

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

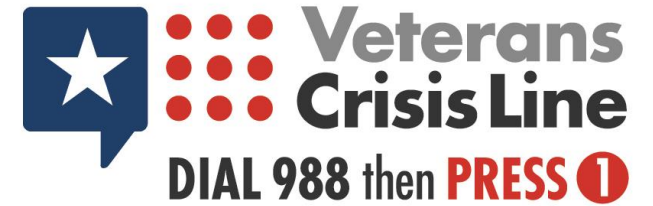
VA S.A.V.E. Training

Office of Suicide Prevention

(Updated March 2024)

*Torrie Dreier, LCSW – Community Engagement Partnerships
Coordinator*

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:
 - 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline
 - Veterans and service members: Dial 988 then 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 Issue

- 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

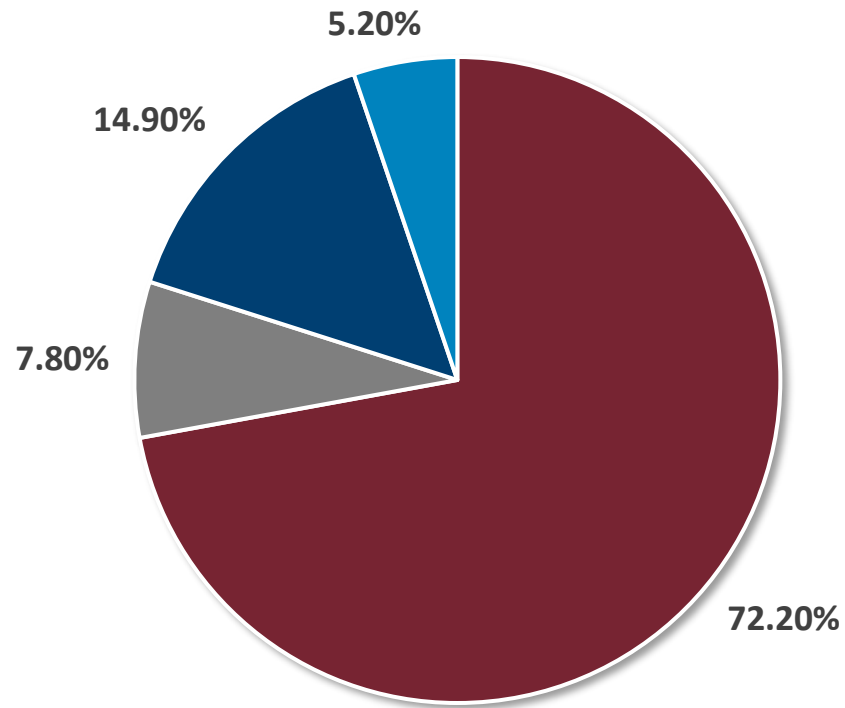


Goal: Minimize risk factors and boost protective factors

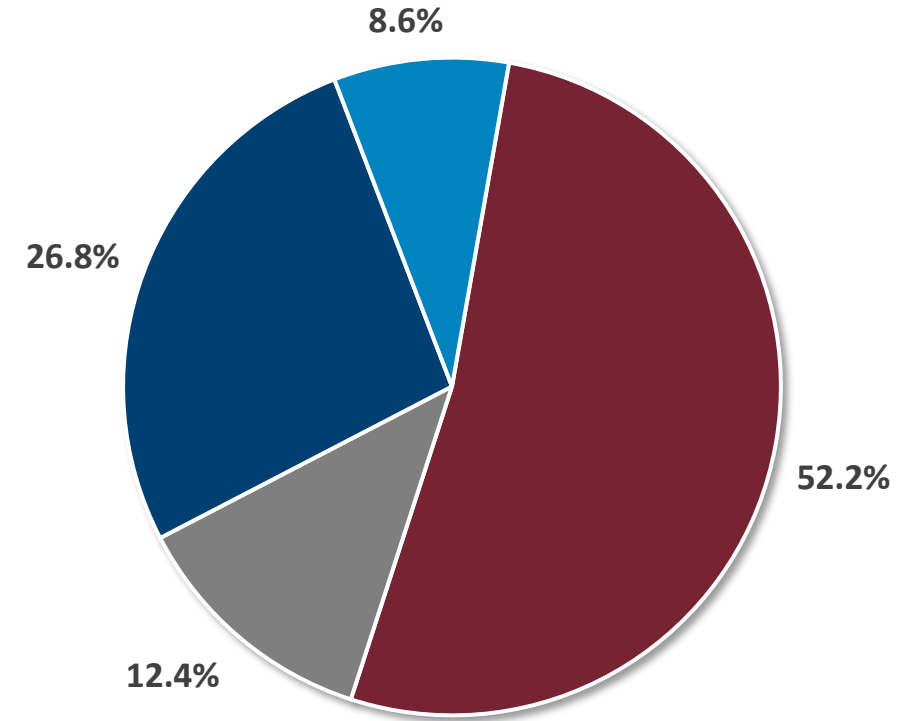
Access to Lethal Means is a Risk Factor

U.S. Veterans and Suicide Methods (2023)

Veterans



Non-Veteran U.S. Adults



- Firearms
- Poisoning
- Suffocation
- Other

What is Lethal Means Safety?

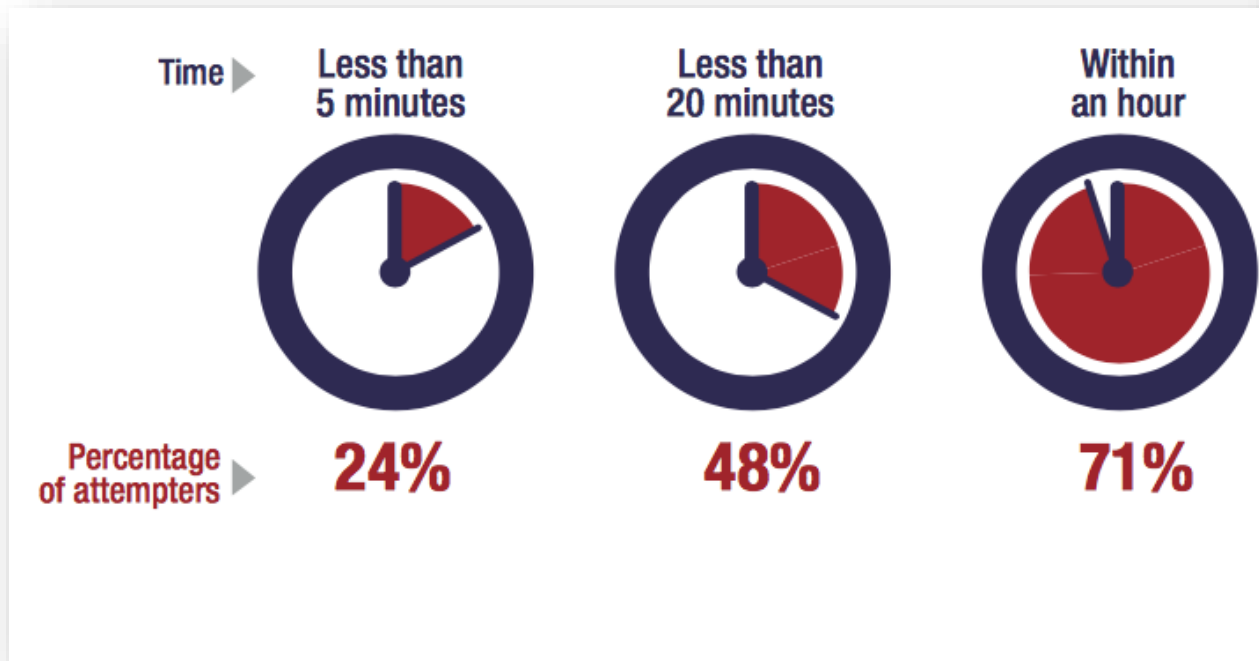
- In the context of suicide prevention, safe storage of lethal means is any action that builds in time and space between a person with thoughts of suicide and a suicide method.
- Effective lethal means safety education and counseling is collaborative and Veteran-centered. It respects the important role that firearms and medications may play in Veterans' lives and is consistent with their values and priorities.

Golden Gate Bridge

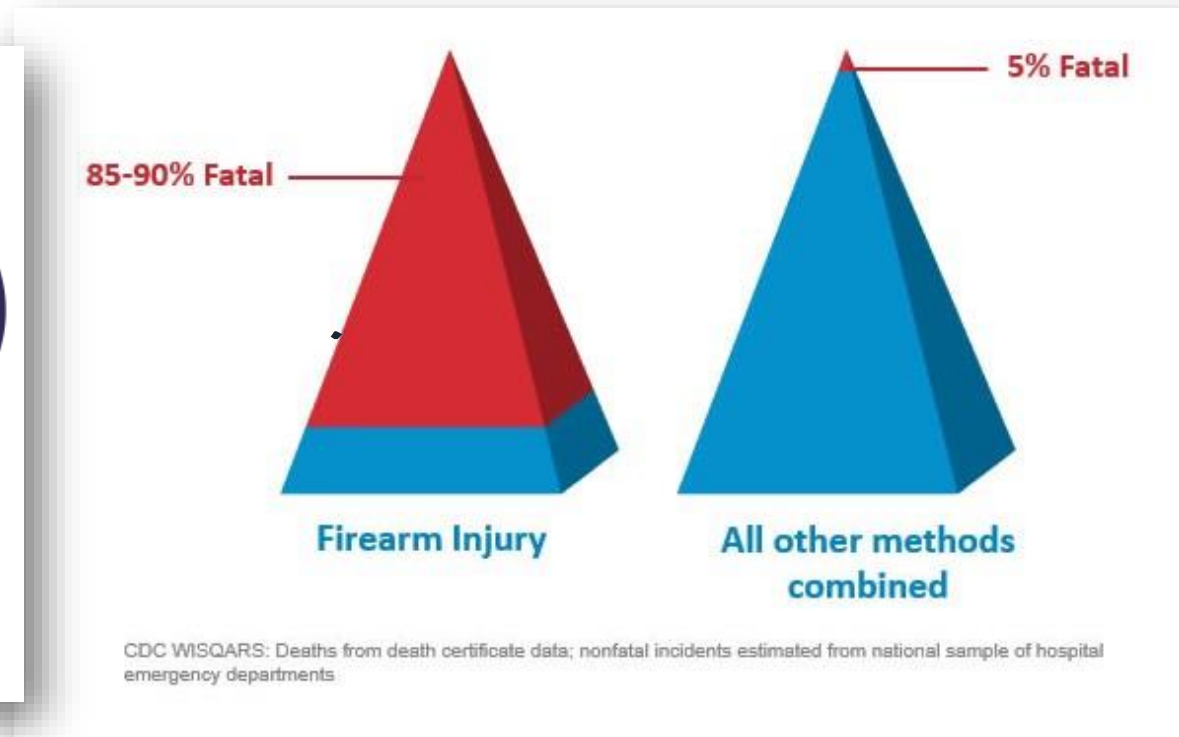


Most Suicide Crises are Brief

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(sup):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 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**.

**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 thoughts of suicide. Someone who talks about suicide provides others with an opportunity to intervene before suicide 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 a suicide 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...**

A Asking the Question

“Are you thinking about killing yourself?”

A Asking the Question

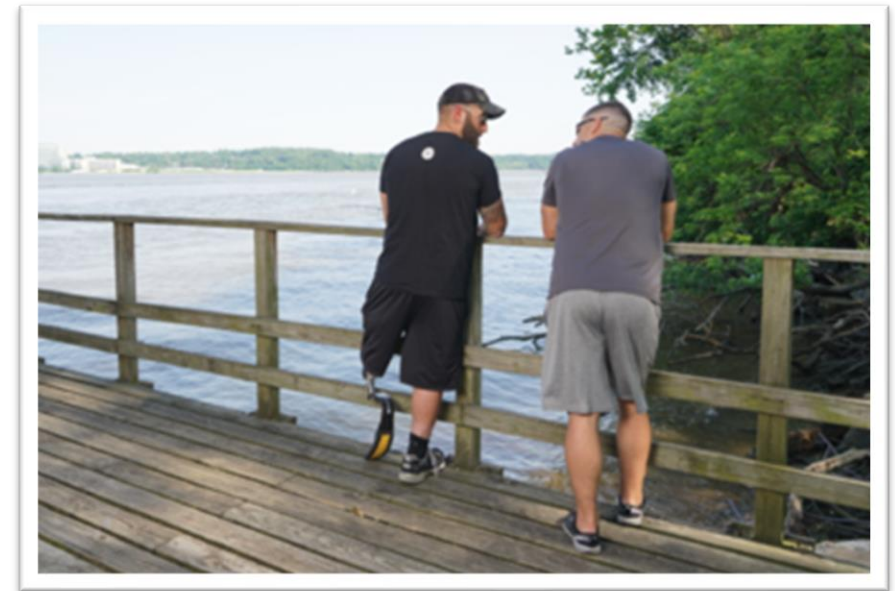
Do's	Don'ts
<p>DO ask the question if you've identified warning signs or symptoms.</p>	<p>DON'T ask the question as though you are looking for a "no" answer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "You aren't thinking of killing yourself, are you?"
<p>DO ask the question in a natural way that flows with the conversation.</p>	<p>DON'T 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 their 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 them 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 **Dial 988 then 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 Veteran who has come in to start a claim for MST. They disclose to you that they have 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

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



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

S 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?



Encourage Treatment and Expedite Getting Help

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

Debrief

- Thoughts, feelings, or questions about the exercise?

Resources

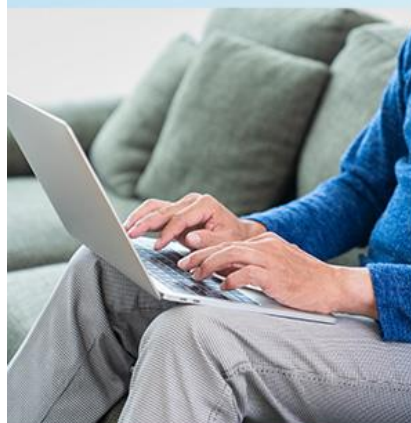
Free, Confidential Support 24/7/365

- Veterans
- Service members
- Family members
- Friends



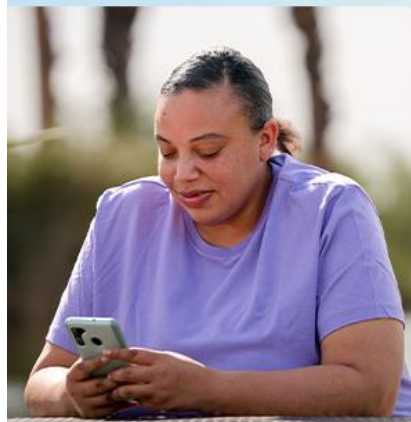
CALL

Dial 988 then Press 1



CHAT

VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat

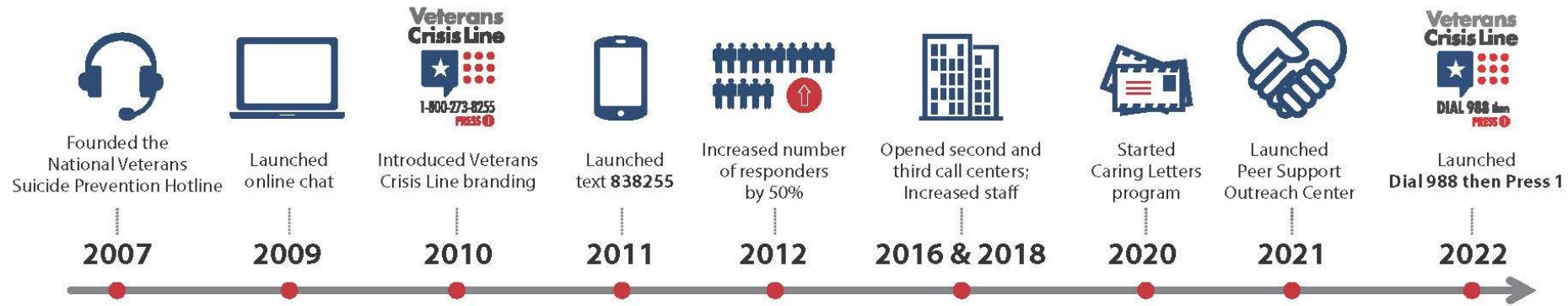


TEXT

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.



More than
7.6 million
calls



More than
360,000
texts



More than
910,000
chats



More than
1.4 million
referrals

to VA Suicide Prevention Coordinators

More than
313,000
dispatches of
emergency services

01/24

Graphic can be found at [Spread the Word \(veteranscrisisline.net\)](https://www.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". The main heading is "Local Resources" with a sub-heading "Home > Local Resources". Below this is a paragraph: "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.

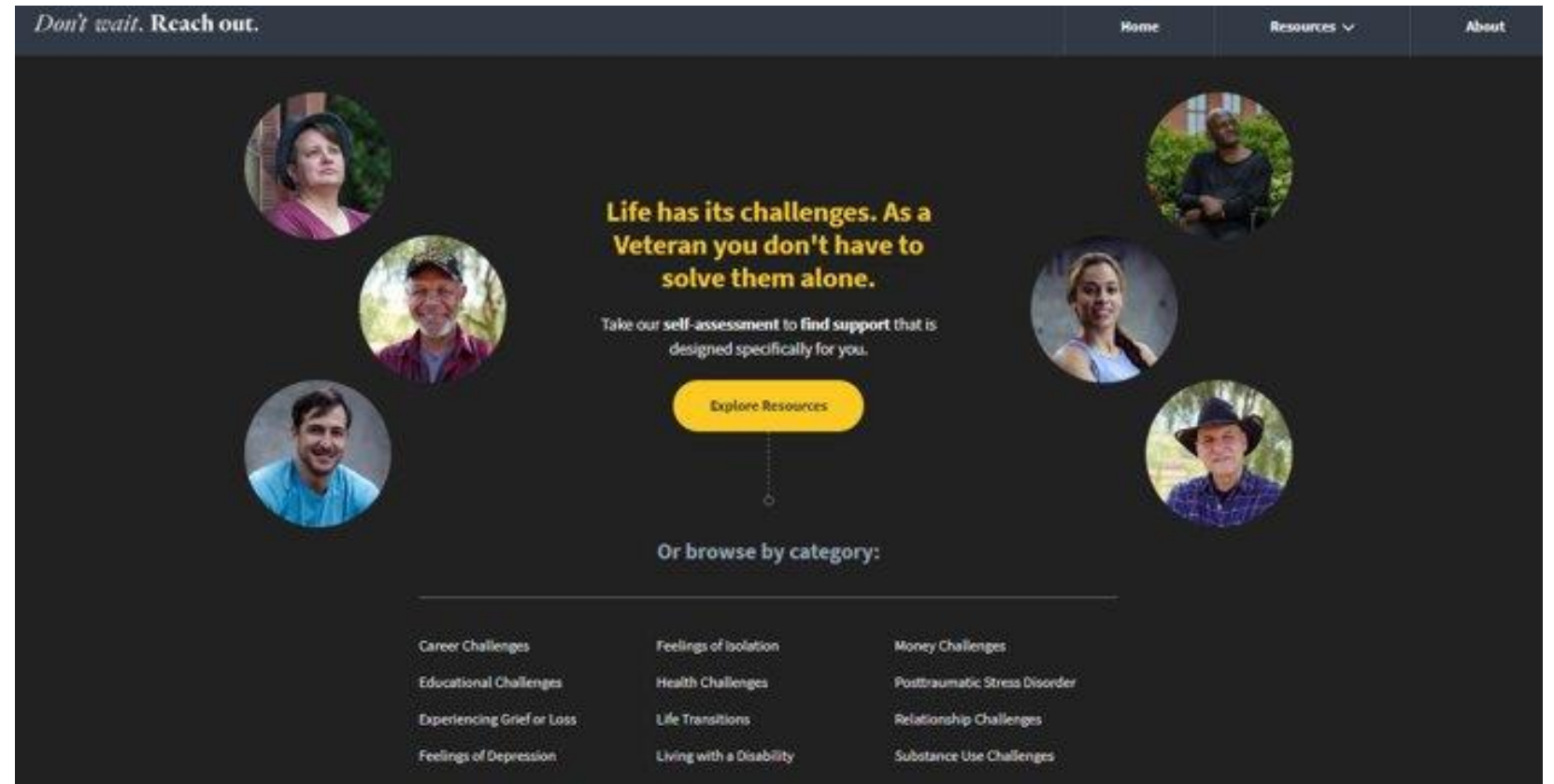


The screenshot shows the search results page for "Search Local VA Resources". It displays "Showing 10 Results out of 11 for 14424". On the left, there are filters: "Find a Resource" (input field), "Use Current Location" (link), "Within" (dropdown set to "50 Miles"), and a list of resource types with checkboxes: "Suicide Prevention Coordinators", "VA Medical Centers", "Outpatient Clinics", "Vet Centers", and "Veterans Benefits Administration Offices". A "Search" button is at the bottom of the filter section. On the right, two results are shown. The first is "Canandaigua VA Medical Center" under the category "VA MEDICAL CENTERS". It lists the address "400 Fort Hill Avenue, Canandaigua, NY 14424-1159", "0 miles away", and the phone number "585-393-7100". The second result is "Suicide Prevention, Team Canandaigua/Rochester" under the category "SUICIDE PREVENTION COORDINATORS". It lists the address "400 Fort Hill Avenue, Canandaigua, NY 14424" and has an "Email" button.

Don't Wait. Reach Out.

Find the right
Veteran Resources
Quickly and Easily

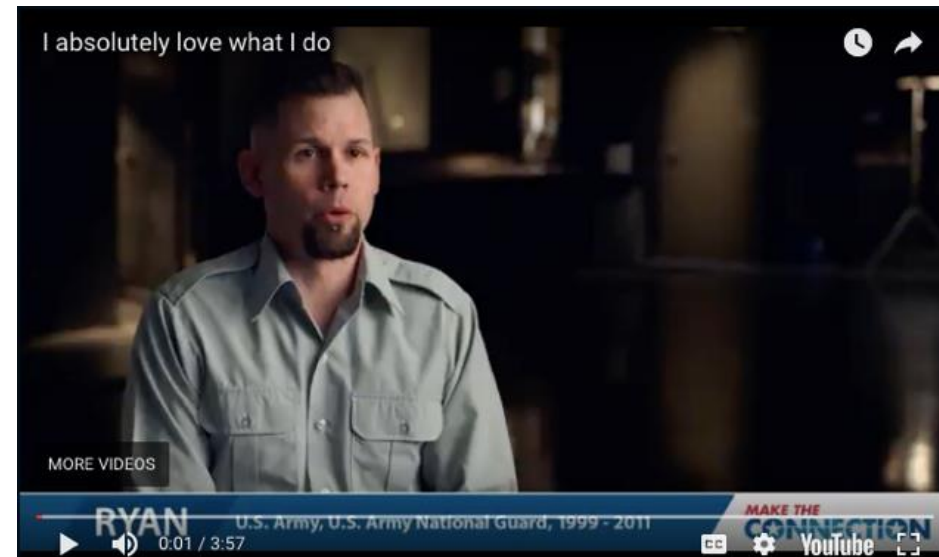
*Don't Wait. Reach
Out. (va.gov)*



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 secure storage of firearms, medications and other lethal means

- Visit 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

The screenshot shows the VA REACH website page for 'Keep It Secure'. The page features a navigation bar with the VA logo and 'U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs'. Below the navigation bar, there are links for 'VA Benefits and Health Care', 'About VA', and 'Find a VA Location'. The main content area is titled 'REACH' and includes a 'QUICK LINKS' section with buttons for 'Hospital Locator', 'Health Programs', 'Protect Your Health', and 'A-Z Health Topics'. There are also logos for 'Veterans Crisis Line' and 'My healthvet'. The 'Keep It Secure' section has buttons for 'Firearm Storage', 'Medication Storage', 'Support', and 'Resources'. A prominent warning message asks, 'Are you a Veteran in crisis or concerned about one?' with a link to 'Find support anytime day or night'. Below this, there is a section for 'Lethal Means Safety & Suicide Prevention' with a text box explaining that lethal means are objects that may be used by individuals experiencing a suicidal crisis. A yellow box on the right side of the page contains the text: 'Nearly 7 out of every 10 Veteran deaths by suicide are the result of firearm injuries. - Department of Veterans Affairs (2021)'. At the bottom of the page, there is a 'Learn More' button.

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.

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

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



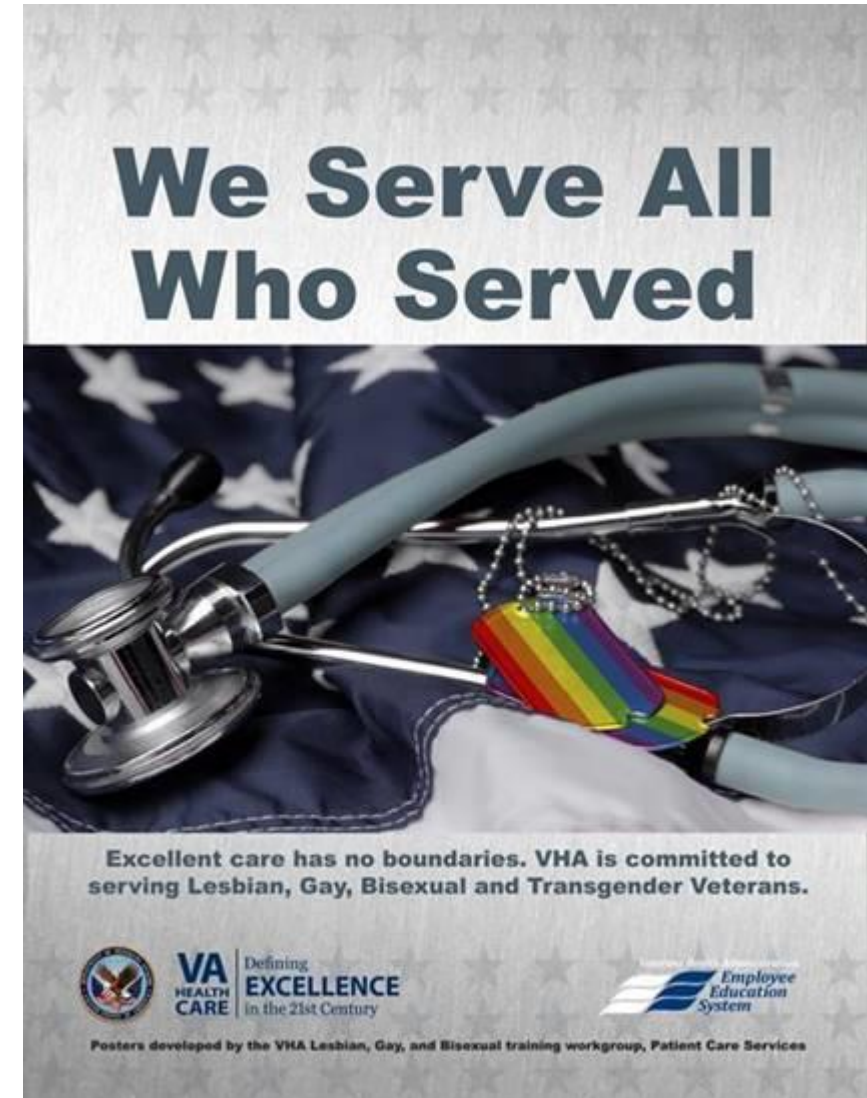
Firearm safety is an important public health issue that can affect your health and your family's well-being.

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.



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 - PTSD: National Center for PTSD (va.gov)

Self-Help

These apps provide support and guidance in living with PTSD.



PTSD Coach



PTSD Family Coach



Beyond MST



Mindfulness Coach

Treatment Companions

These apps offer additional help for PTSD treatments.



CPT Coach



PE Coach



CBT-i Coach



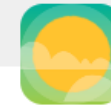
ACT Coach

Related

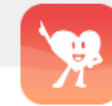
These apps help with related issues affecting people with PTSD.



Safety Plan



COVID Coach

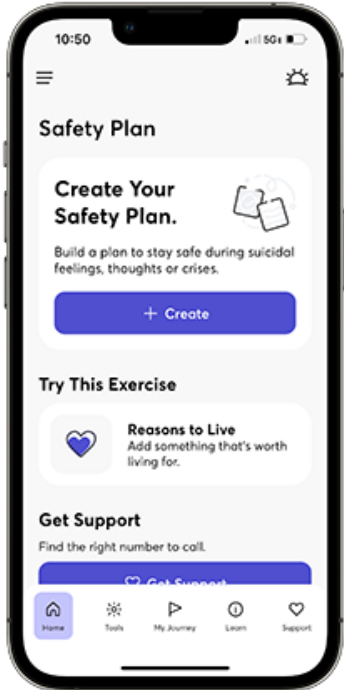


Couples Coach



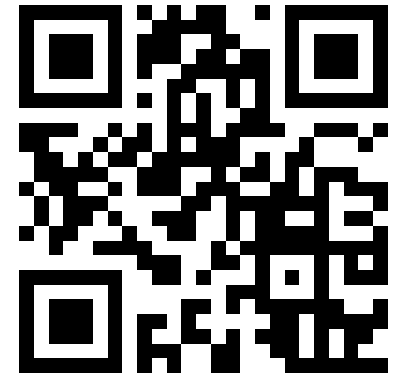
Insomnia Coach

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

#NeverWorryAlone

www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/consult



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)

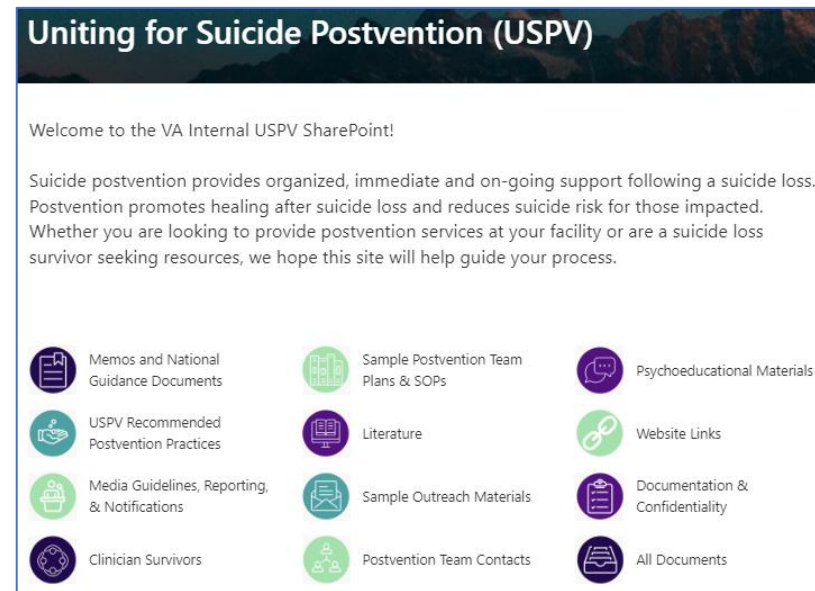
VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

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)

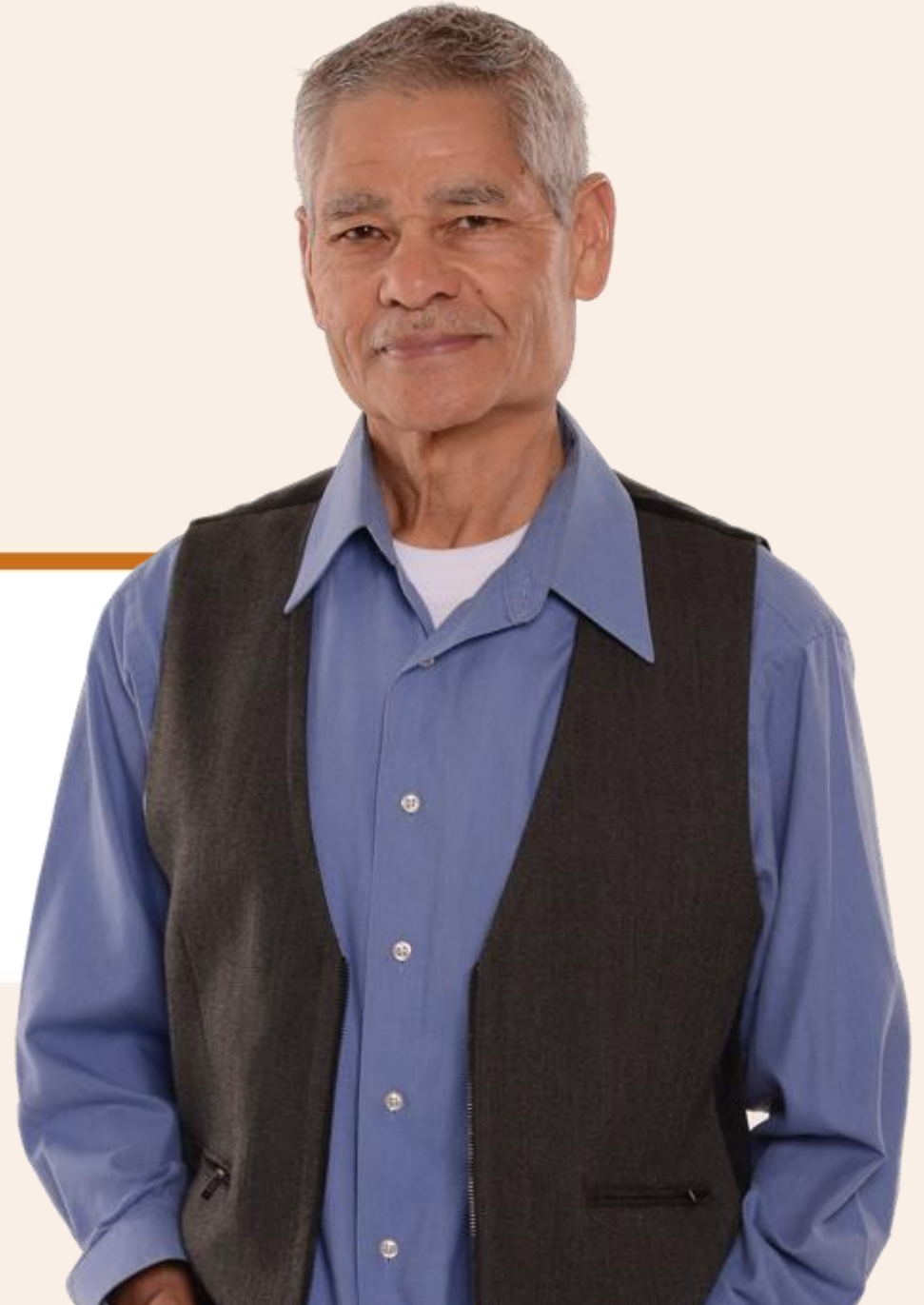
<https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/postvention/>

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



Stay Connected

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



[@deptvetaffairs](#)



[U.S. Department of
Veterans Affairs](#)
[Veterans Health
Administration](#)



[@DeptVetAffairs](#)
[@veteranshealth](#)

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Questions?

Torrie.dreier@va.gov
423-915-6653
