

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# S.A.V.E. Training

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*VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention  
(OMHSP)*

*Suicide Prevention Program*

# A Little Housekeeping Before We Start:

- 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: 1-800-273-8255
      - Service members and Veterans should press 1 to connect with the Veterans Crisis Line.
    - INSERT IMMEDIATE LOCAL RESOURCE, If present (e.g., EAP, Community Partners, Counselor Onsite, etc.)

# Overview

- Objectives
- Facts about Suicide
- Common Myths vs. Realities
- The Steps of S.A.V.E.
- S.A.V.E. Training
- Resources and References

# Objectives

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

- Have a general understanding of the scope of 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.

# Before We Continue

What is your biggest question around suicide and talking to people in crisis?

# Facts About Suicide

# 2019 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report

- **Annual Report**
  - Reports on trends in Veteran suicide deaths from 2005–2017
  - Focuses on suicide counts and rates among various Veteran subpopulations
- **State Data Sheets**
  - Examined state level Veteran suicide deaths and compared to national and regional trends
  - 53 data sheets available for all 50 states, D.C., Puerto Rico, and U.S. Territories



Access the reports online:

[https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/mentalhealth/suicide\\_prevention/data.asp](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/mentalhealth/suicide_prevention/data.asp)

# Data: Suicide in the U.S.

- **National public health problem (as defined by CDC)**
  - Over 45,000 Americans died by suicide in 2017, including 6,139 Veterans.
- **Service member and Veteran issue**
  - In 2017, the suicide rate for Veterans was 1.5 times the rate for non-Veteran adults.
- **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



# 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

# Key Data Points

## 2017 Key Data Points



The rate of suicide was

**2.2** *times higher*  
among female Veterans

compared with non-Veteran adult women.

*\* after accounting for differences in age*



The rate of suicide was

**1.3** *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.



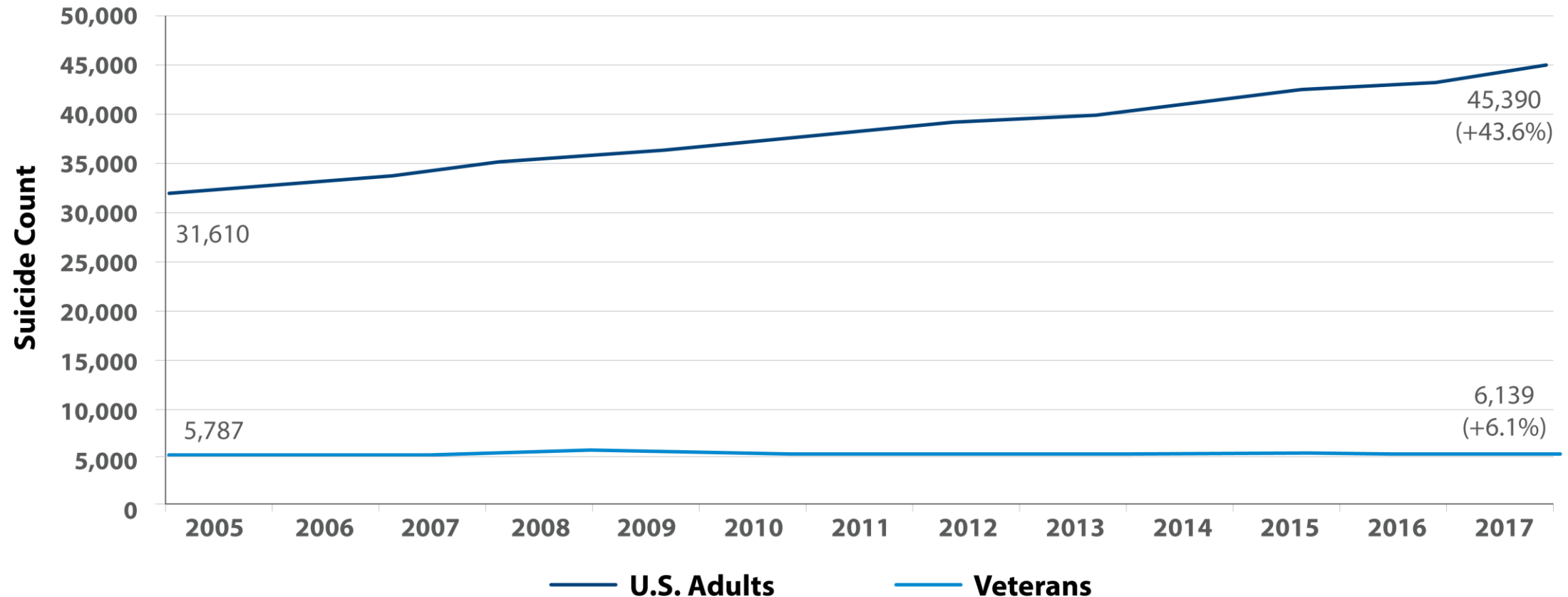
Male Veterans ages

**55 and older**

experienced the **highest count** of suicide.

**69%** of all Veteran suicide deaths resulted from a firearm injury.

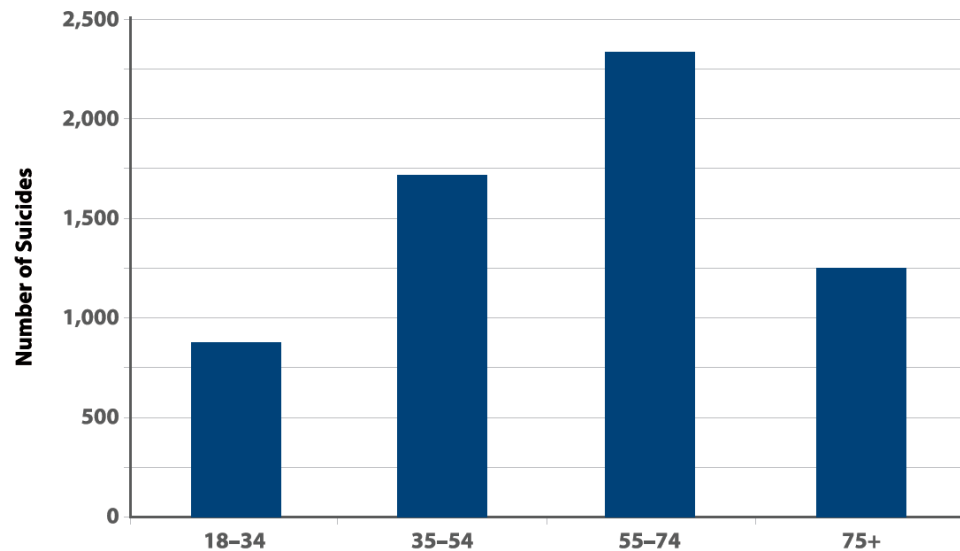
# Suicide Count, U.S. Adult and Veteran Populations (2005–2017)



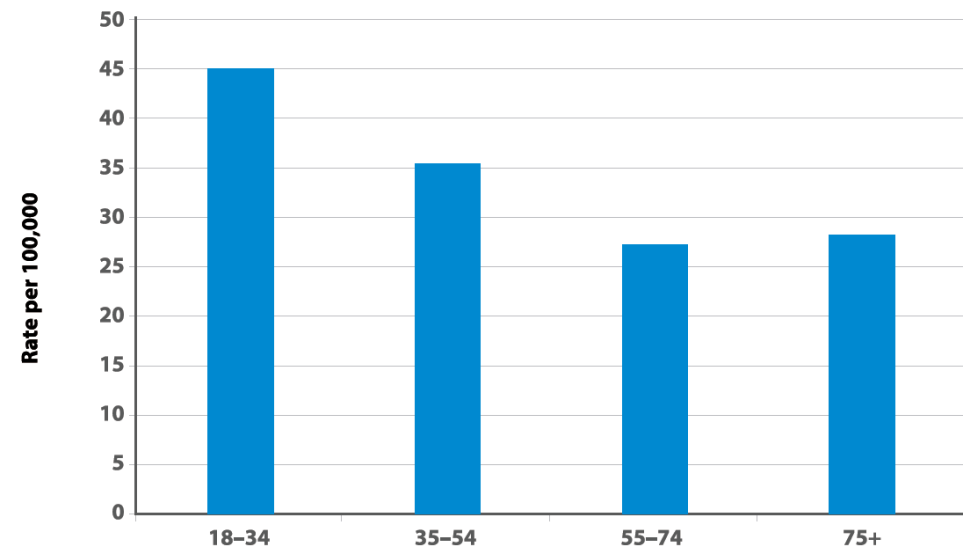
From 2005 to 2017, there was a 43.6% increase in the number of suicide deaths in the general population and a 6.1% increase in the number of suicide deaths in the Veteran population.

# Veteran Suicide Deaths: Count vs. Rate

## Veteran Suicide Deaths in 2017



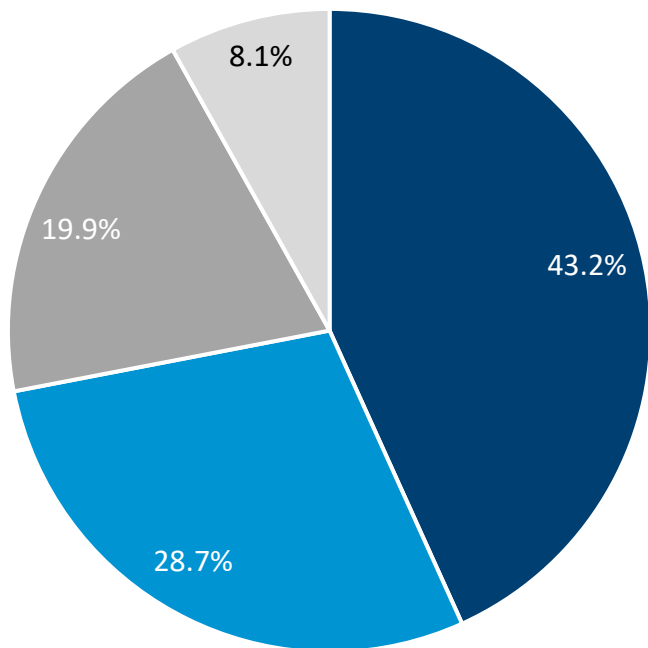
The absolute number of suicides was highest among Veterans ages 55–74.



Veterans ages 18–34 had the highest suicide rate.

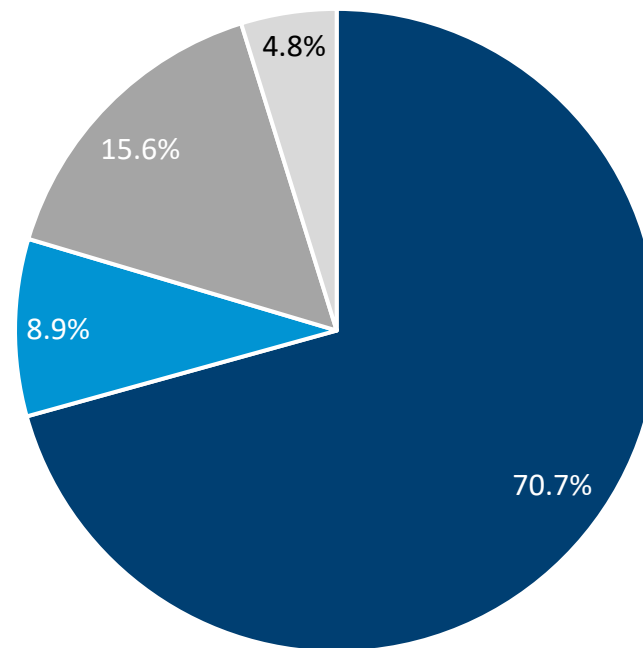
# U.S. Veterans and Suicide Methods (2017)

Female Veterans



■ Firearm Injury   ■ Poisoning  
■ Suffocation   ■ Other

Male Veterans



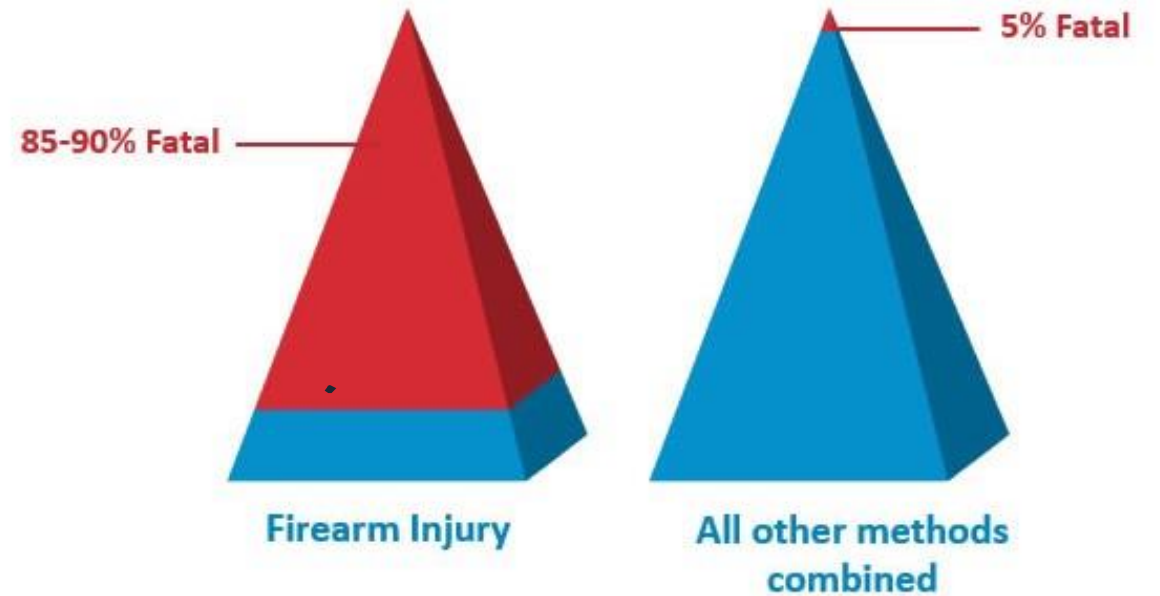
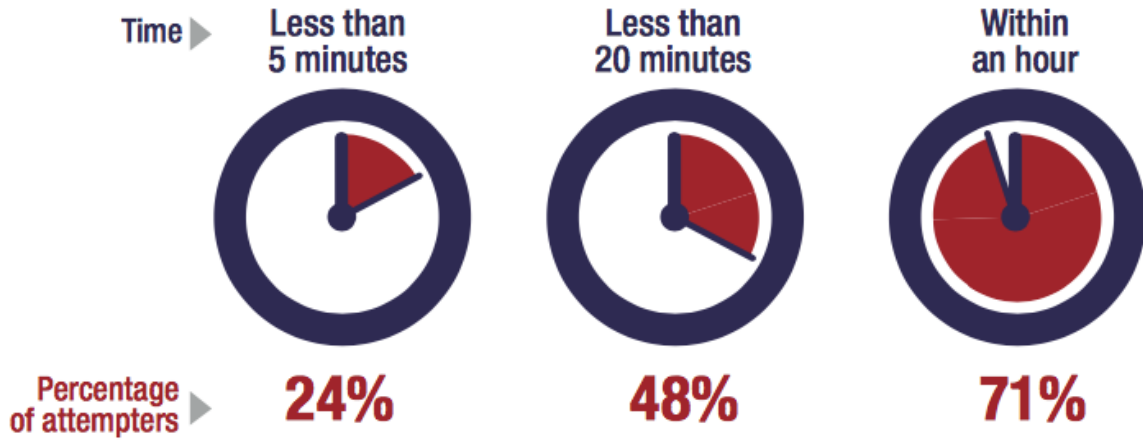
■ Firearm Injury   ■ Poisoning  
■ Suffocation   ■ Other

# Method of Suicide Among Veteran and Non-Veteran Adults Who Died by Suicide (2017)

Method	Percentage of Non-Veteran Adult Suicide Deaths	Percentage of Veteran Suicide Deaths	Percentage of Male Non-Veteran Adult Suicide Deaths	Percentage of Male Veteran Suicide Deaths	Percentage of Female Non-Veteran Adult Suicide Deaths	Percentage of Female Veteran Suicide Deaths
Firearm	48.1%	69.4%	53.5%	70.7%	31.3%	43.2%
Poisoning	14.9%	9.9%	9.2%	8.9%	32.3%	28.7%
Suffocation	28.7%	15.8%	29.3%	15.6%	26.6%	19.9%
Other	8.4%	5.0%	7.9%	4.8%	9.8%	8.1%

In 2017, 69.4% of Veteran suicide deaths were due to a self-inflicted firearm injury.

# Time From Decision to Action < 1 Hour



CDC WISQARS: Deaths from death certificate data; nonfatal incidents estimated from national sample of hospital emergency departments

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 <https://www.mirecc.va.gov/lethalthemeanssafety/facts/>

**Suicide  
is preventable.**



# Common Myths vs. Realities

# Common Myths vs. Realities

Myth	Reality
<p>People who talk about suicide are just seeking attention.</p>	

# Common Myths vs. Realities

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

# Common Myths vs. Realities

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

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>

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

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

**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.



## 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



# **S** Signs of Suicidal Thinking

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

- 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

# **A** Asking the Question

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



## Asking the Question

“Are you thinking about killing yourself?”

# A Asking the Question

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 & 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.
- Now, turn to a neighbor and practice asking the question with one of ways you feel would be most effective.

# **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.**

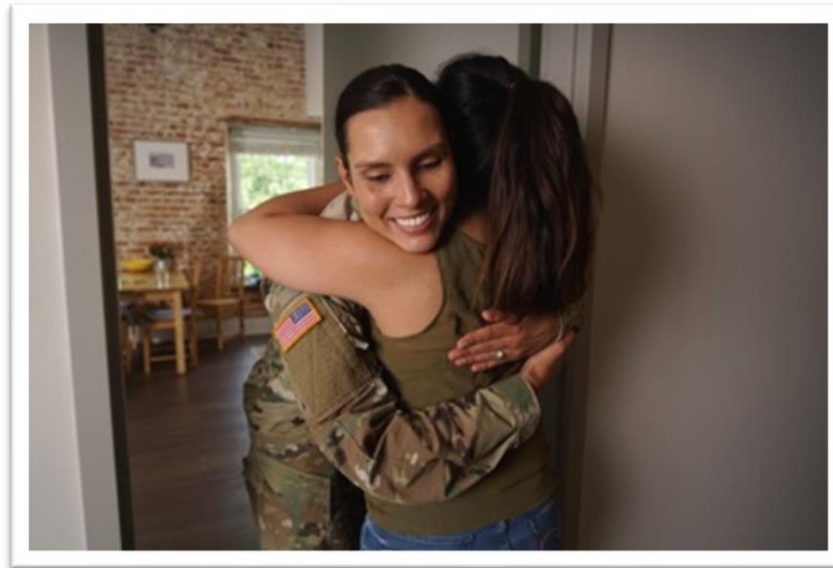


# When Talking with a Veteran at Risk for Suicide

- 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 Sessions

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



# Practice Sessions

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

## S.A.V.E.

**S**

Signs of suicidal thinking should be recognized.

**A**

Ask the most important question of all.

**V**

Validate the Veteran's experience.

**E**

Encourage treatment and Expedite getting help.

# **S** Signs of Suicidal Thinking

What signs did you pick up on?



## 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?



## Encourage Treatment and Expedite Getting Help

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



# Debrief

- Any other thoughts, feelings, questions?

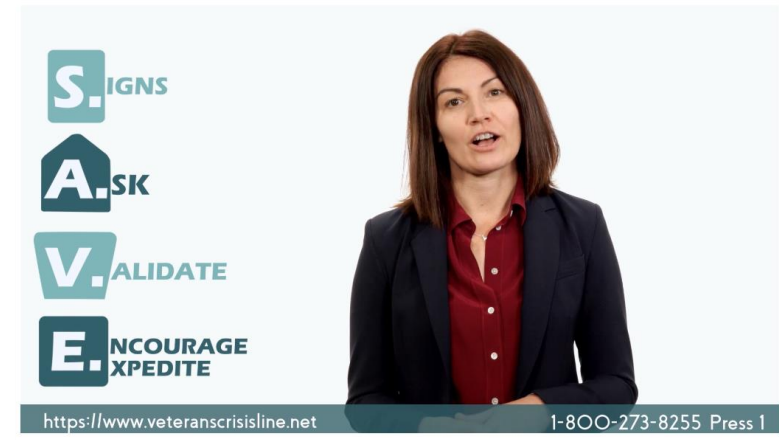
# Resources and References

*Psych Armor Institute's*

# S.A.V.E. Training: Spreading the Word

# S.A.V.E. Training

- A PsychArmor course developed in collaboration with the Department of Veterans Affairs and presented by Dr. Megan McCarthy, Former Deputy Director, Suicide Prevention
- After taking this 25-minute course, you will:
  - Develop a general understanding of the problem of suicide in the United States.
  - Understand how to identify a Veteran who may be at risk for suicide.
  - Know what to do if you identify a Veteran at risk.



[www.PsychArmorInstitute.org](http://www.PsychArmorInstitute.org)

# Utilize S.A.V.E. Training

- S.A.V.E. is a free online Veteran suicide prevention training found on Psycharmor.org.
- S.A.V.E. is provided through VA suicide prevention resources across the country, which can be found using VA's resource locator at [www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator](http://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator).

# S.A.V.E.

- HELP PEOPLE IDENTIFY A VETERAN AT RISK
- PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT HOW TO HELP A VETERAN IN DISTRESS

Available online for free: [psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e/](http://psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e/)

# Utilize S.A.V.E. Training

- There are two different ways to take S.A.V.E.
  1. Group setting
  2. Individually
- S.A.V.E. was designed to be watched as a group. This allows for greater discussion and interaction of the topics and video.



# Who Should Take S.A.V.E. Training?

This training is beneficial for anyone who interacts with Veterans, including:

- First responders
- Crisis line volunteers
- Law enforcement
- Members of clergy
- Individuals working in the justice system
- Health care employees
- Faith leaders
- Community members



Available online for free: [psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e/](https://psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e/)

# 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).
- Solicit co-workers for assistance via Skype, etc.
- If caller disconnects, dial 911 and VCL (**1-800-273-8255 and Press 1.**).

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



# Free, Confidential Support 24/7/365

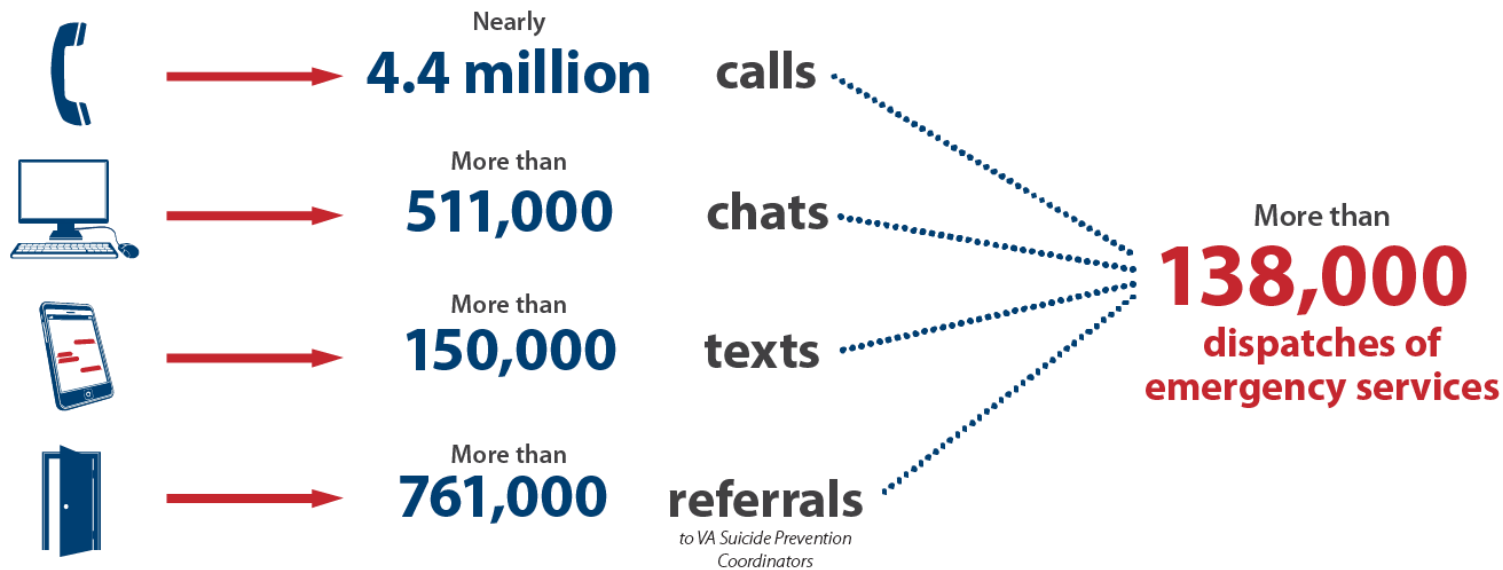
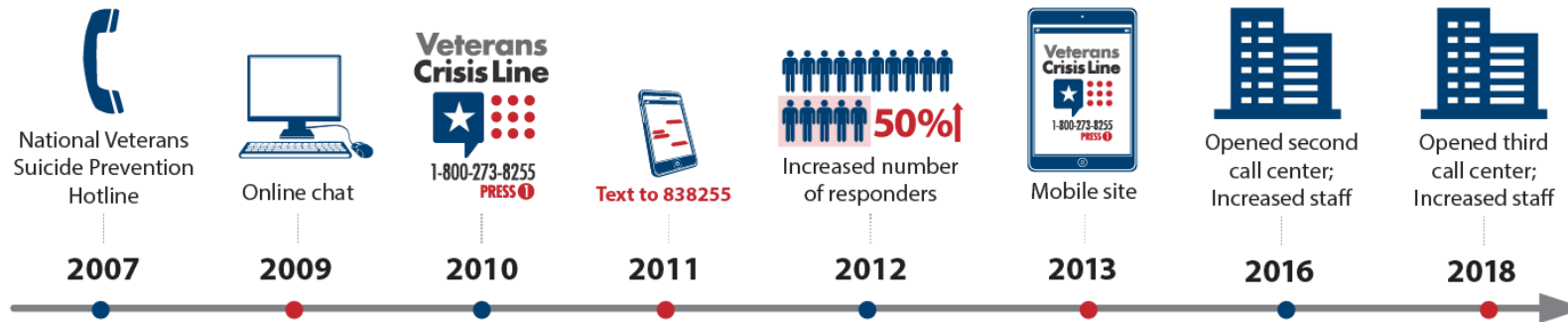


1-800-273-8255 **PRESS 1**

• • • Confidential chat at [VeteransCrisisLine.net](https://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net) or text to **838255** • • •

- Veterans
- Family members
- Service members
- Friends

# Veterans and Military Crisis Line



# #BeThere Prevention Initiative



**#BeThere**  
with a text or call to show you care.

BeThereForVeterans.com

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

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[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=60&v=MCSZ7FjTq5I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=60&v=MCSZ7FjTq5I)

# 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>

# 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**



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

More than 400 SPCs nationwide.







# VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator

## Resource Locator


**Locate Information and Resources**

No matter what you are experiencing, there is support for getting your life on a better track. To find the Veteran resources most helpful for you, fill in your ZIP code or state below and check the boxes of the programs or topics you are interested in. You can also select the National Resource Directory or the SAMHSA Behavioral Health tab to find additional services.






U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Resources



National Resource Directory Resources



SAMHSA Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator

### 1 Select a Resource

**Suicide Prevention Coordinators**  
Specially trained Suicide Prevention Coordinators or teams are available at all VA Medical Centers across the country.

**Crisis Centers**  
Search for community-based crisis centers in your area.

**VA Medical Centers**  
VA Medical Centers offer a range of acute care and community-based outpatient services, including mental health care, diagnostics, homeless and alcohol/drug abuse programs, nursing home and respite care.

**Outpatient Clinics**  
Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) are local VA locations that provide primary care, counseling, laboratory analysis, prescriptions and radiology services.

**Veterans Benefits Administration Offices**  
Veterans Benefits Administration Offices provide services to Veterans seeking benefits related to compensation, pension, vocational rehabilitation, home loans, death benefits, employment, and disability.

**Vet Centers**  
Vet Centers provide readjustment counseling and outreach services to all Veterans who have served in any combat zone, as well as their family members.

**All**  
See all VA and community-based services in your area.

### 2 Choose Location

Search by Zip Code   OR



## 2 Choose Location

Search by Zip Code   OR

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Results for **Suicide Prevention Coordinators** in state **ND**

**Monsebroten, Tammy**  
Fargo, ND 58102  
P: 701-239-3700x93556  
F: 701-237-2642  
[tammy.monsebroten@va.gov](mailto:tammy.monsebroten@va.gov);  
[raae.bickett@va.gov](mailto:raae.bickett@va.gov)

Results for **Crisis Centers** in state **ND**

**FirstLink HotLine**  
Fargo, ND 58103  
P: 701-293-6462  
F: 701-235-2476  
[visit website](#)

**--Standing Rock Line--**  
Fargo, ND 58103

Results for **VA Medical Centers** in state **ND**

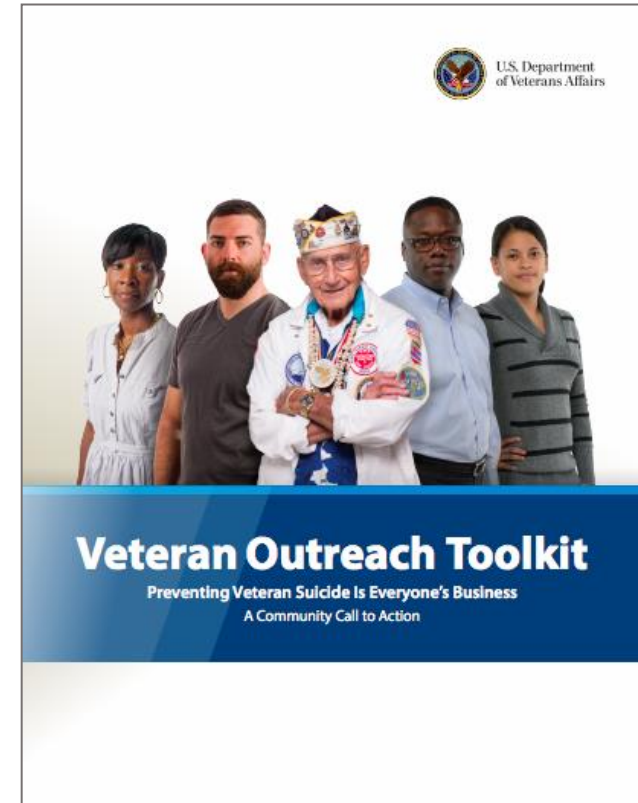
**Fargo VA Health Care System**  
2101 Elm Street N.  
Fargo, ND 58102  
P: 701-232-3241 Or 701-232-3241  
[visit website](#)



# Veteran Outreach Toolkit

Includes facts and myths about suicide, as well as information on:

- Establishing a suicide prevention council
- Talking to Veterans about their military service
- Assessing suicide risk
- Developing a suicide prevention safety plan
- Helping Veterans feel more connected to others
- Joining public-private partnerships



Access the toolkit online:

[go.usa.gov/xnwbz](https://go.usa.gov/xnwbz)



# Community Provider Toolkit

- Free online training on Veteran issues, including military culture, for health care providers.
- Includes tips for screening clients for military service.
- Military culture training can count for continuing education credits (CEUs): <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/communityproviders/military.asp>.



Access the toolkit online:

[www.mentalhealth.va.gov/communityproviders](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/communityproviders)

# Suicide Risk Management Consultation Program

## SUICIDE RISK MANAGEMENT Consultation Program

### FOR PROVIDERS WHO SERVE VETERANS

#### Why worry alone?

The Suicide Risk Management Consultation Program provides free consultation for any provider, community or VA, who serves Veterans at risk for suicide.

#### Common consultation topics include:

- Risk Assessment
- Conceptualization of Suicide Risk
- Lethal Means Safety Counseling
- Strategies for How to Engage Veterans at High Risk
- Best Practices for Documentation
- Provider Support after a Suicide Loss (Postvention)

*#NeverWorryAlone*

To initiate a consult email:

[SRMconsult@va.gov](mailto:SRMconsult@va.gov)

[www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/consult](http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/consult)

ROCKY MOUNTAIN  
MIRECC

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