

Office of Suicide Prevention



Lillie Mellis is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Board-Certified Diplomate in Social Work with over 20yrs of experience. She has worked in various capacities to include Child abuse, Domestic Violence, and Substance Abuse. She is also an Ordained Deacon. Lillie is an Air Force Veteran and has served as Director of Psychological Health for Virginia Air National Guard. Lillie has been with the Department of Veteran Affairs since 2013 working in Suicide Prevention. Currently she is the Education & Training Program Coordinator at the Suicide Prevention Office at Veteran's Affairs Central Office. Lillie is currently working on projects to include Suicide Prevention for Faith Base and Neighborhood Partnerships.

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

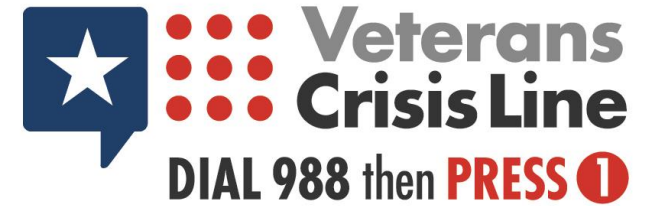
VA S.A.V.E. Training

Office of Suicide Prevention

Lillie Mells, LCSW, BCD

August 2024

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

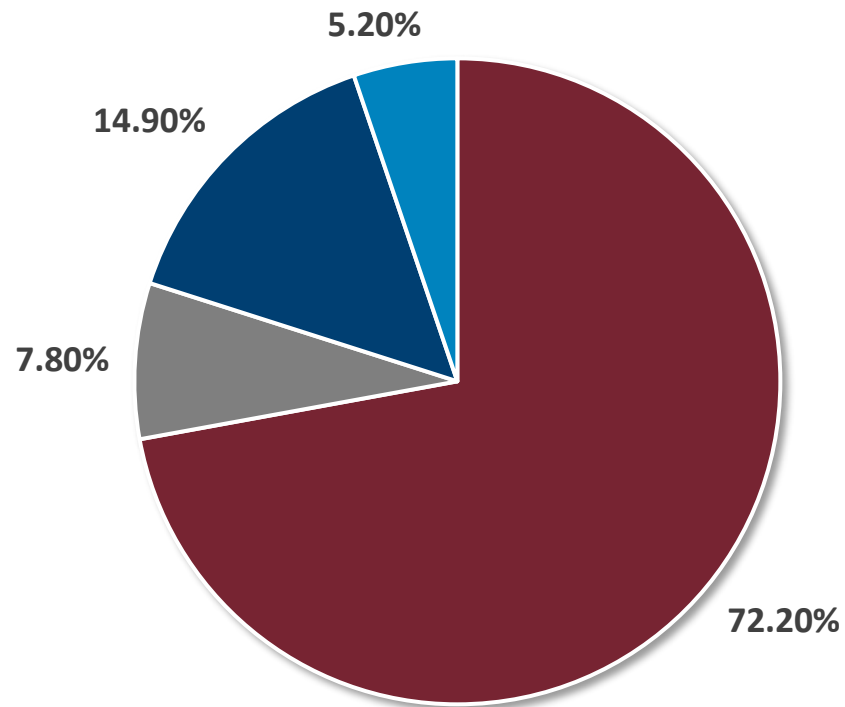


Goal: Minimize risk factors and boost protective factors

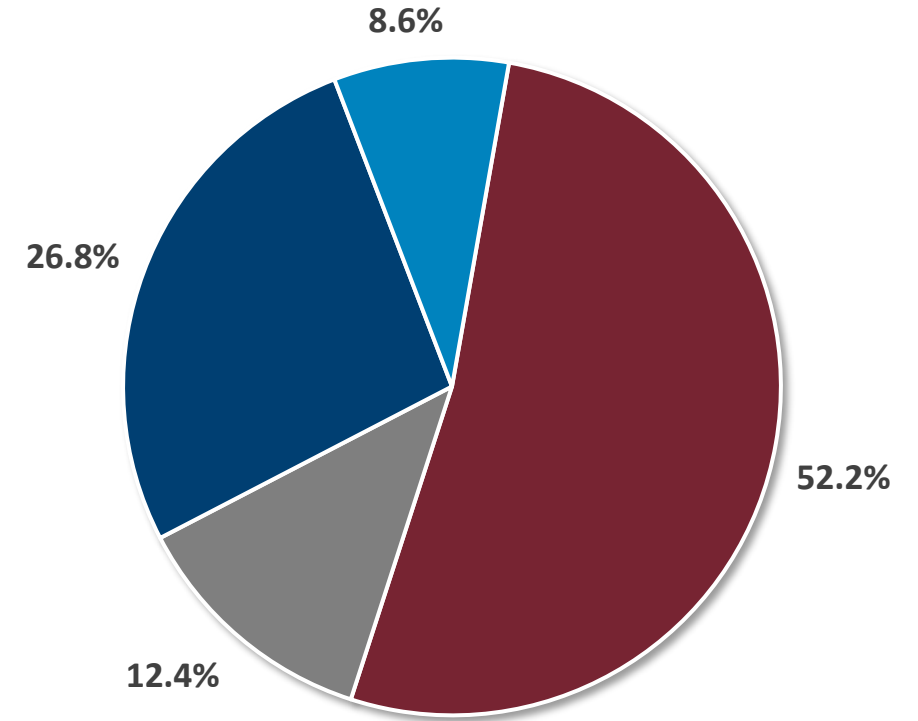
Access to Lethal Means is a Risk Factor

U.S. Veterans and Suicide Methods (2023)

Veterans



Non-Veteran U.S. Adults



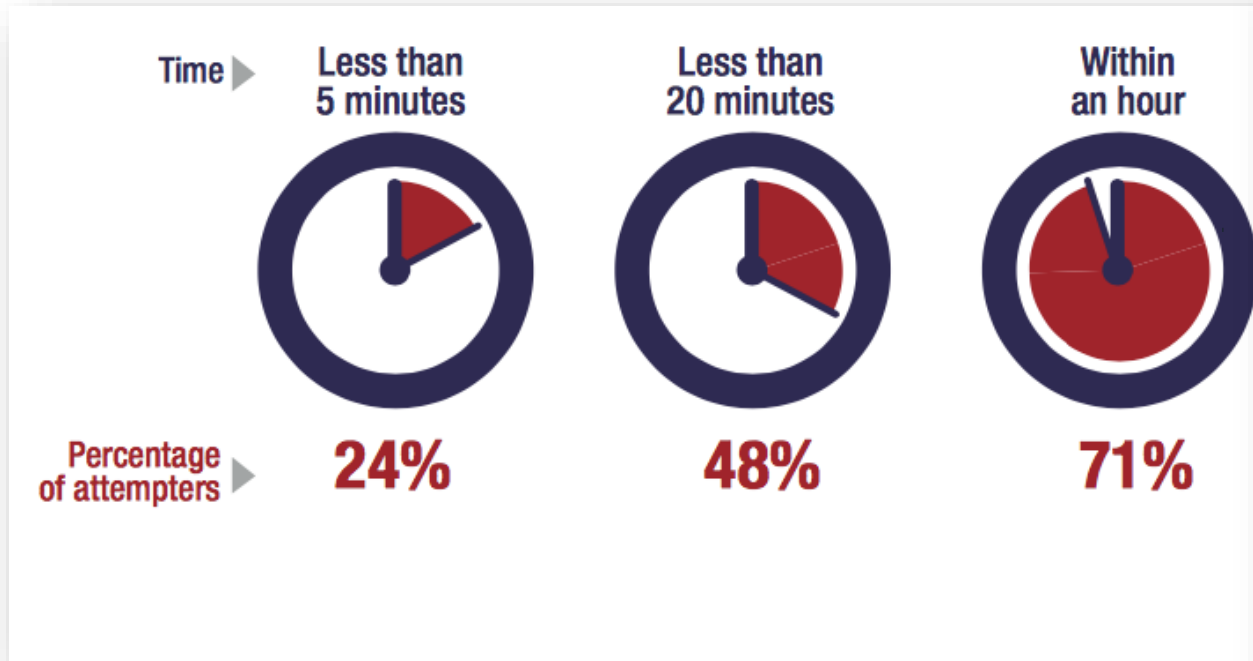
- Firearms
- Poisoning
- Suffocation
- Other

What is Lethal Means Safety?

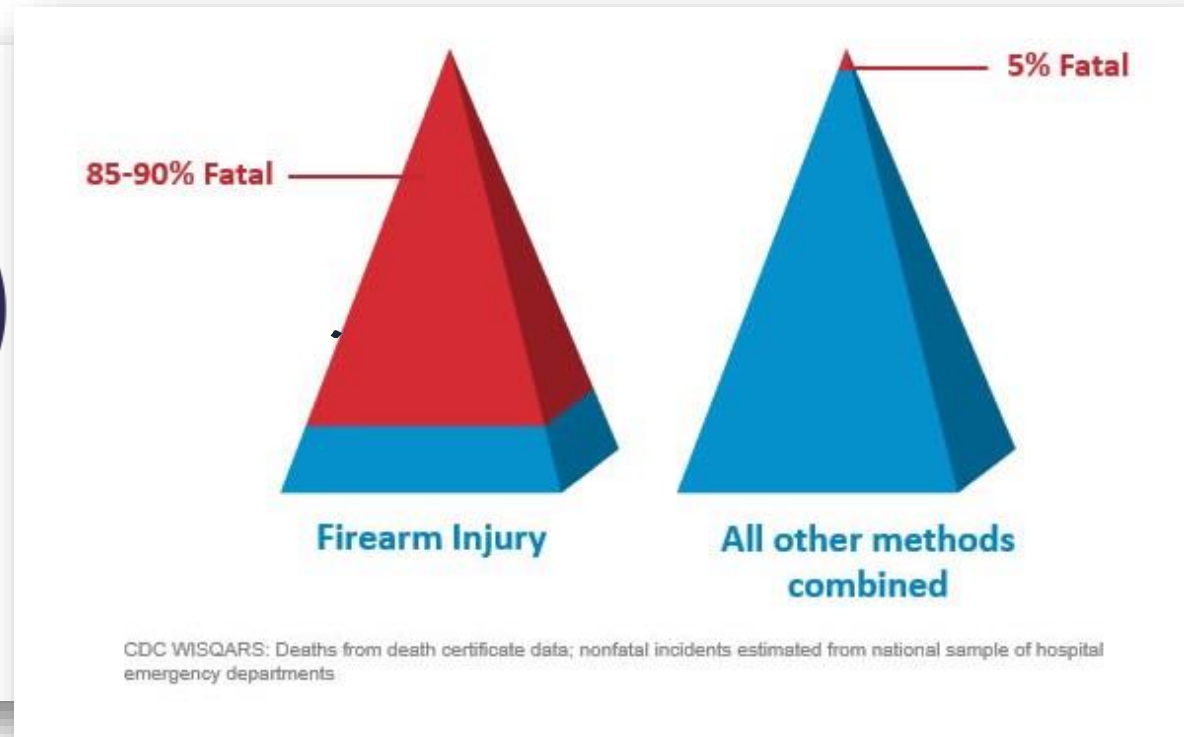
- In the context of suicide prevention, safe storage of lethal means is any action that builds in time and space between a person with thoughts of suicide and a suicide method.
- Effective lethal means safety education and counseling is collaborative and Veteran-centered. It respects the important role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

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 (1)

Myth	Reality
<p>People who talk about suicide are just seeking attention.</p>	

Common Myths vs. Realities (2)

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 (3)

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 (4)

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.

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

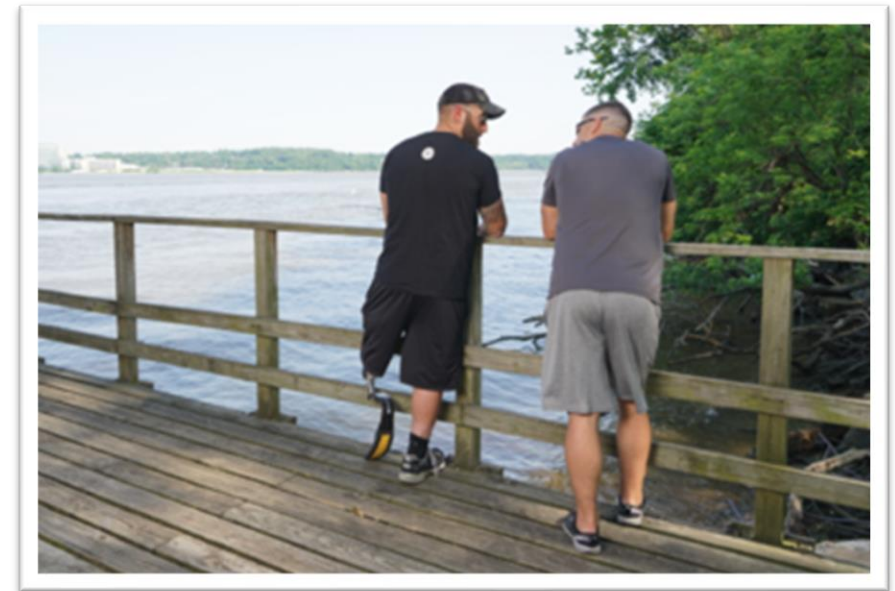
“Are you thinking about killing yourself?”

A Asking the Question

Do's	Don'ts
<p>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>

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.



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.

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

Resources

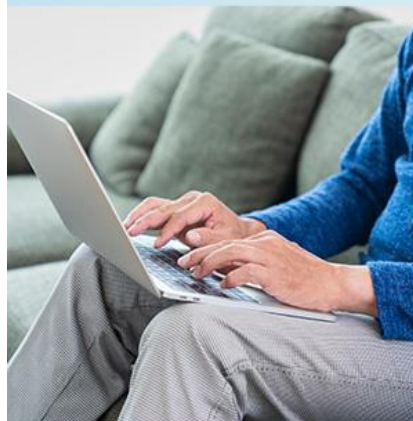
Free, Confidential Support 24/7/365

- Veterans
- Service members
- Family members
- Friends



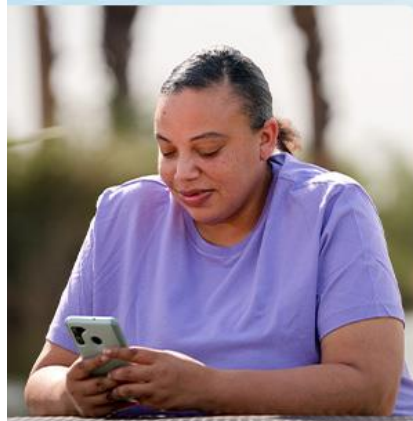
CALL

Dial 988 then Press 1



CHAT

VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat

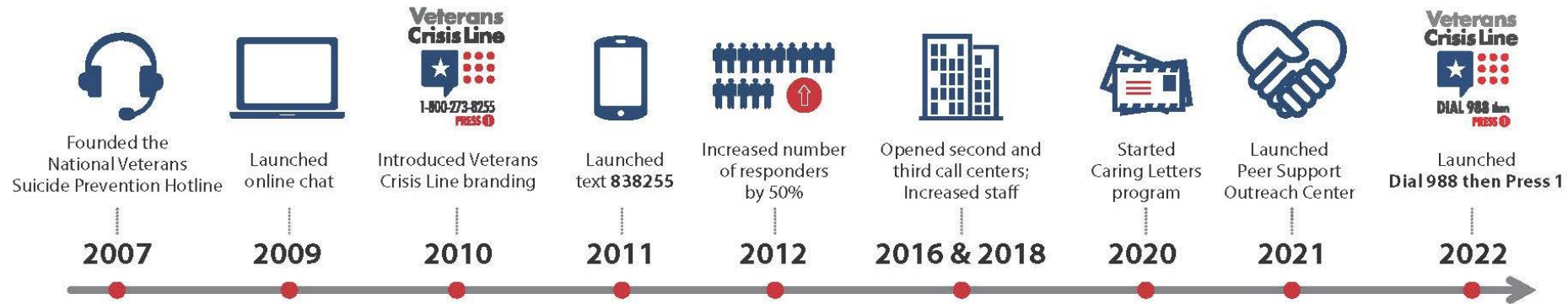


TEXT

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". Below the menu is a breadcrumb "Home > Local Resources" and a large heading "Local Resources". A paragraph asks if the user is looking for clinical care or counseling. At the bottom is a search box titled "Search Local VA Resources" with a "Find a Resource" label, a text input field, a "Within:" dropdown set to "50 Miles", and a "Search" button. A "Use Current Location" link is also present.

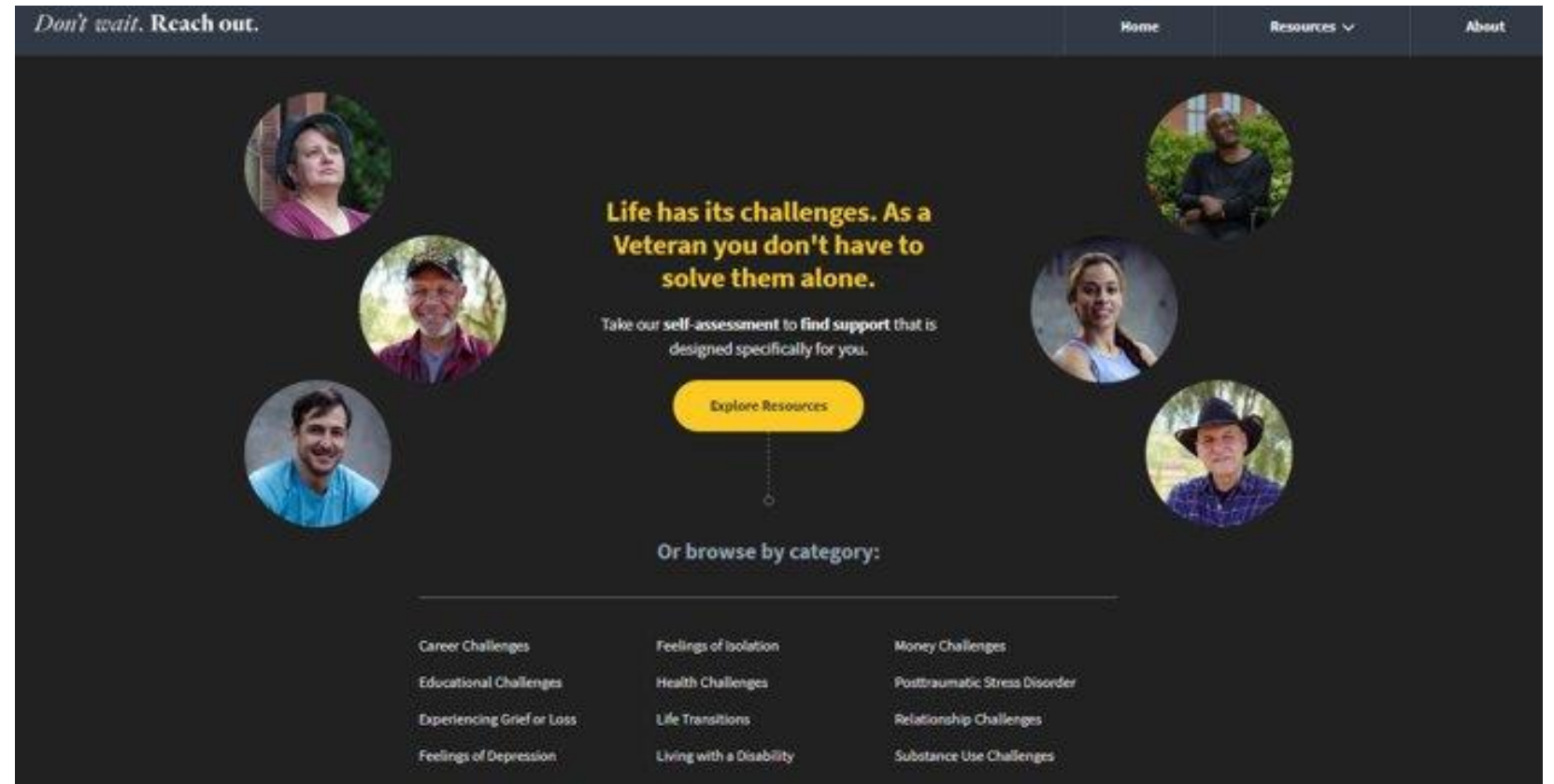


The screenshot shows the search results page. The heading is "Search Local VA Resources". On the left, under "Find a Resource", there is a text input field, a "Use Current Location" link, and a "Within:" dropdown set to "50 Miles". Below this is a list of resource types with checkboxes: "Suicide Prevention Coordinators", "VA Medical Centers", "Outpatient Clinics", "Vet Centers", and "Veterans Benefits Administration Offices". A "Search" button is at the bottom of this list. On the right, it says "Showing 10 Results out of 11 for 14424". Two results are shown: "Canandaigua VA Medical Center" and "Suicide Prevention, Team Canandaigua/Rochester". Each result includes a VA logo, address, distance, phone number, and a "Visit website" or "Email" button.

Don't Wait. Reach Out.

Find the right
Veteran Resources
Quickly and Easily

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



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 titled 'REACH' and is part of the 'VA Health Care - RCACII - Firearm Suicide Prevention & Lethal Means Safety' section. The main heading is 'Keep It Secure'. Below this, there are four buttons: '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 titled 'Lethal Means Safety & Suicide Prevention' which explains that lethal means are objects that may be used by individuals experiencing a suicidal crisis. It lists examples like guns, medications, alcohol, opioids, other substances, ropes, cords, or sharp objects. 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.' The page also includes a 'Learn More' button at the bottom.

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



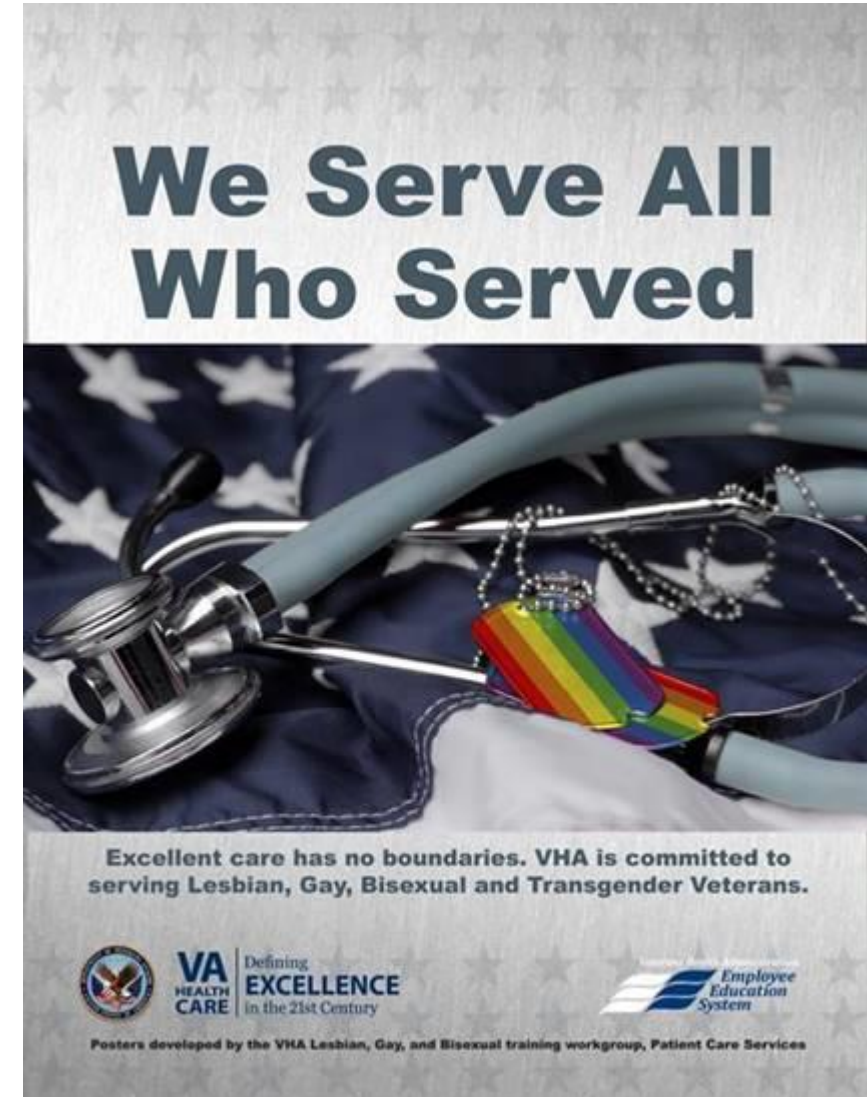
Firearm safety is an important public health issue that can affect your health and your family's well-being.

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



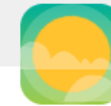
ACT Coach

Related

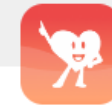
These apps help with related issues affecting people with PTSD.



Safety Plan



COVID Coach

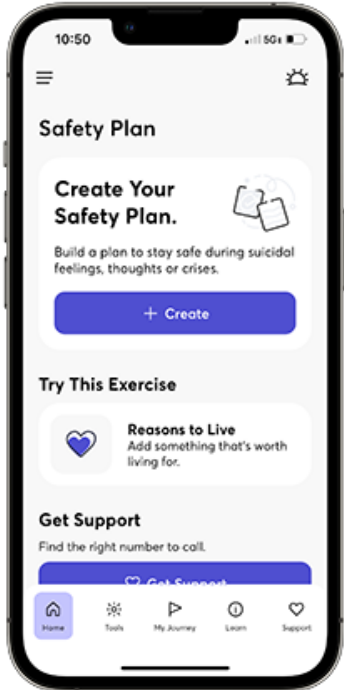


Couples Coach



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)

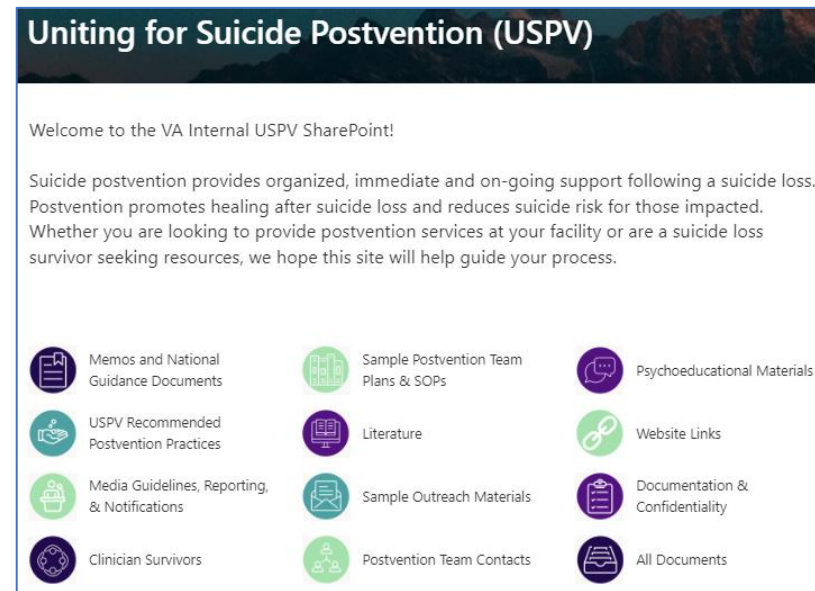
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Uniting for Suicide Postvention

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)

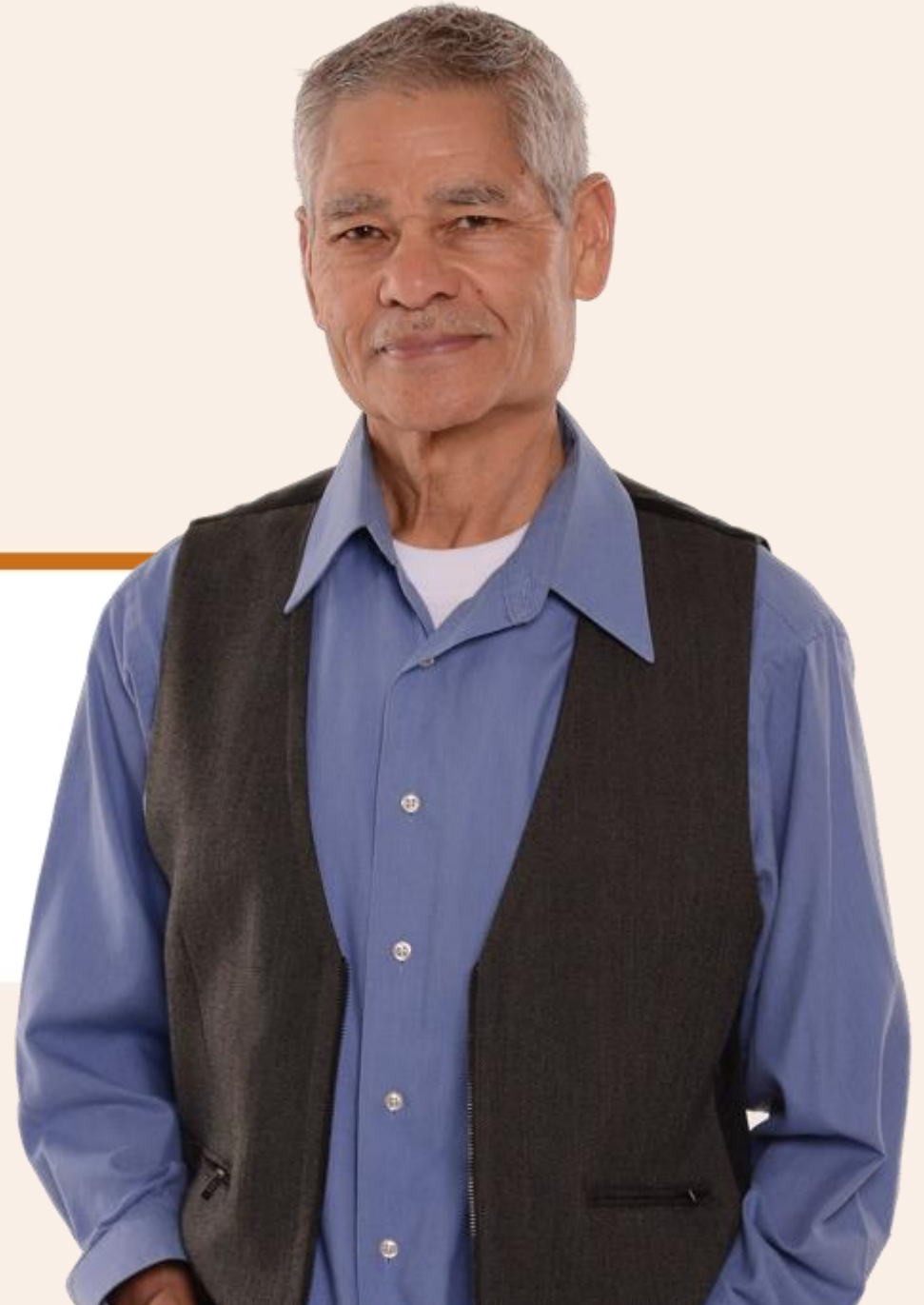
<https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/postvention/>

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/>



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Questions?
