Suicide Prevention: A Guide for Military and Veteran Families

Myth: Asking about suicide may lead someone to become suicidal.

Reality: Asking about suicide does not create suicidal thoughts. Instead, the act of asking the question gives someone permission to talk about difficult thoughts or feelings.

The way we view and discuss mental health has changed drastically over the years, but there is still a substantial amount of work to be done to improve how people view and react to mental health conditions and what they know about mental health treatment. Help us spread the word that suicide is not a secret. Many Veterans and family members of Veterans have been personally impacted by suicide — either by surviving the loss of a loved one or by experiencing suicidal crises themselves. If you recognize the warning signs of suicide, there are some steps you can take to start these important conversations:

- **Be direct:** Ask the question, “Are you thinking of suicide?” Talk openly and matter-of-factly about suicide. Remember, talking about suicide does not cause suicidal thoughts.
- **Be willing to listen:** Give people in distress space to express themselves. Do not criticize, pass judgment, or try to convince them that things aren’t so bad. Instead, reassure them that help is available.
- **Encourage treatment:** Get involved and be available. Try to get a person in distress to seek help from his or her doctor or, if it’s an emergency, the nearest hospital emergency room.

In 2012, VA launched the Behavioral Health Autopsy Program (BHAP) to identify ways VA can enhance its suicide prevention efforts. One of the key findings was that ongoing suicide prevention is needed in the communities where Veterans live and work to ensure that Veterans in distress get the help they need. In addition, VA Suicide Prevention Coordinators (SPCs) have highlighted the critical need for postvention training and resources. In response, VA is
partnering with the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) to provide compassionate care and support to those affected by a Veteran’s death by suicide.

Anyone in crisis is encouraged to share your story with someone you are comfortable speaking to. Talking about suicide openly and directly can build hope and encouragement for someone who is struggling.

Veterans Golf Lessons

Offered in partnership between the St. Cloud VA Health Care System and Eagle’s Turf, free golf lessons--taught by PRO golfers--are being offered to Veterans!

Lessons are available for Veterans receiving care at the St. Cloud VA HCS, and both men’s and women’s sessions are offered. No experience is necessary, and all equipment is provided, or Veterans can use their own.

For more information and application details, please contact Corrin Heesch, 320-252-1670, Ext. 6034, for men’s sessions, or Leah Egan, 320-252-1670, Ext. 6180, for women’s sessions.

Emergency Medical Care

During a medical emergency, Veterans should immediately seek care at the nearest medical facility. A medical emergency is an injury, illness or symptom so severe that without immediate treatment, you believe your life or health is in danger. If you believe your life or health is in danger, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Veterans do not need to check with VA before calling for an ambulance or going to an emergency department. During a medical emergency, VA encourages all Veterans to seek immediate medical attention without delay. A claim for emergency care will never be denied based solely on VA not receiving notification prior to seeking care.

It is, however, important to promptly notify VA after receiving emergency care at a community emergency department. Notification should be made within 72 hours of admission to a community medical facility. This allows VA to assist the Veteran in coordinating necessary care or transfer, and helps to ensure that the administrative and clinical requirements for VA to pay for the care are met.

For more information about emergency care, visit https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/veterans/Emergency_Care.asp
Vietnam Veterans Recognition Ceremony & Resource Fair

A ceremony honoring Vietnam Veterans living in the Wright County area and a Veterans Resource Fair are scheduled on June 18, starting at 5 p.m., at the Monticello Community Center, Mississippi Room, 505 Walnut Street, Monticello.

The St. Cloud VA is a commemorative partner in the national Vietnam War Commemoration, and is committed to publicly thanking and honoring Vietnam Veterans and their families.

A Veterans Resource Fair featuring county, state, and federal Veteran service officers and representatives from St. Cloud VA eligibility, suicide prevention, and caregiver support along with a host of other Veteran resources will also be available.

About the Vietnam War Commemoration:

Authorized by Congress, established under the Secretary of Defense, and launched by the President in May 2012, the Vietnam War Commemoration recognizes all men and women who served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces from November 1, 1955 to May 15, 1975. Nine million Americans, approximately 7 million living today, served during that period, and the Commemoration makes no distinction between Veterans who served in-country, in-theater, or were stationed elsewhere during that period. All answered the call of duty.

By presidential proclamation issued on May 25, 2012, the Commemoration extends from its inaugural event on Memorial Day 2012 through Veterans Day 2025.

To learn more about the Vietnam War Commemoration, go to: www.vietnamwar50th.com.

VA Video Connect Expands Veterans’ Access to Health Care

More and more Veterans are receiving health care treatment virtually, thanks to efforts by VA to expand telehealth.

One of the recent successes has been with VA Video Connect, which allows Veterans to connect with their health-care teams over live video from a computer, tablet or smart phone from the comfort of their homes, thereby increasing their access to VA health care and reducing travel times.

Since its launch in August 2017, more than 20,000 Veterans have used VA Video Connect to receive care, and currently more than 4,000 VA providers across the country are set up to use the system.

“We are taking big steps to make VA health care more accessible,” said then VA Acting Secretary Robert Wilkie. “VA Video Connect provides our Veterans with a convenient option to connect with their providers from their preferred locations in the United States.”
VA Video Connect also has proven to be an important tool for VA after emergencies. The Office of Connected Care’s mobile and telehealth programs, in coordination with the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (VAMC) in Houston and VA’s regional network, quickly organized telehealth capabilities to assist Veterans at two “mega-shelters” and four community based outpatient clinics after Hurricane Harvey in 2017.

As part of that effort, remote clinicians used VA Video Connect and other video technologies to hold virtual health-care appointments with Veterans. VA teams have been coordinating since last year’s hurricane season to prepare for how VA Video Connect can be used to mobilize clinical resources in the face of future emergencies and disasters.

VA Video Connect can be used on almost any computer, tablet or mobile phone with an internet connection, a web camera and microphone. VA Video Connect uses encryption to ensure privacy in each session.

In March 2018, VA released an iOS version of VA Video Connect to the Apple App Store. Soon after, VA Video Connect began trending as a top 10 app in the “medical” category.

“The response from patients has been incredible,” said Dr. Margaret Carrico, a VA primary care provider based at VAMC, Tampa. “Overall, they are delighted. Because wherever they are, they don’t have to come in here to see me. Their daughter doesn’t have to get off work, or they don’t have to drive in traffic.”

To learn more about VA Video Connect, visit the VA App Store at mobile.va.gov/appstore.

**VA Offers Early Participation in a Faster New Claims Decision Review Process**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it is offering two opportunities for early participation in the new, more efficient claims decision review process outlined in the historic Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017.

These two opportunities will allow eligible Veterans to receive a review of a decision on a claim much faster than the current appeals process.

“VA is committed to transforming the appeals process,” said then VA Acting Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This is evidenced by the success of Rapid Appeals Modernization Program which has seen over 12,000 Veterans opt-in. In addition, the Board of Veterans’ Appeals has issued approximately 46,000 decisions this fiscal year — nearly 23,000 more decisions than last year at this time. We are on pace to reach a historical fiscal goal of 81,000 decisions.”
First, VA will expand the Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP) by removing the requirement that Veterans first receive an invitation from VA in order to elect participation in the program. RAMP, which was initially launched in November 2017 as an invitation only program, allows eligible Veterans with a disability compensation appeal early access to the Higher-Level Review and Supplemental Claim Lanes outlined in the Appeals Modernization Act. By removing the invitation requirement, Veterans will have the opportunity to benefit from the new, more efficient decision review process, versus continuing to wait in the legacy appeal process. As of March 31, RAMP reviews were completed in an average of 52 days.

Second, in May, the Board of Veterans’ Appeals will launch its Early Applicability of Appeals Modernization (BEAAM) pilot project. Under this project, the Board will partner with the National Organization of Veterans’ Advocates, Paralyzed Veterans of America and the California Department of Veterans Affairs to identify 50 Veterans who are dissatisfied with a recent decision on their benefits claim. These Veterans will participate in a study that allows them the option of appealing directly to the Board or seeking a review in RAMP. In this study, the Board will collect preliminary data about Veteran choices and experiences.

In October, the Board will begin deciding appeals from RAMP decisions using the features of the Appeals Modernization Act, specifically its new, separate Direct, Evidence and Hearing dockets. The expansion of RAMP, combined with the BEAAM, will allow VA to collect valuable data about implementation of the Appeals Modernization Act.

**Consolidating VA Community Care Programs and Networks**

VA is working to simplify the way Veterans receive care through community providers with the goal of delivering better care and a better experience for Veterans. There are two major initiatives currently underway that will have the greatest impact. The first is legislation that would consolidate all existing VA community care programs into a single program. The second is the establishment of VA’s new Community Care Network, which is being managed by the VHA Office of Community Care. Taken together, the two initiatives will work together to simplify how Veterans receive care through community providers.

**Existing VA Community Care Programs**

Currently, there are multiple programs that VA may use to refer Veterans to outside community providers. The programs, established by Congress, are based in Federal law. Over the years the number of programs has grown, including programs like the Veterans Choice Program, each with its own purpose and set of requirements adding, complexity in terms of implementation. Through these programs, VA is authorized by law to refer Veterans (and in some cases family members) to community providers under specific conditions.
Existing VA Community Care Networks

In addition, there are currently two networks of licensed healthcare providers and practitioners who provide care to Veterans paid for by VA: Patient-Centered Community Care (PC3) and Veterans Choice Program (VCP). These networks link VA and community providers, allowing VA to purchase care for Veterans outside VA. Without these networks, VA would have to enter into separate agreements with thousands of individual community providers. Third Party Administrators (TPAs) (i.e., Health Net and TriWest) each manage a region of these networks for VA and perform certain administrative tasks on behalf of VA.

Consolidating Programs and Networks

VA is working to simplify both the community care programs and the networks. This includes working with Congress to consolidate all the existing community care programs into a single program under the law and streamline criteria for Veterans to receive treatment.

In addition, VA is deploying new Community Care Network (CCN) contracts across four specified regions to provide a network of licensed healthcare providers and practitioners for medical, surgical, complementary and integrative health services (CIHS), durable medical equipment (DME), pharmacy, and dental services to Veterans who are unable to receive care at a VA medical facility. CCN is focused on transparency, accountability, quality and increased communications between VA and Veterans.

Going Forward

Taken together, consolidating community care programs and networks will streamline and improve community care for Veterans. At the same time, these changes will strengthen coordination between VA and community care providers, and ensure they receive timely payments for care they provide to Veterans.
Use VA well & take charge of your health!

---

**Patient Orientation**

**Coffee Talks**

Informal orientation sessions with a “how to” presentation at 2 p.m., followed by Q & A, and tour. Spouses and caregivers welcome!

- July 13, 2018: 2 p.m.
- Aug. 10, 2018: 2 p.m.
- Sept. 14, 2018: 2 p.m.

Coffee Talks are held in Building 4, Room 114 or dial-in via telephone at: 800-767-1750, participant code 11242#

---

**Introduction to Whole Health**

An educational class that equips you to take charge of your health by emphasizing self-empowerment, self-healing, and self-care.

- July 6, 2018: Noon
  Building 28, Room 67
- July 16, 2018: 10 a.m.
  Building 4, Room 114
- Aug. 3, 2018: Noon
  Building 28, Room 67
- Aug. 20, 2018: 10 a.m.
  Building 4, Room 114
- Sept. 7, 2018: Noon
  Building 28, Room 67
- Sept. 17, 2018: 10 a.m.
  Building 4, Room 114

---

All classes held at:
St. Cloud VA Medical Center
4801 Veterans Drive, St. Cloud

Choose VA
UPCOMING EVENTS

Introduction to Whole Health
Friday, June 1 or Monday, June 18
Noon-2 p.m. or 10 a.m.-Noon
St. Cloud VA or St. Cloud VA
Bldg. 28, Rm. 67 or Bldg. 4, Rm. 114
A class that equips Veterans to take charge of their health by emphasizing self-empowerment, self-healing, and self-care. No pre-registration is required.

Veterans Affairs Radio Show
Monday, June 4 8:10-8:30 a.m.
KNSI AM 1450/FM 103

Veterans Law Clinic (by appointment only)
Tuesday, June 5 & June 19 Noon-2 p.m.
St. Cloud VA, Bldg. 28, Room 126
Free legal consultation for Veterans. No criminal law issues will be discussed. Please call 320-253-0138 or 1-800-622-7773 to schedule an appointment.

Mental Health Recovery Outreach Group
Wednesday, June 6 5-6 p.m.
Good Earth Co-Op
2010 Veterans Drive, St. Cloud

For a complete Calendar of Events, go to https://www.stcloud.va.gov/calendar.asp

Voices for Veterans Radio Show
Wednesday, June 20 8:10-8:30 a.m.
WJON AM 1240

We Love Pets — but they can’t attend your medical appointments.

We welcome ADA-qualified service dogs that are specifically trained to work or perform tasks for people with disabilities.

For the safety of all around us, please leave your pets at home.

Hosted by the St. Cloud VA, Veterans and family members are welcome to attend. VA enrollment or pre-registration is not required to attend the meeting. Call 320-252-1670, Ext. 6503, or email leigh.vandewalker@va.gov for more information.

Coffee Talk
Friday, June 8 2-3:30 p.m.
St. Cloud VA, Bldg. 4, Room 114
Learn how to most effectively use VA systems of care. If you can’t come in person, dial-in via telephone at: 800-767-1750, participant code 11242#. All Veterans are welcome.

Vietnam Veterans Recognition Ceremony & Veterans Resource Fair
Monday, June 18 5-6 p.m.
Monticello Community Center
Mississippi Rm., 505 Walnut St., Monticello
Vietnam Veterans and their families are invited to a recognition ceremony. A Veterans fair featuring a host of Veteran resources will also be available.
Quick Reference Phone List

Main St. Cloud VA HCS Phone Number 320-252-1670 or 800-247-1739
TDD User 320-255-6450
Max J. Beilke VA Clinic, Alexandria 320-759-2640
Brainerd VA Clinic 218-855-1115
Montevideo VA Clinic 320-269-2222
Veterans Crisis Line 800-273-8255 Press 1
Homeless Veteran Hotline 877-424-3838

Billing:
- VA Care 866-347-2352
- Non-VA Medical Care Ext. 6483
- Veterans Choice Program 866-606-8198
- Debt Collection Issues for Choice 877-881-7618
Chaplain Service Ext. 6386
Community Care Referrals Ext. 6401
Discrimination Complaints Ext. 6304
Eligibility Ext. 6340
Nutrition Clinic Ext. 6376
Transition & Care Management Program Ext. 6453
Patient Advocate Ext. 6353
Pharmacy Refill Line 855-560-1724
Privacy Officer Ext. 6408
Public Affairs Office Ext. 6353
Release of Information (Medical Records) Ext. 6336
Transportation Ext. 7622
TRICARE 844-866-9378
Voluntary Service Ext. 6365
VA Police Ext. 6355

Stay in Touch

Visit our Website: www.stcloud.va.gov
Like us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/StCloudVAHCS

Sign up for our automated email service. Visit the St. Cloud VA Website at: http://www.stcloud.va.gov and on the right-hand side of the page is a request to sign up for email updates. Enter your email address and you are automatically signed up to receive email updates from our web page. There are also options presented to sign up for updates from other government sites.