

# 2024 American Legion Auxiliary Mid Winter Conference



**American Legion Auxiliary  
Leaders light the path for  
VETERANS,  
the ALA, and each other.**

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# VA S.A.V.E. Training

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

*Community Engagement and Partnership  
Program*

## Before We Begin:

- 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: 988
      - 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.

## 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.



# 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.

# 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

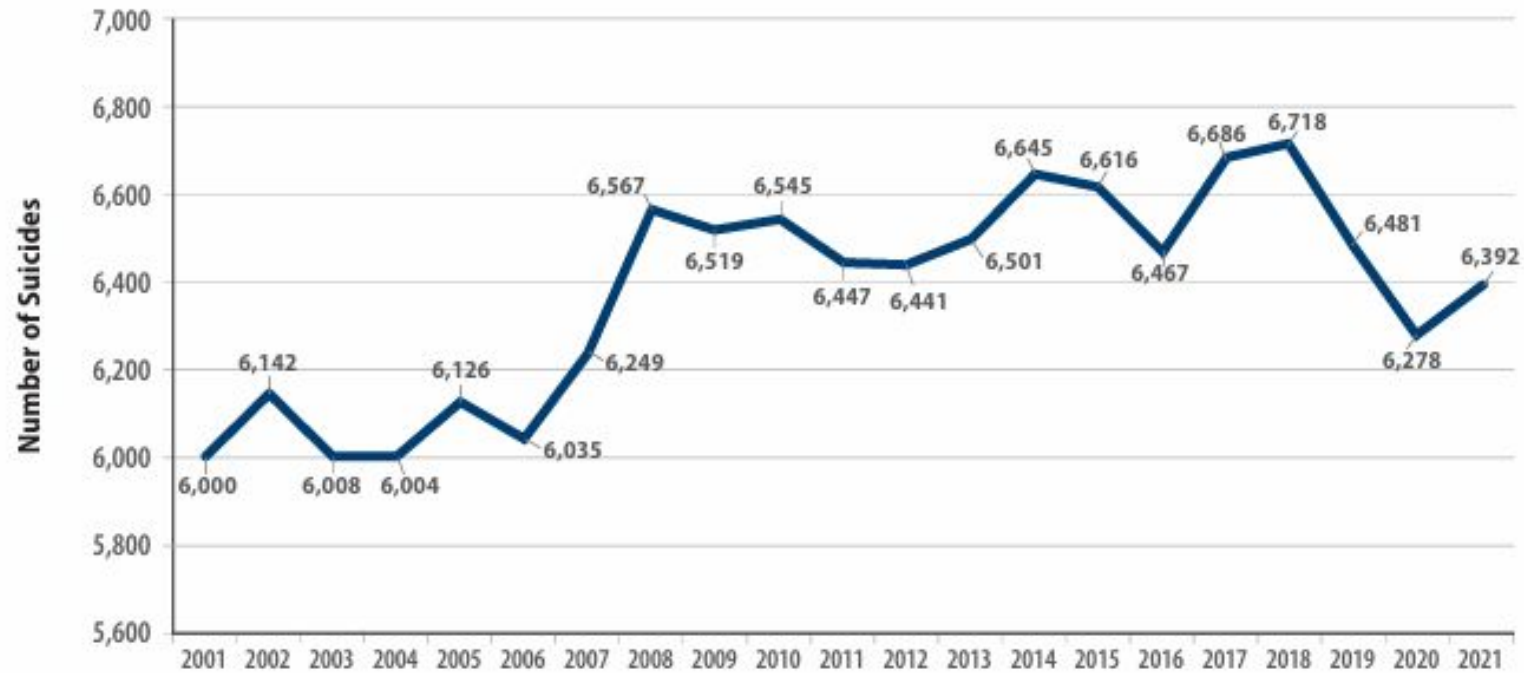


**Goal:** Minimize risk factors and boost protective factors

**Key Findings:**  
***2023 National Veteran Suicide  
Prevention Annual Report***

# Veteran Suicide Deaths, 2001-2021

Figure 2: Veteran Suicide Deaths, 2001–2021



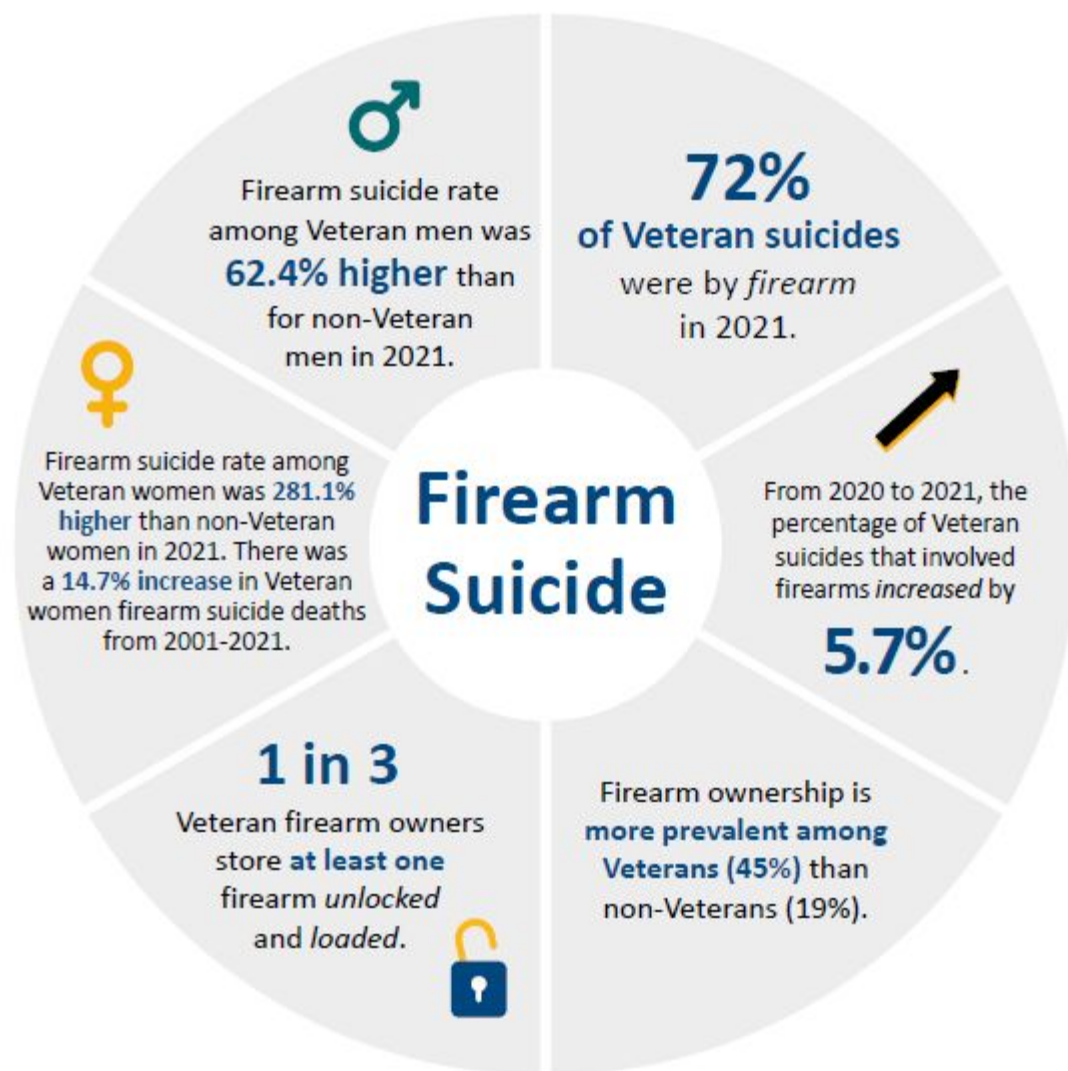
# Contributing Factors

- COVID-19
- Veteran Mortality (All Cause, +13.7%)
- Financial Strain
- Housing Instability
- Sociopolitical Instability/Volatility
- Anxiety & Depression
- ETOH (ethyl alcohol) Misuse/Abuse
- Family Relationship Strain
- Firearm Access



- Health Care Use
- Social Support
- Community Integration
- Firearm Secure Storage

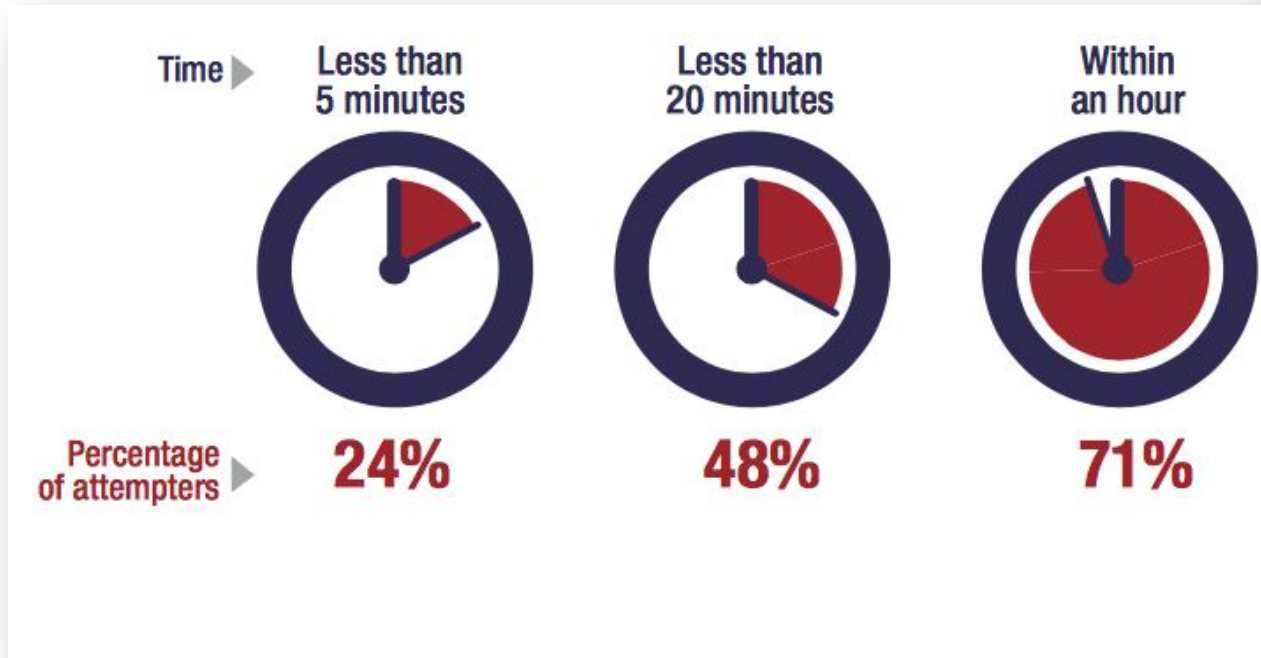




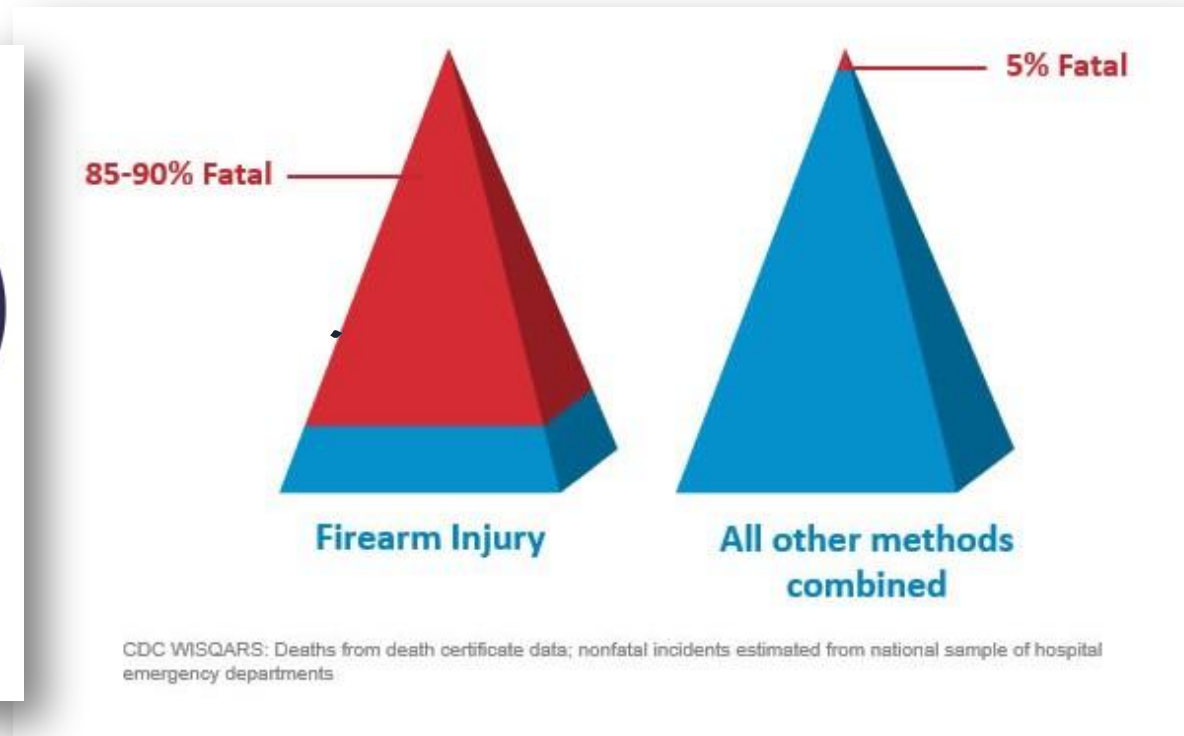
# What is Lethal Means Safety?

- In the context of suicide prevention, safe storage of lethal means is any action that builds in time and space between a suicidal impulse and the ability to harm oneself.
- 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 Suicidal 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  
<https://www.mirecc.va.gov/lethalmeanssafety/facts/>



## Lethal Means Safety Works

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

**Suicide  
is preventable.**



# Common Myths vs. Realities

# Common Myths vs. Realities

Myth	Reality
<p data-bbox="693 668 1854 843">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 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

# **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>



## 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.



# **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 **988 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 (**988 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.

*Let's Talk It Out Together*

## Background Information

- Veteran is a 28-year-old, male
- Married with infant child
- Recently separated from service approximately one year ago
- Physical pain due to sustained injury during time in service
- Recently laid off from third job since separation
- Financial stress
- Social anxiety (Being around large crowds) and Post-Traumatic Stress prevented the Veteran from going on vacation with his family

## Scenario

You are the neighbor of a Veteran who typically greets you every morning on your way to work when they are walking their beloved dog. The Veteran is usually pleasant and engaging, however, the last few days, the Veteran has been increasingly irritable. The Veteran has not been outside with their dog as usual and has not been saying hello to you each morning. Yesterday, the Veteran placed multiple belongings including a medal he received during his time in service and several empty alcohol bottles in the recycling bin. You know that the Veteran's family is out of the country on vacation. Recently, the Veteran posted on Facebook they are looking for a sitter for their beloved dog until their family returns. You begin to wonder if the Veteran is doing okay. What do you do next?

# Remember

## VA 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.

**VA**



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# **S** Signs of Suicidal Thinking

What signs can you identify in the scenario?



## Asking the Question

Do you think it is appropriate for the neighbor to ask if the Veteran is experiencing suicidal thoughts?





## Asking the Question

If you were the neighbor, how would you “ask the question”?



## Validate the Veteran's Experience

How would you validate the Veteran?



## Encourage Treatment and Expedite Getting Help

How would you encourage treatment and expediate getting help?



## Encourage Treatment and Expedite Getting Help

The Veteran says no, what would you do?

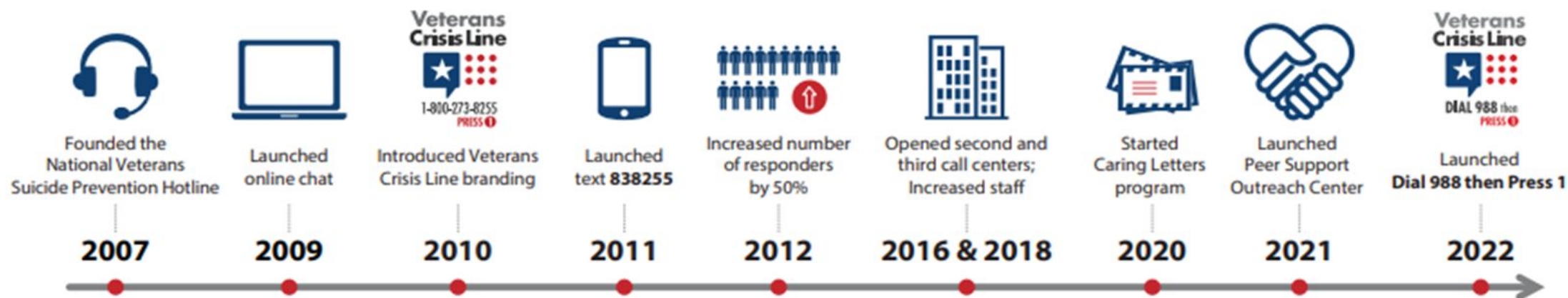
# Resources

Free, Confidential Support 24/7/365



- Veterans
- Service members
- Family members
- Friends

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.



More than  
**6.2 million**  
calls



More than  
**253,000**  
texts



More than  
**739,000**  
chats



More than  
**1.1 million**  
referrals

*to VA Suicide Prevention Coordinators*

More than  
**233,000**  
dispatches of  
emergency services

# 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](#)

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

## Take a Moment — Reach Out

Veterans have been trained to carry the heavy stuff,  
but don't have to go through it alone.

TAKE A MOMENT

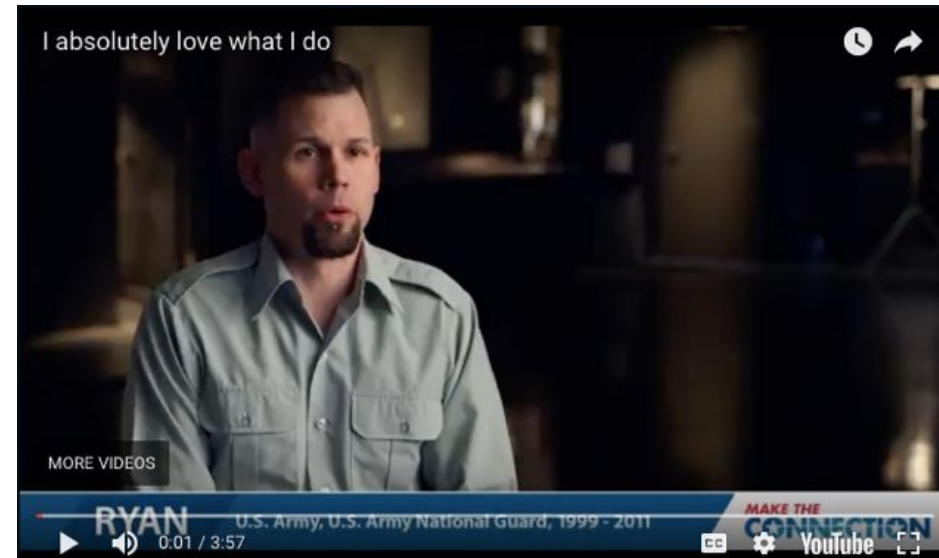
# REACH OUT

Watch the Video 

# 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>

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

- Visit [www.keepitsecure.net](http://www.keepitsecure.net) 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 at [www.nssf.org/safety](http://www.nssf.org/safety)

VA » Health Care » REACH » Firearm Suicide Prevention & Lethal Means Safety

## REACH

► Mental Health  
► More Health Care

### QUICK LINKS

- Hospital Locator  
Zip Code  Go
- Health Programs
- Protect Your Health
- A-Z Health Topics

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

My healthvet  
My Health, My Care: 24/7 Access to VA

## FIREARM SUICIDE PREVENTION & LETHAL MEANS SAFETY

# KeepItSecure.net

### PRACTICE SAFE STORAGE OF FIREARMS, MEDICATION & OTHER LETHAL MEANS

Lethal means are objects like guns, medications, alcohol, opioids or other substances, ropes, cords, or sharp objects that can be used during a suicidal crisis. If a Veteran is in crisis or having suicidal thoughts, these items can become deadly when they are easily accessible. For example, nearly 7 out of every 10 Veteran deaths by suicide are the result of firearm injuries (Dept. of Veteran Affairs, 2018).

Increasing the time and distance between someone in a suicidal crisis and access to lethal means can reduce suicide risk and save lives. There are simple steps you can take to protect yourself and your family. On this page, you'll find:

- How to identify and handle a suicidal crisis
- Helpful tips for storing guns, medications, and other lethal means
- Additional resources about safe storage



# New Lethal Means Safety Resources



## Reducing Firearm & Other Household Safety Risks Brochure

provides best practices for safely storing firearms and medications along with advice for loved ones on how to talk to the Veteran in their life about safe storage.

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

## 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.



# Mental Health Mobil Apps. Mobile Apps - PTSD: National Center for PTSD (va.gov)

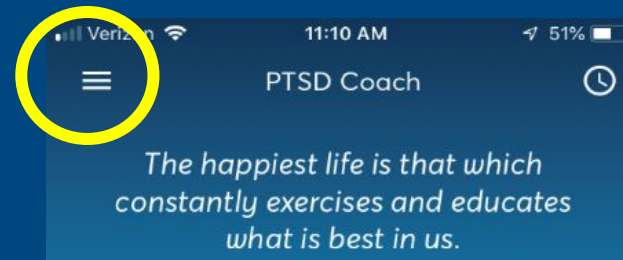
<p><b>Self-Help</b></p> <p>These apps provide support and guidance in living with PTSD.</p>	 <p>PTSD Coach</p>	 <p>PTSD Family Coach</p>	 <p>Beyond MST</p>	 <p>Mindfulness Coach</p>
<p><b>Treatment Companions</b></p> <p>These apps offer additional help for PTSD treatments.</p>	 <p>CPT Coach</p>	 <p>PE 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>COVID Coach</p>	 <p>Couples Coach</p>	 <p>Insomnia Coach</p>	 <p>StayQuit Coach</p>

# Safety Plan now in PTSD Coach!



## To access the Safety Plan:

1. Download\* and open PTSD Coach
2. Tap the lateral menu
3. Tap Safety Plan



**National Center for PTSD website:**

[https://www.ptsd.va.gov/appvid/mobile/ptsdcoach\\_app.asp](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/appvid/mobile/ptsdcoach_app.asp)

# 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**







# Supporting Providers Who Serve Veterans

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

Request a consult:  
*#NeverWorryAlone*  
srmconsult@va.gov



Provider support after a suicide loss (Postvention)



Risk assessment



Lethal means safety counseling



Conceptualization of suicide risk



Best practices for documentation



Strategies for how to engage Veterans at high risk

VA



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# Postvention Resources



COMMUNITY

PROVIDERS

WORKPLACE



Films



Infographics



Podcasts

Uniting for Suicide Postvention (USPV): <https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/postvention/>

VA



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## 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:

<https://psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e/>



# 2023

## National Veteran Suicide Prevention

### Annual Report

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VA Suicide Prevention  
Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

November 2023

<https://department.va.gov/suicide-prevention-annual-report>

**VA**



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of Veterans Affairs

# Questions?

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