



THE NATIONAL ACTION ALLIANCE FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION RESPONDS TO [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs DATA RELEASE](#)ⁱ

A statement prepared by The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention
Contact: Liliya Melnyk, lmelnyk@edc.org, National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention

Washington, D.C. (July 7, 2016)— Earlier today, in a release of preliminary data from a forthcoming report, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) revealed that 20 veterans a day die from suicide. This includes data from all 50 states as well as US Territories, and is the largest veteran data set released to date. The release reveals that from 2001-2014 there was an 8.8% increase in suicide among veterans accessing care through the Veteran’s Health Administration (VHA) whereas there was a 38.6% percent increase in suicide among veterans not accessing care from the VHA.

Similar to data recently released by the [CDC](#)ⁱⁱ reflecting increased rates of suicide across the general population, these data underscore the need for continued attention to reducing suicide among our nation’s veterans. These data indicate the need for a collaborative approach between the VA and its many community partners dedicated to the mission of saving the lives of veterans. From such data we are better informed and equipped to guide our prevention, intervention, aftercare, and research efforts whether a veteran is being served by the VHA or in their home communities. Since suicide is an American public health challenge claiming over 40,000 lives a year, this challenge is not the sole domain of VA, but for all of us. While the VA is most suited to serve veterans who touch their systems, it is up to all of us to make sure every door is the right door for a veteran in need. A comprehensive approach between the VA and the community has the potential to save more lives. The VHA has recently expanded tele-mental health services, hired additional psychologists and psychiatrists, and increased the number of staff on the Veterans’ Crisis Line. The [National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention](#)ⁱⁱⁱ (Action Alliance) applauds these efforts along with the VHA’s ongoing commitment to work in close partnership with national and community partners to address the public health problem of suicide through a comprehensive approach that promotes health, healing, and recovery.

The Action Alliance is the public private partnership focused on advancing national suicide prevention efforts and is fortunate to have Carolyn Clancy, MD, VA Under Secretary for Health for Organizational Excellence, serving as our public sector co-chair, which further demonstrates VA’s dedication to reducing suicide among veterans and all Americans. Suicide is an American health concern we all must work together to address.

Resources supporting these efforts include:

Key Resources for Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families:

- [Make The Connection](#)^{iv} - An online resource designed to connect Veterans, their family members and friends, and other supporters with information, resources, and solutions to issues affecting their lives.

- [Veterans Health Council^v](#) - A service created to inform veterans and their families about health issues and benefits available to them, educate health care communities about the multiple health issues associated with military service, develop materials on veterans' health issues for medical schools, nursing schools, teaching hospitals, and related educational outlets, and advocate on behalf of veterans' healthcare initiatives.
- [Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors \(TAPS\)^{vi}](#) - TAPS offers care to those grieving the death of a loved one serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. Established in 1994, TAPS operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week through a national peer support network and provides connection to grief resources, all at no cost to surviving families and loved ones.
- Wounded Warrior Project's [Combat Stress Recovery Program^{vii}](#) - The Combat Stress Recovery Program (CSR) addresses the mental health and cognitive needs of warriors returning from war. CSR provides military rehabilitation services at key stages during a warrior's readjustment process.
- [VA/DOD Clinical Practice Guideline for Assessment and Management of Patients at Risk for Suicide^{viii}](#) - These comprehensive guidelines outline a framework for structured assessment of adults suspected to be at risk of suicide and the immediate and long-term management and treatment that should follow if an individual is found to be at risk.
- [Give an Hour^{ix}](#) - Give an Hour's mission is to develop national networks of volunteers capable of responding to both acute and chronic conditions that arise within our society, beginning with the mental health needs of those who serve and their families. They are a nonprofit organization providing free mental health services to US military personnel and families affected by the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Crisis Services:

- [Veterans Crisis Line^x](#) - (1-800-273-8255; Press 1) Text to 838255. Resource offering 24/7 access to a skilled, trained counselor at a crisis center. This crisis line also serves active duty military.

While this release has a focus on veterans, there are also a variety of resources available for active duty military. Please note key resources for those currently serving in the armed services:

- [Defense Suicide Prevention Office^{xi}](#) - The Defense Suicide Prevention Office (DSPO) provides advocacy, program oversight, and policy for Department of Defense suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention efforts to reduce suicidal behaviors in Service members, civilians and their families.
- [US Military Matters^{xii}](#) - Offers free online training and resources for National Guard and Reserve members, loved ones, and prevention professionals.

This release provides a renewed call to action to address suicide in among our nation's veterans and among all Americans, recognizing that for every one person who tragically dies by suicide in the U.S., there are approximately 278 people who have experienced serious thoughts about killing themselves, and nearly 60 who have survived a suicide attempt, the overwhelming majority of whom will go on to live out their lives. These untold stories of hope and recovery are the stories of suicide prevention, stories which are informing the Action Alliance's efforts to prevent more suicides every day.

Media Partners:

Research shows that the media may influence suicide rates by the way they report on suicide. Evidence suggests that when the media tells stories of people positively coping in suicidal moments, more suicides can be prevented. We urge all members of the media working on these stories to refer to the

[Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide](#)^{xiii} for best practices for safely and accurately reporting on suicide. For stories of persons with lived experience of suicidality and finding hope, refer to www.lifelineforattempt survivors.org^{xiv}.

Other resources for suicide prevention information:

- [American Association of Suicidology](#)^{xv}
- [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#)^{xvi}
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#)^{xvii}
- [Suicide Awareness Voices of Education](#)^{xviii}
- [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#)^{xix}

ABOUT THE NATIONAL ACTION ALLIANCE FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION:

The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention is the public-private partnership working to advance the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention and make suicide prevention a national priority. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, through the Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) operates the Secretariat for the Action Alliance, which was launched in 2010 by former U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and former U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates with the goal of saving 20,000 lives in five years. Contact Liliya Melnyk, lmelnyk@edc.org

ⁱ <http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2801>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db241.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org/>

^{iv} <http://maketheconnection.net/>

^v <http://www.veteranshealth.org/>

^{vi} <http://www.taps.org/>

^{vii} <https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/programs/combat-stress-recovery-program>

^{viii} <http://zerosuicide.sprc.org/resources/vadod-clinical-practice-guideline-assessment-a>

^{ix} <https://www.giveanhour.org/>

^x <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>

^{xi} <http://www.dspo.mil/>

^{xii} <http://usmilitarymatters.org/>

^{xiii} <http://reportingonsuicide.org/>

^{xiv} <http://lifelineforattempt survivors.org/>

^{xv} <http://www.suicidology.org/>

^{xvi} <http://afsp.org/>

^{xvii} <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

^{xviii} <http://www.save.org/>

^{xix} <http://www.sprc.org/>