



**A Public Health Approach to Suicide Prevention for
Service Members, Veterans, and Families**



Background

- Suicide was the 10th leading cause of death in 2020:
 - 2nd leading cause of death for ages 10-14 and 25-34 years.
 - VHA: Virginia veterans: 177 deaths in 2018, 188 (2019), 181 (2020).
- VHA: More than 6,000 veterans died by suicide each year from 2008-2019:
 - Suicide rate for veterans was 57% greater than non-Veteran U.S. adults (2020).
 - **~17 veterans died by suicide every day (2020).**
 - **10 not connected to USDVA healthcare prior to death.**

Anchors of Hope



343 fewer Veterans died from suicide in 2020 than in 2019, reflecting the lowest count of Veteran suicides since 2006.



The age-adjusted suicide rate for women Veterans in 2020 was the lowest since 2013, a decrease of 14%.



From 2019 to 2020, there were consecutive reductions in suicides. From 2018 to 2020, adjusted rates for Veterans fell by 9.7%. By comparison, the adjusted rate for non-Veteran U.S. adults fell by 5.5%



So far, there does not appear to be an increase in Veteran suicides related to COVID-19, but the data continues to be gathered and will be reviewed.

And yet, we need to do more. We cannot do this work without each of you.

Introductory Suicide Prevention Training

S.A.V.E. Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eljsbl3zu-A>



| Training Key Points

- S – Signs
- A – Ask
- V – Validate
- E – Encourage and Expedite



**Governor's and Mayor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide
Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families**



VA's 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](#).



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Priority Areas of Focus



Identify service members, Veterans, and their families and screen for suicide risk



Promote connectedness and improve care transitions



Increase lethal means safety and safety planning

Regional and Statewide Teams

- **Richmond Mayor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide**
 - Began in March 2018
 - City-level strategic planning initiative for comprehensive suicide prevention
 - Local Public Mental Health Center, **Richmond Behavioral Health Authority**, is the lead for Mayor Levar Stoney
- **Virginia Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide (GCPS)**
 - Began in December 2018 (*in the first group of 7 States Nationwide*) and took Mayor's Challenge Work statewide
 - **Secretaries of Health and Human Resources and Veterans and Defense Affairs Co-Lead this effort**
 - Statewide coordination by Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services and Department of Veterans Services

Join Us in Action

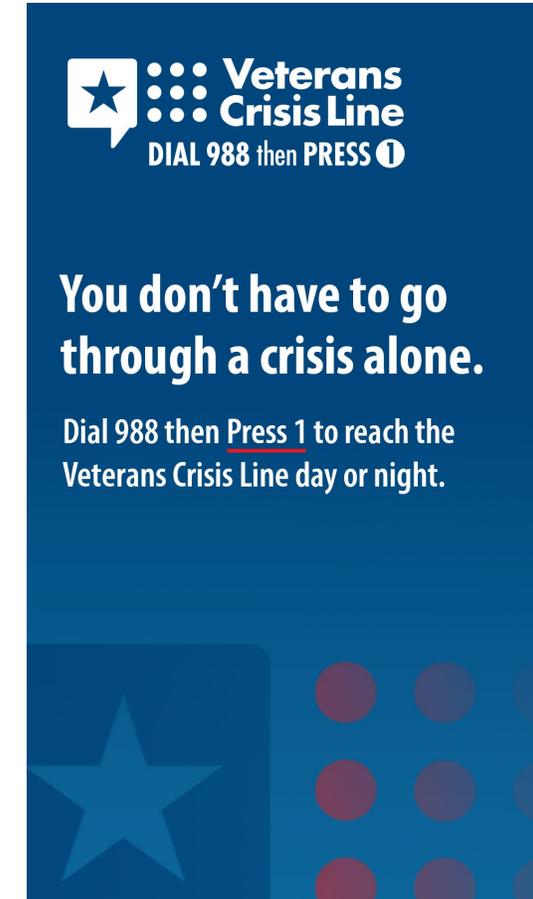
- We prevent suicide through meaningful connection, one person at a time. Here's what you can do to help prevent Veteran suicide:
 - Become knowledgeable about **suicide data and suicide prevention resources**. All resources can be downloaded at: https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/data.asp.
 - Promote **VA S.A.V.E. Training** to your community: <https://psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e/>.
 - Help create a safe community by posting the **Veterans Crisis Line** number (**Dial 988 then Press 1**) around campus and community settings.
 - Provide connections to peer and clinical support resources:
 - DVS Virginia Veteran and Family Support Program <https://www.dvs.virginia.gov/virginia-veteran-and-family-support-2>
 - Don't Wait. Reach Out. Campaign <https://www.va.gov/REACH/>

Share 988/Veterans Crisis Line with your Networks

- The Veterans Crisis Line has a new, easy-to-remember number: [Dial 988 then Press 1](#).
- Help spread the word by visiting [VeteransCrisisLine.net](#) to find downloadable assets.

Here are a few simple actions you can take:

- Update your websites and digital assets with the new logo
- Share on social media using sample posts and graphics for use on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram
- Use a Dial 988 then Press 1 email signature image and video conference background
- Share the pre-written newsletter, blog, and email content with your networks



Promote Suicide Prevention Training Resources

The Virginia Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide team offers a FREE video training portal from PsychArmor

- Includes 15 courses in military culture, suicide prevention, and safety planning
- Portal Link: <https://governorchallenge.psycharmor.org/>
 - Click Join my State/Territory Team (select Virginia) and share this resource widely

Promote Lethal Means Safety

Lock and Talk Virginia – <https://lockandtalk.org/>

- Support to prevent suicide by limiting access to firearms, medications, and other potentially dangerous items during a mental health crisis.
- Initiative provides:
 - Suicide prevention training and educational materials
 - Safety devices - medication boxes and gun locks
 - Support material for gun retailers and ranges
 - Consulting services to schools, workplaces, and organizations on suicide prevention policies and resources



Join Virginia's Identify, Screen, and Refer (VISR) Program

- Goals:
 - Enhance training in military culture, suicide prevention, and safety planning
 - Expand suicide risk screening in community settings
- **Help us bring the VISR program to your campus!**
 - Register now with this interest/needs survey:
https://gmuchss.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_560ywErc7FVsVF4
 - Training/support will be tailored to program/agency needs – for questions, please email the VISR team at Renshaw.Lab@gmail.com

Provide Postvention (After Loss) Support

- Postvention – organized response after a suicide loss to
 - Facilitate healing
 - Mitigate negative effects of exposure to suicide
 - Prevent suicide among individuals that are high risk after exposure to suicide
- Postvention Resources:
 - Suicide Prevention Resource Center - <https://www.sprc.org/comprehensive-approach/postvention>
 - [College Campus Postvention Guide](#)
 - Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors - military suicide loss support - <https://www.taps.org/suicide>



| Discussion

Thank you.

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