

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# VA S.A.V.E. Training

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*Georgia Gerard, LCSW*

*Rocky Mountain Mental Illness Research Education and  
Clinical Center (MIRECC)*

## Before We Begin:



Many have been impacted by suicide. Keep in mind:

- Reactions and experiences are unique to each person, be compassionate with yourself if strong feelings arise.
- Please take care of yourself. Feel free to take a break if needed and return when you are able.
- If you are in need of immediate support, please contact the Veterans Crisis Line by dialing **988** press 1.

# Overview

- Objectives
- Facts about Veteran Suicide
- Common Myths vs. Realities
- VA S.A.V.E. Steps
- Postvention and Impacts of Suicide Loss
- 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.
- Veteran Suicide Data for the state of Georgia (2021):
  - Not significantly different from the national Veteran suicide rate.
  - Was significantly higher than the national general population suicide rate.

# 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 Factors for Suicide

## Health

- Mental health conditions
- Physical health conditions
- Chronic pain
- Traumatic brain injury

## Environmental

- Access to lethal means
- Prolonged stress
- Stressful life events
- Exposure to suicide by others

## Historical

- Previous attempts
- Family history
- Childhood abuse, neglect, trauma

# Protective Factors for Suicide

## Health

- Good health and healthy behaviors
- Access to care
- Medical compliance

## Environmental

- Family and community support
- Safe storage of lethal means
- Safe, stable environment

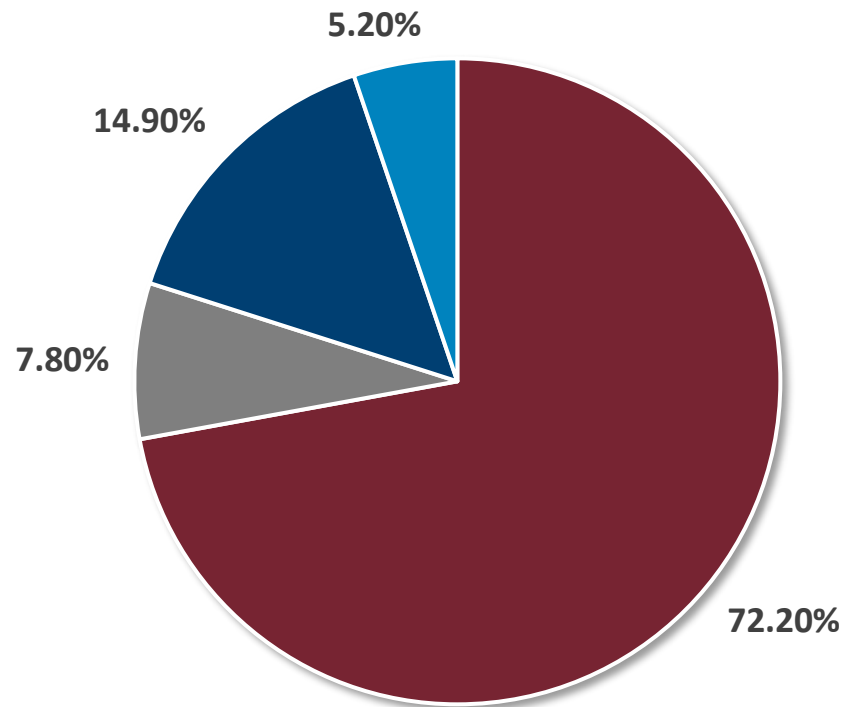
## Personal

- Sense of purpose
- Cultural, spiritual, and religious beliefs
- Self-esteem
- Hope for future
- Coping skills

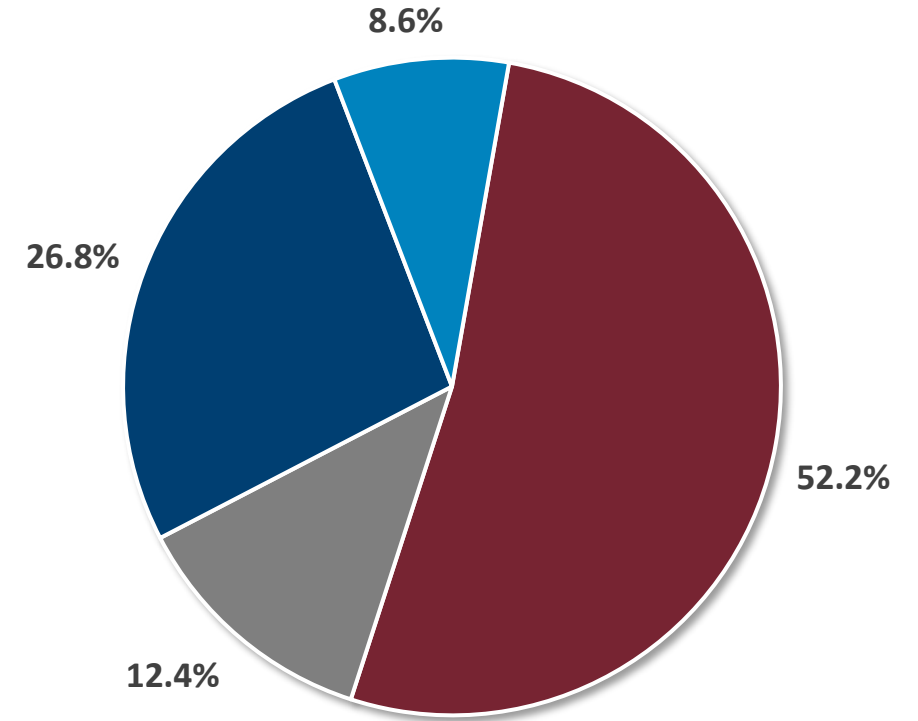
# Access to Lethal Means is a Risk Factor

# 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.

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

# We Can All Prevent Suicide

- Suicide is not inevitable for anyone. By starting the conversation, providing support, and directing help to those who need it, we can prevent suicides and save lives.
- Evidence shows that providing support services, talking about suicide, and reducing access to means of self-harm are just some of the actions we can all take.
- Understanding the issues concerning suicide and mental health is an important way to take part in suicide prevention, help others in crisis, and change the conversation around suicide.

# Common Myths vs. Realities



# Common Myths vs. Realities

Myth	Reality
<p data-bbox="690 668 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, suicidal statements 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 experiencing a suicide crisis 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

### Warning Signs

**Warning signs are person specific, but if present, may indicate that the person needs help or further assessment**

# **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

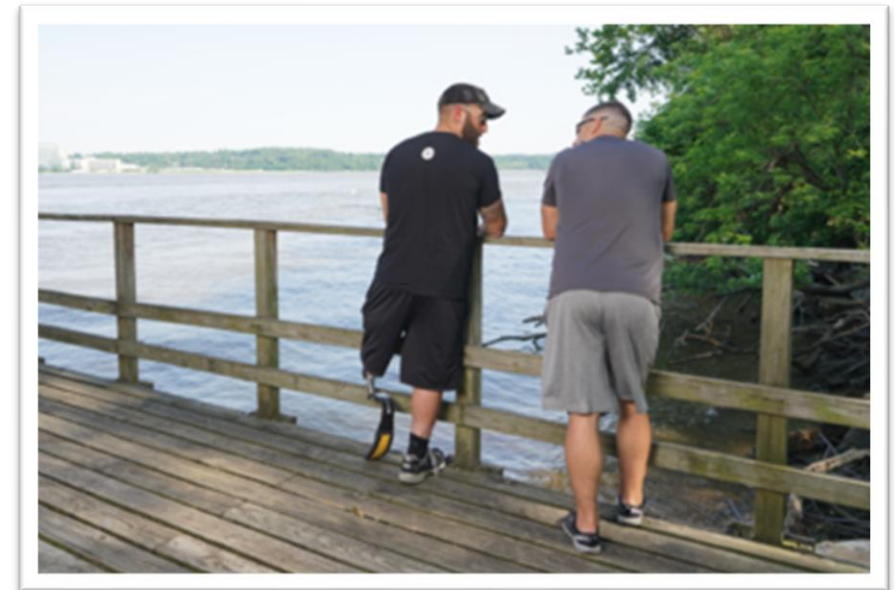
Do's	Don'ts
<p><b>DO</b> ask the question if you've identified warning signs or symptoms.</p>	<p><b>DON'T</b> ask the question as though you are looking for a "no" answer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "You aren't thinking of killing yourself, are you?"</li></ul>
<p><b>DO</b> ask the question 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>

# A Asking the Question

- Considerations:
  - Differences about how individuals talk about death or dying and their beliefs regarding suicide
  - Individual comfort level with disclosing personal information or talking about mental health and suicide
- What are your thoughts about asking the question? Any concerns?

# **V** Validate the Veteran's Experience

- Talk openly about suicide. Be willing to listen and allow the person to express their feelings.
- Do not pass judgment.
- Reassure that help is available.





## Validate the Veteran's Experience: Check-In & Practice

- Someone shares, “Everything is so hard right now, I don’t feel like being here anymore.”
- What are some examples of validating statements in response to that?
  - *“This would be a lot of anyone to handle.”*
  - *“You have been struggling with a lot.”*
  - *“Others in your situation would also feel that way.”*
- How might you feel if someone responded to you with, *“Everything will be fine.”*?

# **E** Encourage Treatment and Expedite Getting Help

- What should I do if I think someone is at risk for suicide?
  - 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 that help is available.
- Call the Veterans Crisis Line at **Dial 988 then Press 1.**

# Things to Consider

- Remain calm.
- Listen more than you speak.
- Do not argue.
- Use open body language.
- Limit questions — let the individual do the talking.
- Use supportive, encouraging comments.
- Be honest — let them know that there are no quick solutions, but help is available.



# Practice Sessions

- Imagine that you are talking to a friend, family member, co-worker, or Veteran in your organization/community. You know this person has been having several stressors lately and seems to be withdrawing from activities, and overall seems “down” much of the time. They mention that everything feels “hopeless.”
- What **Signs** may be present, or could you be looking for?
- How would you **Ask** the question?
- What could you say to **Validate** their experience or feelings?
- What type of care could you **Encourage**?

# 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

# Postvention and Impacts of Suicide Loss

# What is Suicide Postvention

- Suicide postvention is a constellation of services that provide **organized, immediate, and on-going** support following a suicide loss.
- It **promotes healing** after suicide loss and **reduces suicide risk** for those impacted.
- Postvention is **an important part** of successful suicide prevention efforts.



# Suicide Loss

- Suicide loss is different than other kinds of loss.
- In addition to more universal grief reactions, survivors of suicide loss may experience post-trauma symptoms as well as guilt, confusion, abandonment, shame, and anger.
- They may also face stigma and blame.



# Common Reactions to Suicide

EMOTIONAL	PHYSICAL	COGNITIVE	BEHAVIORAL	EXISTENTIAL/SPIRITUAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sadness</li> <li>▪ Anger</li> <li>▪ Anxiety</li> <li>▪ Numbness</li> <li>▪ Guilt</li> <li>▪ Blame</li> <li>▪ Relief</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hollowness</li> <li>▪ Tension</li> <li>▪ Oversensitivity to noise</li> <li>▪ Shortness of breath</li> <li>▪ Lack of energy</li> <li>▪ Muscle weakness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Disbelief</li> <li>▪ Confusion</li> <li>▪ Overestimating own role</li> <li>▪ Preoccupation</li> <li>▪ Hallucinations</li> <li>▪ Hindsight bias</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sleep problems</li> <li>▪ Appetite Changes</li> <li>▪ Social Withdrawal</li> <li>▪ Crying</li> <li>▪ Restlessness</li> <li>▪ Avoidance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Shattered assumptions</li> <li>▪ Questioning: self-esteem, professional work, life goals</li> <li>▪ Questioning: religious beliefs “how could my god let this happen”</li> </ul>

# Recognizing Your Reactions

- Acknowledge and accept your feelings – whatever they are, without judgement. There is no right way to feel after a traumatic loss.
- Try not to take other people's stress reactions personally – their reactions (such as irritability or anger) may be different from your own.

# After a Loss to Suicide

- Thoughts/feelings/needs can and do change over time.
- What you can do on your own that helps:
  - Talking through your experience, feelings, and reactions.
  - Memorializing and honoring the person who died.
  - Creating a narrative that allows for complexity, uncertainty and compassion.
  - Connecting with a community of loss survivors, family, friends, coworkers, etc.
- Mental health professionals can offer support by:
  - Helping you explore your thoughts and feelings in a nonjudgmental way.
  - Working with you to alleviate the pain caused by unhelpful beliefs and negative thoughts.
  - Helping you identify ways to become more connected with others.



# Supporting a Suicide Loss Survivor



## Listen



- Be ready, open, and willing to have tough conversations
  - + Know that it may take time - keep checking in
- Offer your full attention
  - + Focus on listening by asking open-ended questions
- Understand the loss survivor's choices and emotions from their point of view rather than your own




## Validate



- Resist the desire to fix, reframe, or advise
  - + Try paraphrasing what you have heard in your own words
- There is no timeline on grief
  - + Avoid the pull to say that "things will get better"
- Everyone experiences suicide loss differently - what is helpful to you, may not be the same for someone else

# Supporting a Suicide Loss Survivor



## Support



- Ask what the loss survivor needs help with and assist with tangible, supportive tasks
  - + Bring prepared meals
  - + Grocery shop for them
  - + Walk their dogs
- Relieve some pressure by helping the loss survivor navigate the support resources available to them
  - + Provide suicide loss resources
  - + Help schedule appointments
- Keep checking in months and years after the loss
  - + Holidays
  - + Life events (e.g., wedding, new baby, promotion)
  - + Birthday of the person who died
  - + Loss anniversaries



## Honor



- Show the loss survivor that you remember the person who died
  - + Reach out
  - + Share memories
  - + Proactively remember important dates
- Suggest ways to honor the memory of the person who died
  - + Regularly meet at their favorite place
  - + Create a memorial in their honor
  - + Participate in a memorial walk
- Remind the loss survivor you continue to value the life of the person who has died and that they will never be forgotten

# Final Thoughts

- Healing takes time. Allow yourself the time you need to grieve.
- Grief has no predictable pattern or timetable. Though there are elements of commonality in grief, each person and each situation is unique.
- Setbacks and occasional painful reminders can catch you off-guard. This is a normal and expected part of the grieving and healing process.



# International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day



# Resources

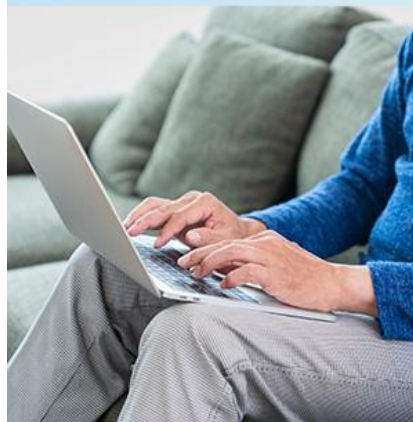
# Free, Confidential Support 24/7/365

- Veterans
- Service members
- Family members
- Friends



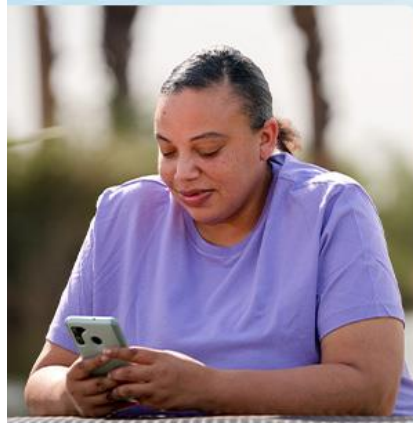
**CALL**

Dial 988 then Press 1



**CHAT**

[VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](https://VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat)

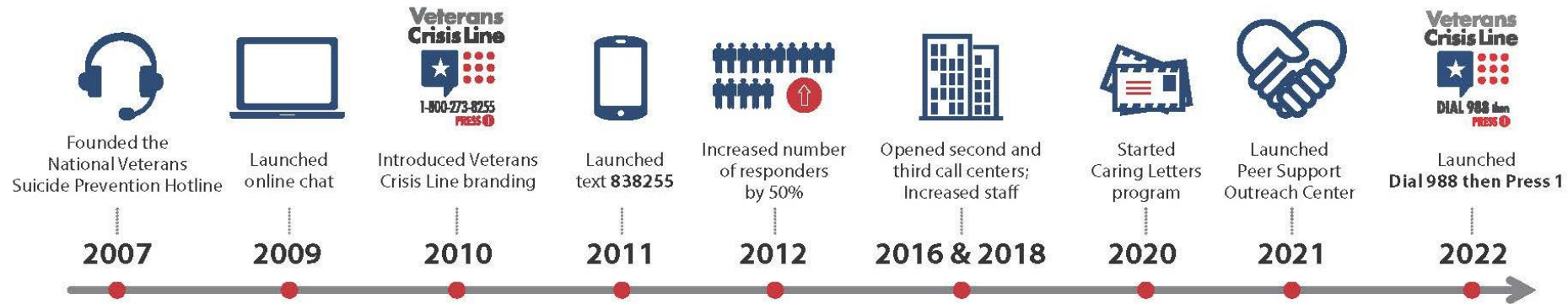


**TEXT**

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 reads: "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 link "Use Current Location" is also present.

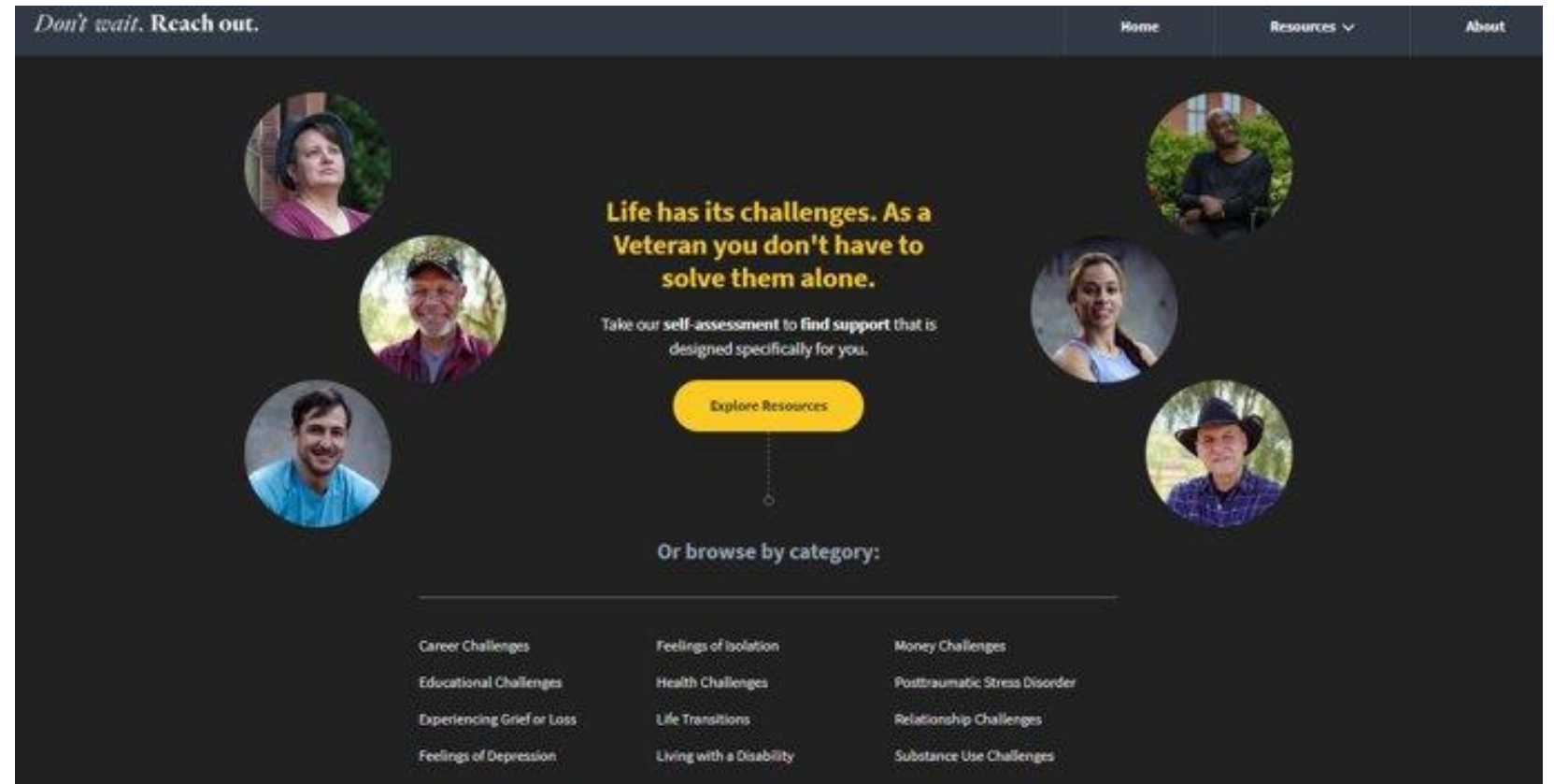


The screenshot shows the search results page titled "Search Local VA Resources". On the left, under "Find a Resource", there is an input field "Enter City, State, or ZIP" and a "Use Current Location" link. Below is a "Within:" dropdown set to "50 Miles" and a list of resource types with checkboxes: "Suicide Prevention Coordinators", "VA Medical Centers", "Outpatient Clinics", "Vet Centers", and "Veterans Benefits Administration Offices". A "Search" button is at the bottom of this list. On the right, it says "Showing 10 Results out of 11 for 14424". Two results are visible: "Canandaigua VA Medical Center" (400 Fort Hill Avenue, Canandaigua, NY 14424-1159, 0 miles away, phone 585-393-7100, and a "Visit website" link) and "Suicide Prevention, Team Canandaigua/Rochester" (400 Fort Hill Avenue, Canandaigua, NY 14424) with an "Email" button.

# *Don't Wait. Reach Out.*

Find the right  
Veteran Resources  
Quickly and Easily

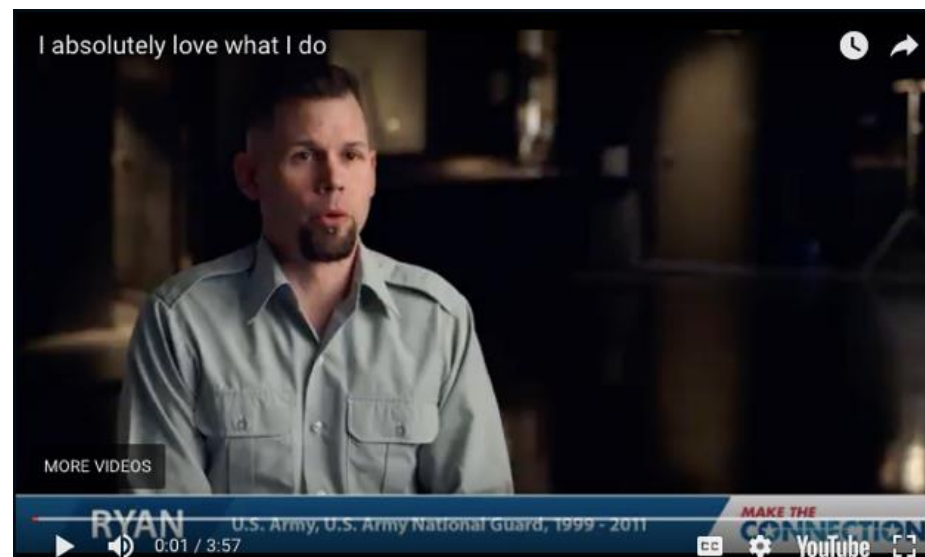
*Don't Wait. Reach  
Out. (va.gov)*



# 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](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)

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 box 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 text explaining the risks and a 'Learn More' button. 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.'

# Lethal Means Safety Resources



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.

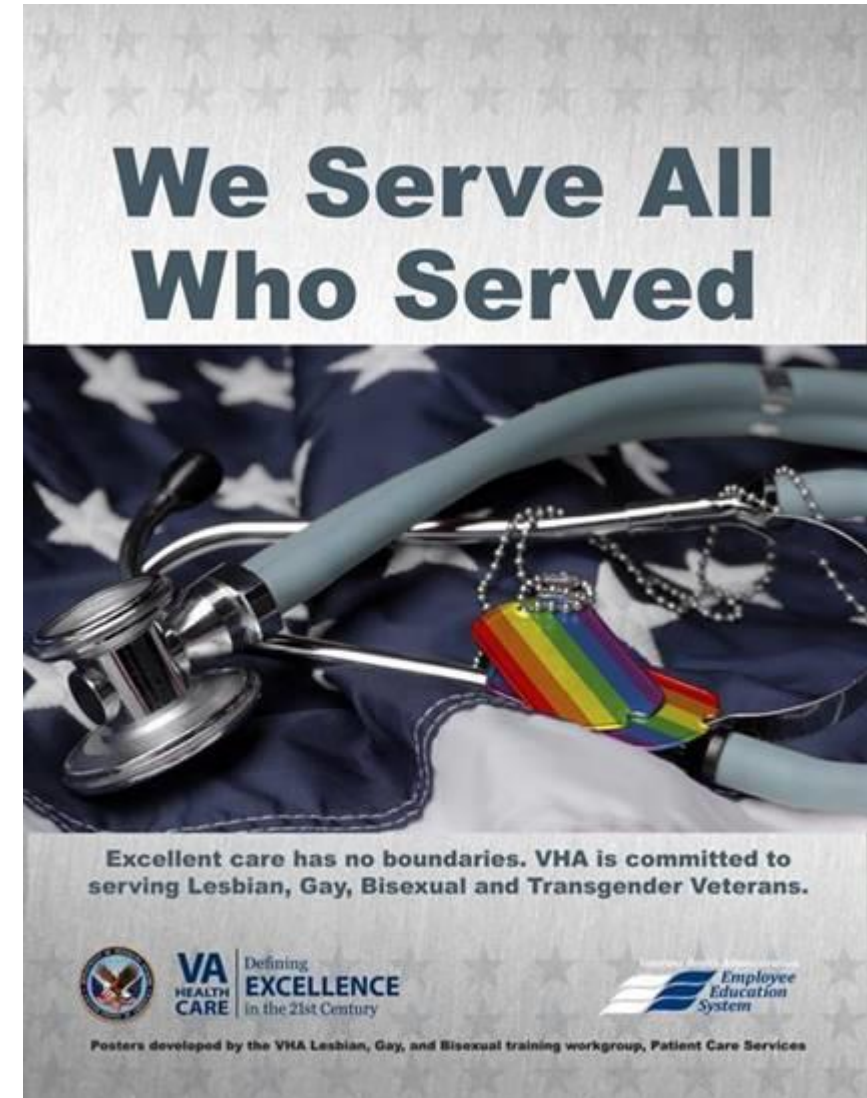
## Reducing Firearm & Other Household Safety Risks Brochure

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.















# LGBTQ+

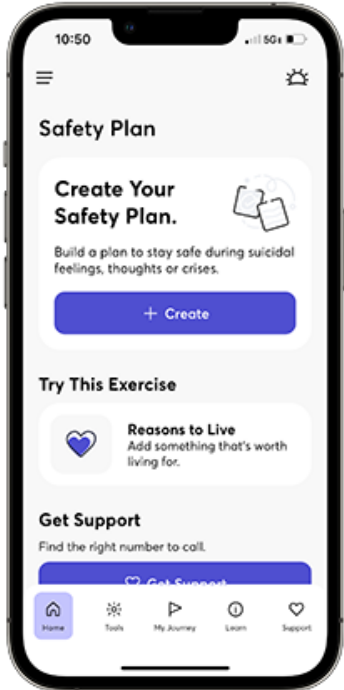
- The VA supports the LGBTQ+ community and provides care for LGBTQ+ Veterans. Here is where you can find resources:
  - Every VHA facility has a LGBTQ+ Veteran Care Coordinator – contact information can be found by state on the VAs website. [LGBTQ+ Veteran Care Coordinator \(LGBTQ+ VCC\) Locator - Patient Care Services \(va.gov\)](#)



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

<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>Safety Plan</p>  <p>COVID Coach</p>  <p>Couples Coach</p>  <p>Insomnia Coach</p>

# 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](#).

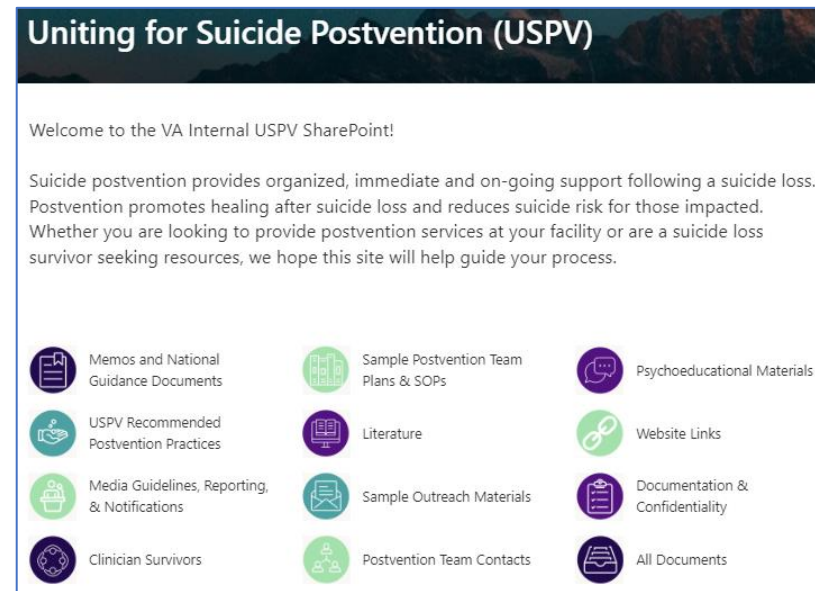


*Note: Safety Plan is a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs app, developed by the National Center for PTSD Dissemination and Training Division and the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention.*



# 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 Resources for Survivors of Suicide Loss

## VA resources for survivors of suicide loss

We offer you this guide to help you during this profoundly difficult time.

[▶ Learn more about available resources](#)



## 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?

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