

VA Maine Suicide Prevention Program and Outreach

Suicide Prevention is everybody's business

#BeThere

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Objectives for today's presentation

- **Gain a better understanding of Veteran-specific risks, and its translation to transition challenges**
 - **Have a general understanding of the scope of suicide within the United States**
 - **Know how to identify a Veteran that may be at risk for suicide**
 - **Know what to do when you identify a Veteran at risk**
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Department of Veterans Affairs

VA Maine Healthcare System

- VA Medical Center, Togus
- Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) x8

Regional Benefits Office (RO), co-located on Togus Campus with VA Maine HCS.

Veterans
Health
Administration

VA Central
Office

Veterans
Benefits
Administration

National
Cemetery
Administration

No National Cemeteries in Maine currently interring Veterans. State of Maine has four Veteran Cemeteries.

Military and Veteran-specific risks



- Frequent deployments to hostile environments
- Length of deployments; Difficult readjustments
- Exposure to extreme stress
- Physical/sexual assault while in the service (not limited to women)
- Service-related injuries
 - acknowledgement to management
- Weapon knowledge – familiarity and comfortability

Support starts with understanding

Potential transition challenges

- Relating to people who do not know or understand their or any military experiences
 - Loss of a known community; Joining/creating another
 - Preparing for an unknown: entrance/return to workforce
 - Adjusting to a different pace of life and work
 - Life-changing experiences □ Irreversible new normal
 - Addressing combat stress and how it changes 'you'
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Suicide in the United States

- It is estimated that close to **one million** people make a suicide attempt each year
 - **One attempt every 35 seconds**
 - **More than 42,000** U.S. deaths from suicide per year among the general population
 - Every **12.3 minutes** someone dies by suicide
 - The **10th** leading cause of death in the U.S.
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Suicide in the United States

Sexual Orientation & Gender disparities

- Men die by suicide almost **4 times** more often than women
 - Women attempt suicide **3 times** more often than men
 - A study of trans adults revealed that **41%** of trans adults had attempted suicide.
 - With each occurrence of physical or verbal harassment or abuse, a person who identifies as LGBTQ is **2.5x** more likely to commit self-harm.
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Facts about Veteran suicide

- On average, **20 Veterans** die per day by suicide
- **Veterans** account for **18%** of all deaths from suicide among U.S. adults.
- Veterans are more likely than the general population to use **firearms** as a means for suicide.
- On average, **764 suicide attempts per month** among Veterans receiving recent VA health care services
- **25%** of Veteran suicides have a history of previous suicide attempts.

Suicide Prevention is the VA's top clinical priority ~ VA Secretary David J. Shulkin

Suicide is a major public health concern; a specific health concern for Veterans.

Suicide is complex and multifactorial; addressing it demands a multi-faceted approach.

Meeting the need...

Common myths

- Asking about suicide may lead to someone taking his/her life.
- If somebody really wants to die by suicide, there is nothing you can do about it.
- If somebody really wants to die by suicide, they will find a way to do it.

vs.

Realities

- Asking about suicide does not create suicidal thoughts
- The acute risk for suicide is often time-limited. Helping someone connect with treatment can save a life.
- Making one form of suicide less convenient does not usually lead people to find another method. Some people will, but the overwhelming majority will not.

Death by suicide is preventable

Lethal Means Reduction

- **Limiting access to lethal means reduces suicide**

-- e.g., Firearms, abundance of analgesic doses per bottle, etc.

- **How did we figure this out?**

-- e.g., Coal gas in the UK, placement of lethal items behind counters, fencing off bridges

- **85-90% of people who survive a suicide attempt do not go on to die by suicide later**

S.A.V.E

- The acronym “SAVE” summarizes the steps needed to take an active and valuable role in suicide prevention.

Signs of suicidal thinking

Ask questions

Validate the Veteran’s experience

Encourage treatment and Expedite help

Signs

- Hopelessness, feeling like there's 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 abuse
 - Withdrawing from family and friends
-

Ask

DO ask the question if you've identified warning signs or symptoms

Are you thinking of suicide?

Have you had thoughts about taking your own life?

Are you thinking about killing yourself?

DO ask the question in a way that is natural and flows with the conversation

DON'T ask the question as though you are looking for a “no” answer

Validate

- 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 that help is available
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Encourage treatment and **Expedite** getting help:

- Don't keep the Veteran's suicidal behavior a secret
- Do not leave him or her alone
- Assist the person to seek immediate help
- Call 911

Reassure the Veteran that help is available

- 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-there are no quick solutions but help is available

Things to remember

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

#Be There

It begins with small acts of support

Learn the warning signs of crisis

Ask: Are you okay? How can I help?

Show genuine concern

Assist a Veteran to connect with help



Thank you for supporting Veterans and Service Members

VETERANS CRISIS LINE

**Veterans
Crisis Line**



1-800-273-8255

PRESS 1

- Veterans
- Service members
- Family members
- Friends

• • • Confidential chat at **VeteransCrisisLine.net** or text to **838255** • • •

VETERANS CRISIS LINE



VA's Crisis Line established August 2007

Data as of February 2017:

- Answered over 2.8 million calls
- 323,000 chats
- 67,000 texts
- 454,000 referrals to VA SPCs
- Dispatched emergency services 74,000 times



VA Suicide Prevention Program





U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs



Suicide is and will always be EVERYBODY'S business

Questions?

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References

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Based on suicide/ suicide attempts reported within the VA Suicide Prevention Application Network (SPAN) during calendar year 2014.
