

VA S.A.V.E./Public Health Model Approach

Laura Stumvoll, MS, BSN
Community Engagement and Partnerships Coordinator
Laura.Stumvoll.va.gov



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
Public Health Model Approach

VA S.A.V.E. Steps

Resources



Objectives

By participating in this training, you will:

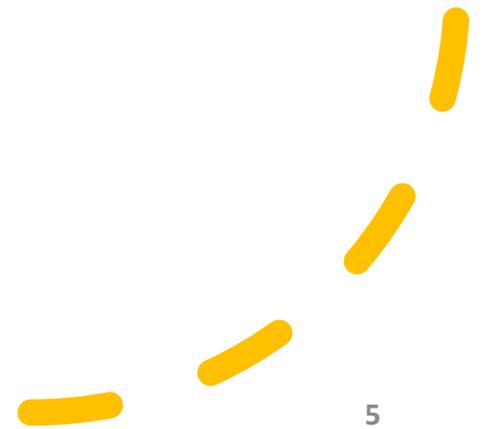
**Have a general understanding of the scope of Veteran and non-Veteran suicide within the United States.
Need for Public Health Model approach.**

Know how to identify a Veteran and others who may be at risk for suicide.

Know what to do when you identify an individual at risk.

**Take a
moment to
consider:**

**What are your biggest questions around
suicide and talking to people in crisis?**





Facts About Suicide

Suicide is a National Public Health Issue

- Suicide is a national public health issue, affecting both the Veteran and general population.
- Societal factors may also impact suicide risk, such as economic disparities, race, ethnicity, LGBTQ+, homelessness, social connection, isolation, health and well-being.
- One suicide is heartbreaking, notably affecting an estimated 135 surviving individuals for each death by suicide.
- Our nation grieves with each suicide, necessarily prompting the collective tireless pursuit of evidence-based clinical interventions and community prevention strategies, critical to the implementation of VA's National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide.

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 and non-Veteran suicide, we must maximize protective factors while minimizing risk factors at all levels, throughout communities nationwide.

Veteran Suicide Statistics

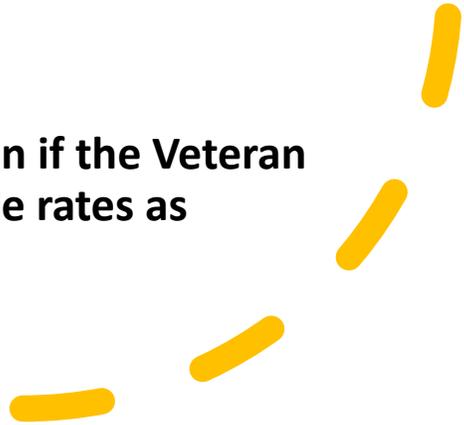
In 2022, there were 6,407 suicides among Veterans and 41,484 among non-Veteran U.S. adults.

For Veterans, this number increased by three, from 6,404 in 2021 to 6,407 in 2022. This number is lower than 12 of 14 previous years.

The age-adjusted suicide rate for male Veterans rose 1.6%, which was less than the 1.8% increase for male non-Veterans.

The female Veteran age-adjusted suicide rate decreased 24.1%, while the female non-Veteran suicide rate rose 5.2%.

There were 10.5% more Veteran suicides in 2022 than if the Veteran population had the same age- and sex-specific suicide rates as non-Veteran U.S. adults.



- Minnesota Veteran Suicides by Age Group, 2022

- 18-34 years old 12
- 35-54 years old 20
- 55-74 years old 34
- 75+ years old 27
- All 93

- Minnesota Veteran Suicide Deaths by Method, 2022

- Firearms- 72 or 76% of the time
- Other- 22 or 23.4% of the time



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

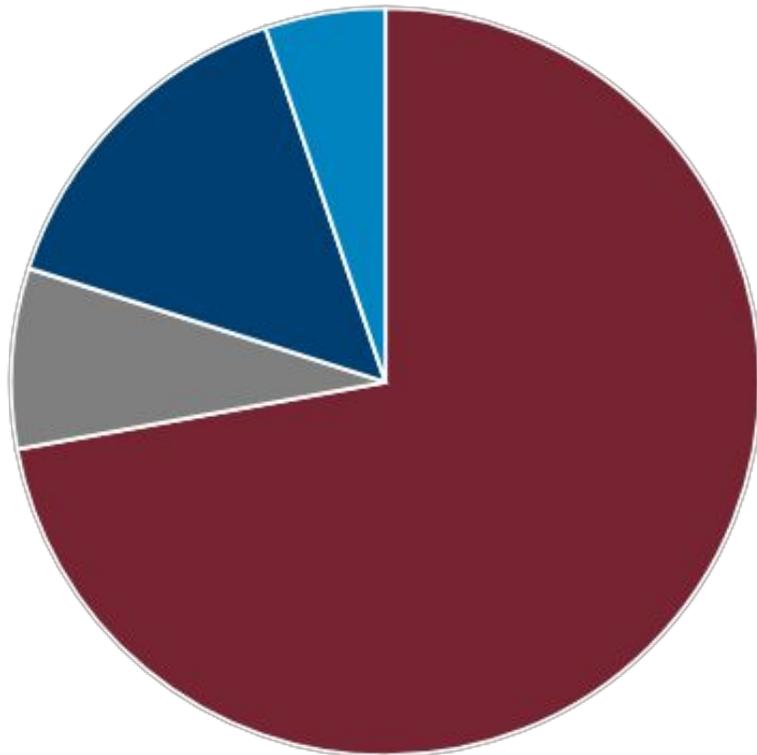
What is Lethal Means Safety?

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.

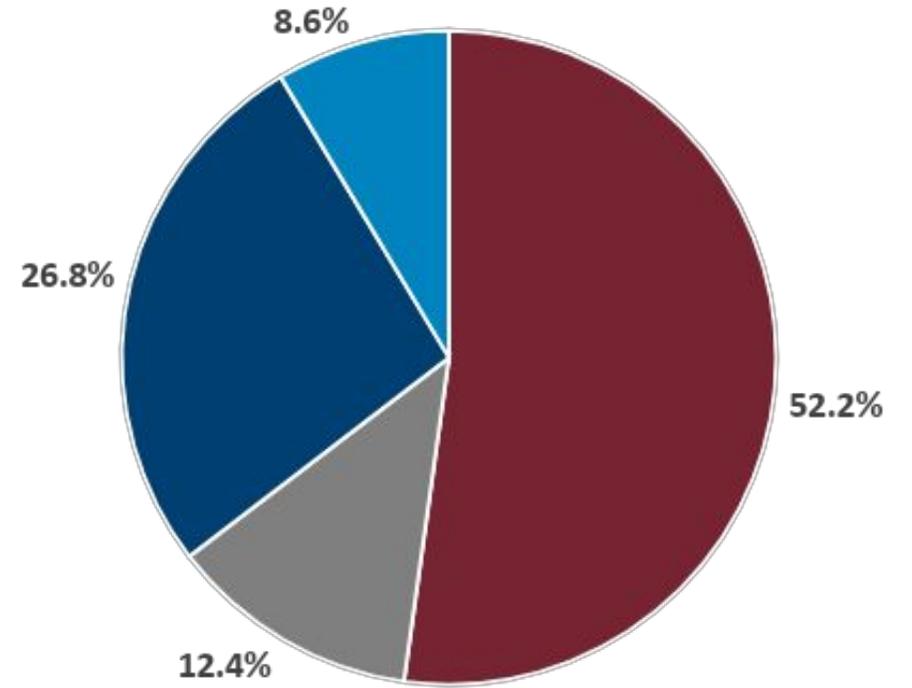
Effective lethal means safety education and counseling is collaborative and person-centered. It respects the important role that firearms and medications may play in peoples' lives and is consistent with their values and priorities.

U.S. Veterans and Suicide Methods (2023)

Veterans



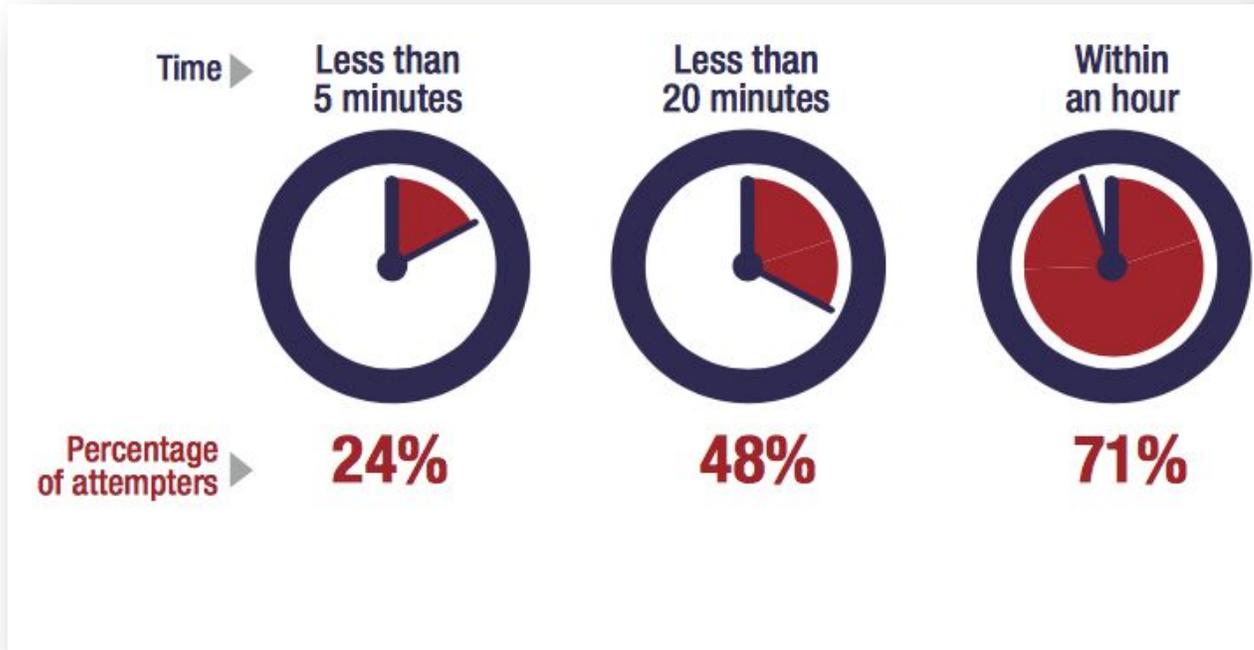
Non-Veteran U.S. Adults



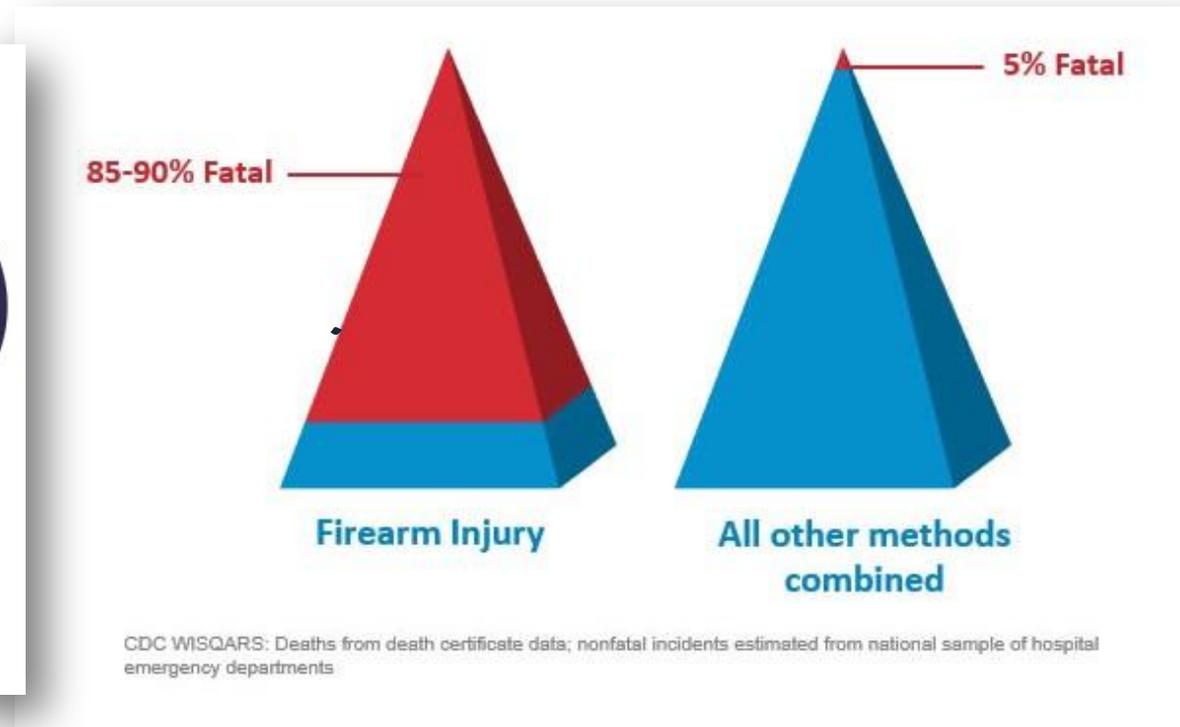
- Firearms
- Poisoning
- Suffocation
- Other

Most Suicide Crises are Brief

Time from Decision to Action < 1 hour



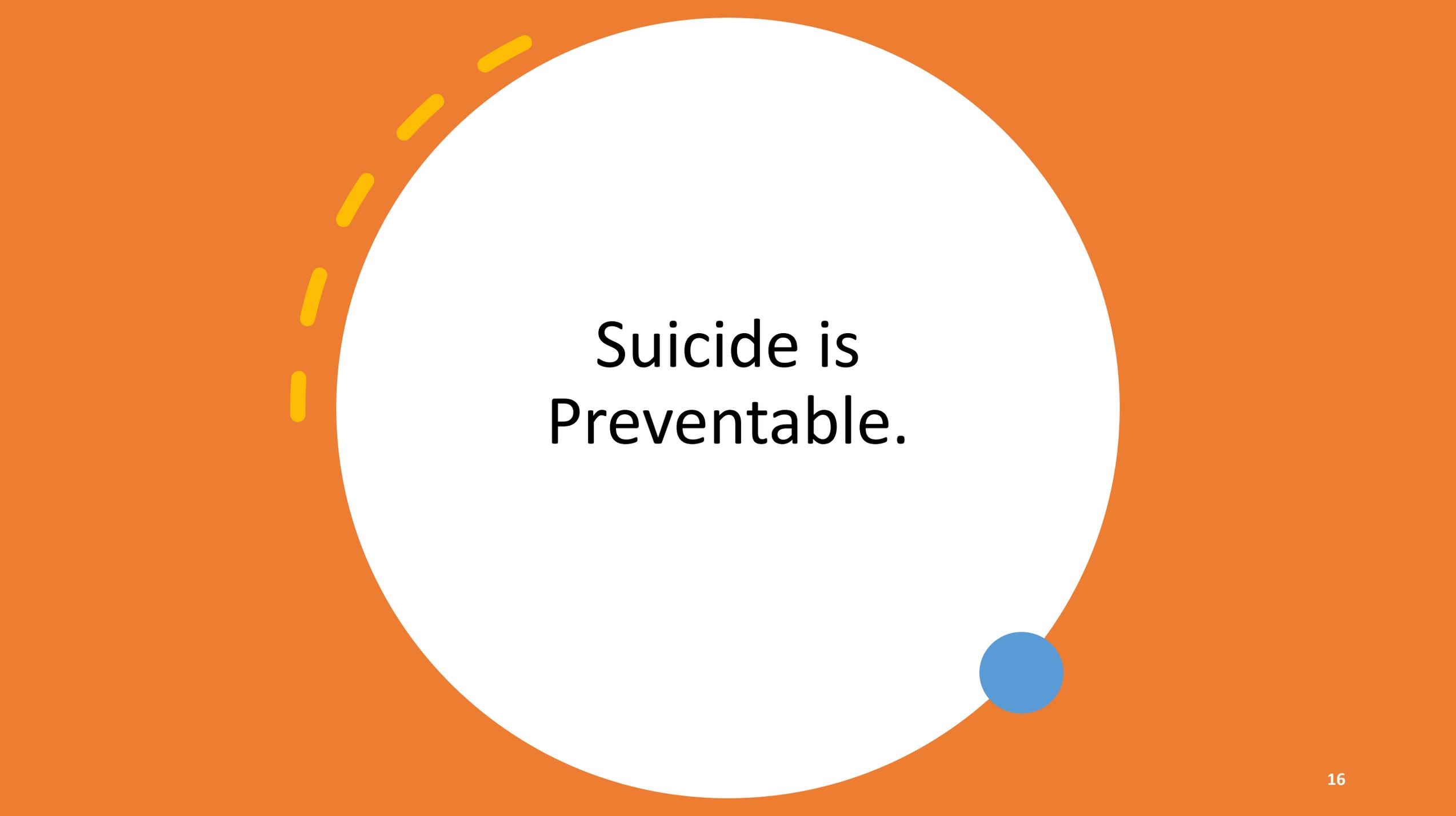
Source: Simon, T.R., Swann, A.C., Powell, K.E., Potter, L.B., Kresnow, M., and O'Carroll, P.W. Characteristics of Impulsive Suicide Attempts and Attempters. SLTB. 2001; 32(supp):49-59.



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 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, others **ahead of time** to help them survive a suicide crisis, we have likely prevented suicide for the **rest of their lives**.



Suicide is
Preventable.



Suicide Prevention is Everyone's Business

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP ?

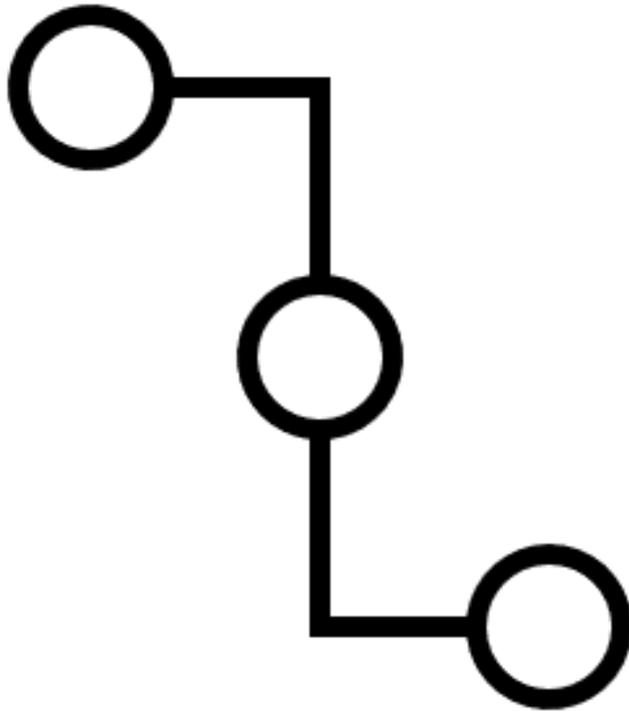
Encourage others to attend S.A.V.E. training

Join your local suicide prevention coalition

**Assist your community coalition in promotion
of events**

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





VA S.A.V.E. :

Teaching Communities How to Help those at Risk for Suicide

VA S.A.V.E. will help you act with care and compassion if you encounter a Veteran, others who are 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/Person'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



Signs of Suicidal Thinking

- 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

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



Asking the Question

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

“Are you thinking about killing yourself?”



A

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>



Validate the Veteran's Experience

- Talk openly about suicide. Be willing to listen and allow the Person to express their feelings.
- Recognize that the situation is serious.
- Do not pass judgment.
- Reassure the Veteran/Non-Veteran that help is available.



Encourage Treatment and Expedite Getting Help

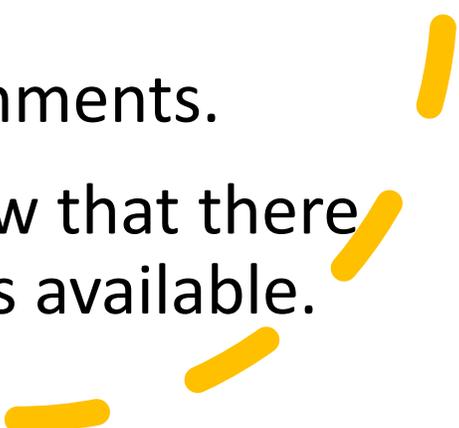
- What should I do if I think someone is suicidal?
 - Don't keep the suicidal behavior a secret.
 - Do not leave them alone.
 - Try to get the person to seek immediate help from his or her doctor or the nearest hospital emergency room.
 - Call 911.
- Reassure the Person that help is available.

Call the Crisis Line at

Dial 988, Veterans Press 1.



When Talking with a Person 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.
- 

Remember

VA S.A.V.E.

Signs of suicidal thinking should be recognized.

Ask the most important question of all.

Validate the Veteran's experience.

Encourage treatment and Expedite getting help.



Resources

9888

**SUICIDE & CRISIS
LIFELINE**

- 988 offers 24/7
- judgment-free support for mental health, substance use, and more.
- Text, call, or chat 988.

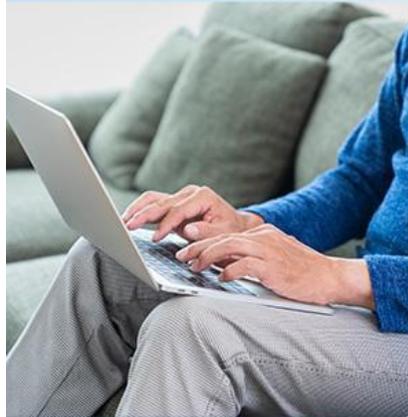
Free, Confidential Support 24/7/365

- Veterans
- Service members
- Family members
- Friends



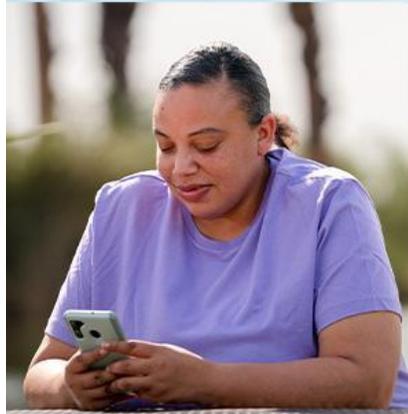
CALL

Dial 988 then Press 1



CHAT

VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat

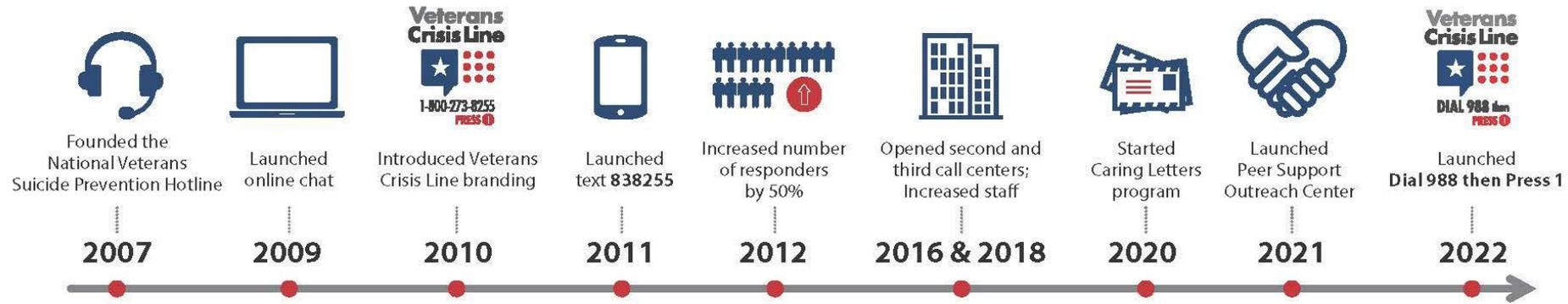


TEXT

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)

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 is part of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) website. The header includes the VA logo, the text "U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs", and a "Sign in" button. Below the header, there are navigation links for "VA Benefits and Health Care", "About VA", and "Find a VA Location". The main content area features a large image of a handgun in a case with a photo of a couple. Below the image, the heading "Keep It Secure" is followed by four buttons: "Firearm Storage", "Medication Storage", "Support", and "Resources". A prominent warning box asks, "Are you a Veteran in crisis or concerned about one?" and provides a link to "Find support anytime day or night". Below this, the section "Lethal Means Safety & Suicide Prevention" explains that lethal means are objects that may be used by individuals experiencing a suicidal crisis, including guns, medications, alcohol, opioids, other substances, ropes, cords, or sharp objects. It states that if a Veteran is in crisis or having suicidal thoughts, these items can become deadly if easily accessible. The text further explains that increasing the time and distance between a person in suicidal crisis and their access to lethal means can reduce suicide risk and save lives. The VA Keep It Secure program promotes awareness about the simple steps you can take to protect yourself and your family. A quote from the Department of Veterans Affairs (2021) states: "Nearly 7 out of every 10 Veteran deaths by suicide are the result of firearm injuries." A "Learn More" button is located at the bottom of the page.

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

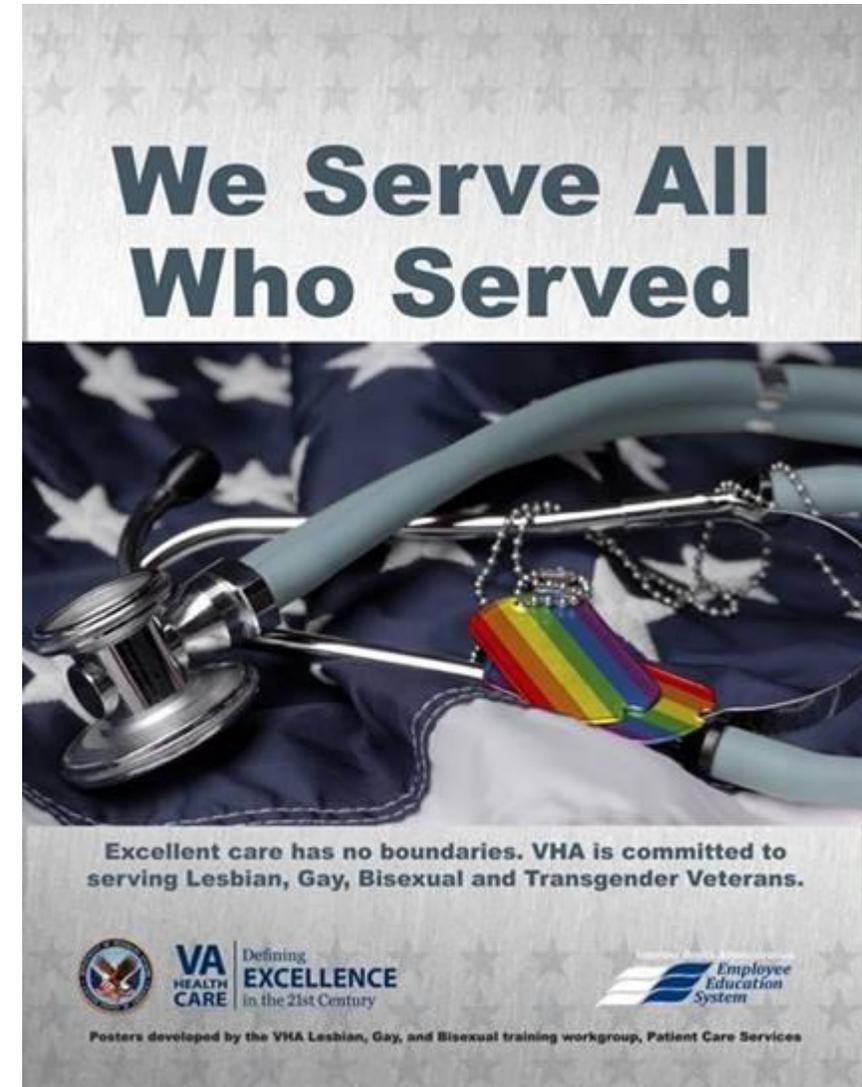


Firearm safety is an important public health issue that can affect your health and your family's well-being.

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 \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov/health-care/patient-care-services/lgbtq-veteran-care-coordinator-lgbtq-vcc-locator)



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.

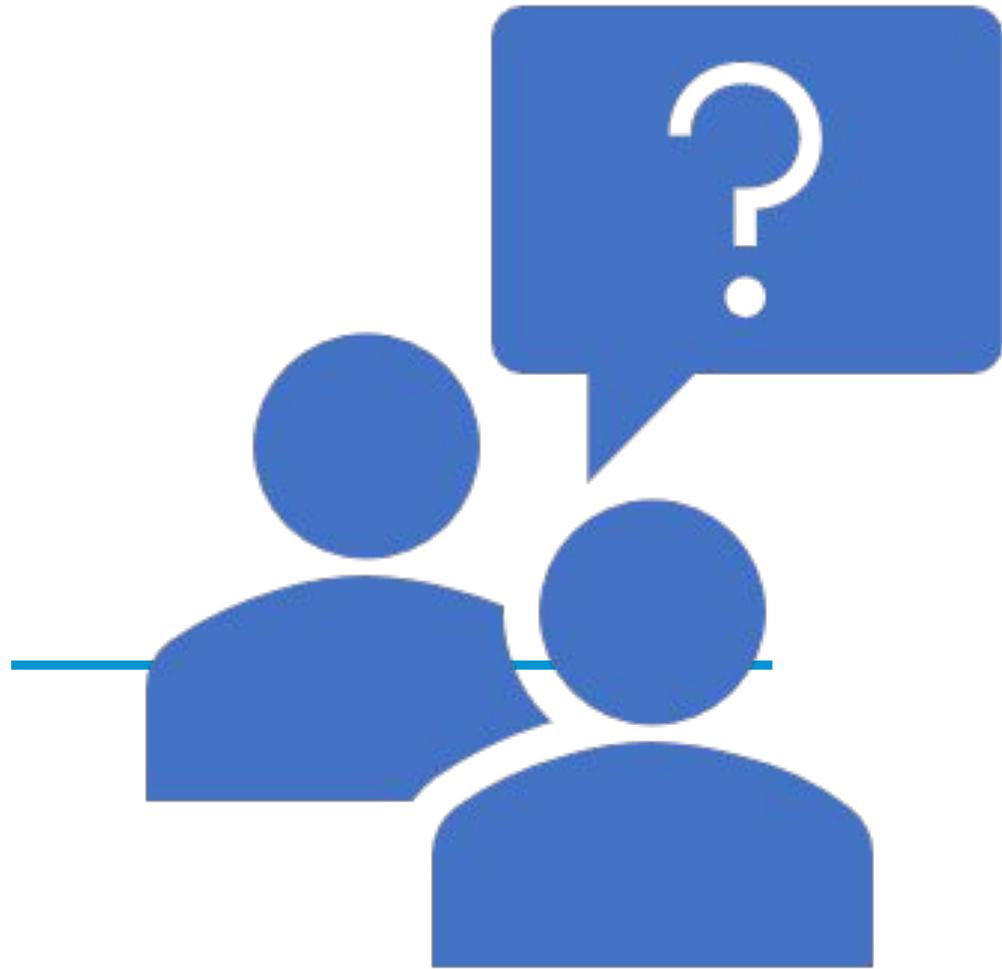
PTSD Coach PTSD Family Coach Beyond MST Mindfulness Coach

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



Questions?

**Thank
You !**

Laura Stumvoll, MS, BSN
Community Engagement and Partnerships Coordinator

Laura.Stumvoll@va.gov