Vet Centers", and "Veterans Benefits Administration Offices". A "Search" button is at the bottom of this list. On the right, it says "Showing 10 Results out of 11 for 14424". Two results are shown: "Canandaigua VA Medical Center" (400 Fort Hill Avenue, Canandaigua, NY 14424-1159, 0 miles away, phone 585-393-7100, and a "Visit website" link) and "Suicide Prevention, Team Canandaigua/Rochester" (400 Fort Hill Avenue, Canandaigua, NY 14424) with an "Email" button.

# Don't Wait. Reach Out.

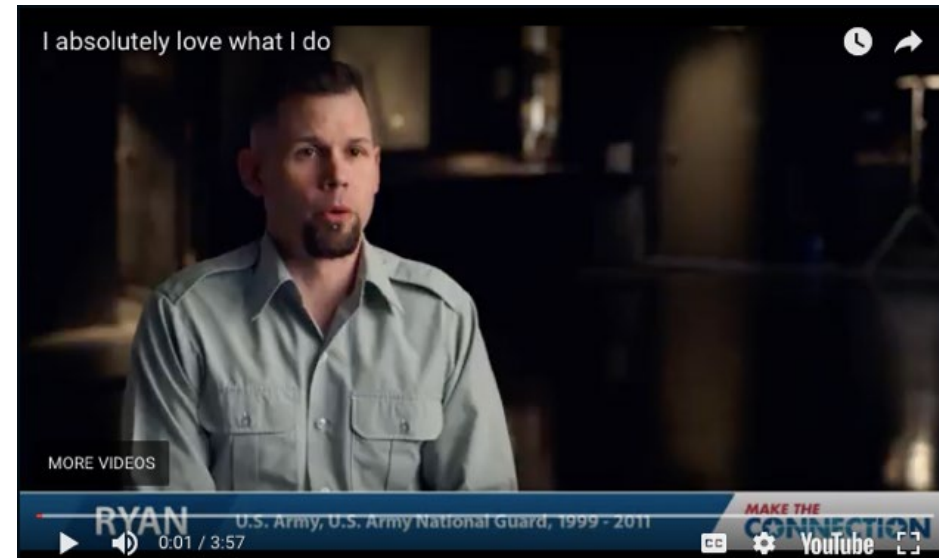
Find the right  
Veteran Quickly  
and Easily

[Don't Wait. Reach  
Out. \(va.gov\)](https://va.gov)



# Make The Connection

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



[Make the Connection Website](#)

# Practice secure storage of firearms, medications and other lethal means

- Visit the [Keep it Secure](#) website 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](#).

VA U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

VA Benefits and Health Care About VA Find a VA Location

VA Health Care RCACI1 Firearm Suicide Prevention & Lethal Means Safety

## REACH

Mental Health More Health Care

QUICK LINKS

- Hospital Locator
- Health Programs
- Protect Your Health
- A-Z Health Topics

Veterans Crisis Line  
DIAL 988 then PRESS 1

My healthvet  
My Health, My Care, my Access to VA

### Keep It Secure

Firearm Storage Medication Storage Support Resources

Are you a Veteran in crisis or concerned about one?  
Find support anytime day or night

#### Lethal Means Safety & Suicide Prevention

Lethal means are objects that may be used by individuals experiencing a suicidal crisis. They include things like guns, medications, alcohol, opioids, other substances, ropes, cords, or sharp objects. If a Veteran is in crisis or is having suicidal thoughts, these items can become deadly if easily accessible.

Increasing the time and distance between a person in suicidal crisis and their access to lethal means can reduce suicide risk and save lives. The VA Keep It Secure program promotes awareness about the simple steps you can take to protect yourself and your family.

Nearly 7 out of every 10 Veteran deaths by suicide are the result of firearm injuries.  
- Department of Veterans Affairs (2021)

Learn more about the warning signs of suicide, including those that require immediate action.

Learn More

# New Lethal Means Safety Resources

[Reducing Firearm & Other Household Safety Risks Brochure](#) provides best practices for securely storing firearms and medications along with advice for loved ones on how to talk to the Veteran in their life about safe storage.

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

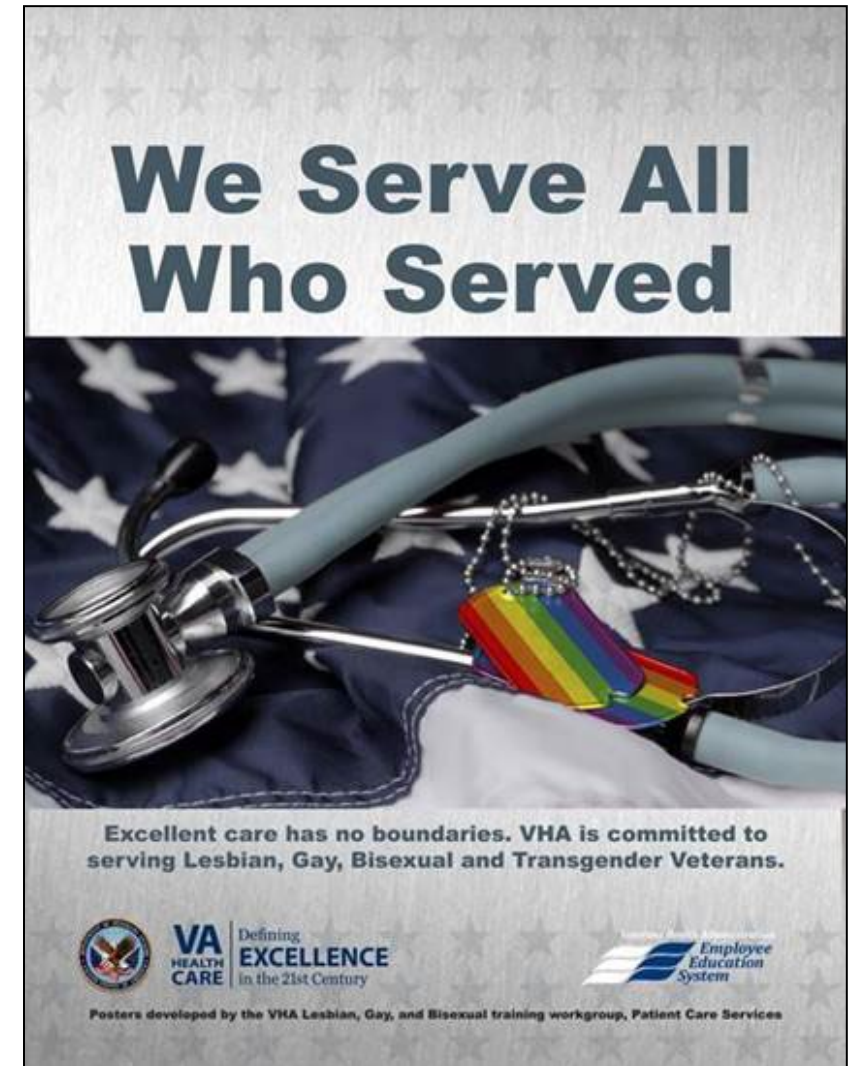


**Firearm safety is an important public health issue that can affect your health and your family's well-being.**

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.













# LGBTQ+

- The VA supports the LGBTQ+ community and provides care for LGBTQ+ Veterans. Here is where you can find resources:
  - Every VHA facility has a LGBTQ+ Veteran Care Coordinator – contact information can be found by state on the VAs website. [LGBTQ+ Veteran Care Coordinator \(LGBTQ+ VCC\) Locator - Patient Care Services \(va.gov\)](#)

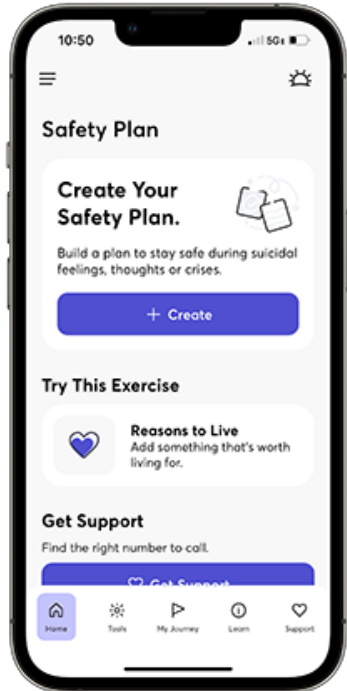


# Mental Health Mobile Apps

Mobile Apps – [National Center for PTSD \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov)

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

# Check out the new Safety Plan app!



Safety Plan helps Veterans create a personalized step-by-step action plan to keep themselves safe during a crisis. It is highly customizable and provides access to coping tools, self-assessment measures, and crisis support resources like the Veterans Crisis Line.

Download the app today by using the QR code, or by visiting the [App Store](#) or [Google Play](#).



Note: Safety Plan is a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs app, developed by the National Center for PTSD Dissemination and Training Division and the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention.





# Supporting Providers Who Serve Veterans

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

To request a consult: [srmconsult@va.gov](mailto:srmconsult@va.gov)

*#NeverWorryAlone*

[MIRECC VA website: Supporting Providers Who Serve Veterans](#)



**Risk assessment**



**Lethal means safety counseling**



**Conceptualization of suicide risk**



**Best practices for documentation**



**Strategies for how to engage Veterans at high risk**

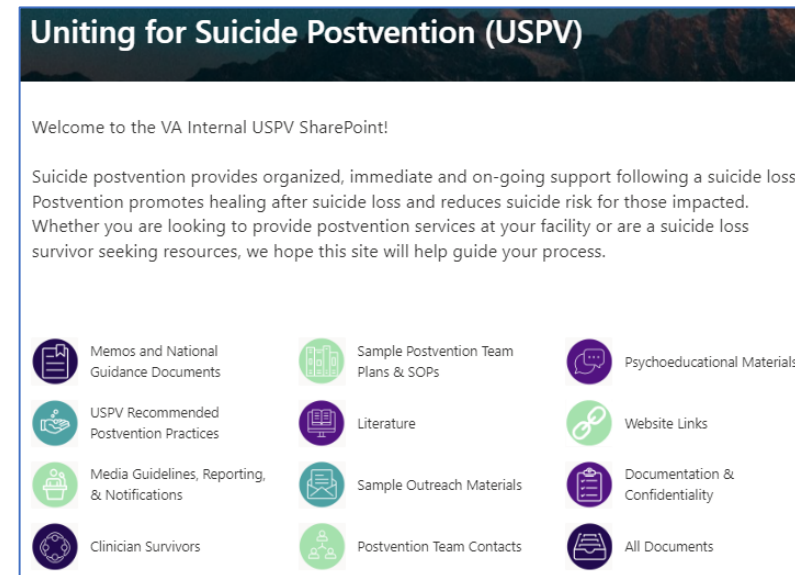


**Provider support after a suicide loss (Postvention)**



# Uniting for Suicide Postvention

USPV offers resources and support to those impacted by suicide loss to promote healing and reduce suicide risk.



SRM also offers consultation to facilities / leaders (e.g., planning postvention responses, developing postvention teams) and providers (e.g., to process a patient suicide loss)

[MIRECC Uniting for Suicide Postvention](#)

## 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: [Psych Armor Courses](#)



# Stay Connected

Follow us on social media to stay up to date on our programs and initiatives



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Administration](#)



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**Any Additional Questions?**

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# Contact Information

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734-968-9318 (call or text)