

**Keita Franklin, LCSW, PhD**  
Executive Director, Suicide Prevention Program  
*Department of Veterans Affairs*

 @VeteransHealth @DeptVetAffairs

## Morning Keynote

# Suicide in the United States and in the Veteran Population

# Suicide

- National public health problem (as defined by CDC)
  - 10th-leading cause of death in the U.S. (with around twice as many suicides as homicides)
    - 45,000 deaths per year (up almost 30 percent since 1999)
    - Costs \$69 billion annually
- Veterans and service members are at an elevated risk
- Specific Veteran populations at-risk:
  - Younger Veterans
  - Women Veterans
  - Veterans in a period of transition
  - Veterans with exposure to suicide
  - Veterans with access to lethal means
  - Other than honorable discharges (“bad paper”)

# Important Figures

**20** Veterans die by suicide each day.



**123**

Americans die by suicide each day.

**1-2**

Active duty service members die by suicide each day.

# Important Figures



The rate of suicide was

**1.8** *times higher  
among female Veterans*

*compared with non-Veteran adult women.*

\* after accounting for differences in age



The rate of suicide was

**1.4** *times higher  
among male Veterans*

*compared with non-Veteran adult men.*

\* after accounting for differences in age



Male Veterans ages

**18–34**

*experienced the highest rates of suicide.*



Male Veterans ages

**55 and older**

*had the highest count of suicide.*

**69%** *of all Veteran suicide deaths resulted from a firearm injury.*

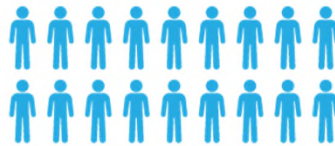
# VA Suicide Prevention Best Practices

# National Academy of Medicine (NAM) Classification



## Universal (all)

Universal prevention strategies are designed to reach the entire Veteran population.



## Selective (some)

Selective prevention strategies are designed to reach subgroups of the Veteran population that may be at increased risk.



## Indicated (few)

Indicated prevention strategies are designed to reach individual Veterans identified as having a high risk for suicidal behaviors.

# Population Based Suicide Risk Screening & Evaluation

Universal Screening  
Risk may not be  
identified

Patients eligible for  
annual mental  
health (MH)  
screening or  
presenting to ED for  
any reason

Primary Care/Nexus  
Clinics, ED

Selected Screening  
At-Risk

Patients with existing  
psychiatric disorder or acute  
or chronic medical conditions  
associated with increased  
suicide risk

Outpatient MH clinics, Pain &  
Sleep Clinics, Inpatient  
Medical, CLC

Indicated Screening  
Elevated Risk

Patients receiving  
acute inpatient  
mental health  
services or  
residential mental  
health treatment

Inpatient Psychiatric  
Units or MH RRTP



# Innovative Practices in Suicide Prevention: Universal (All)

- The **Mayor's and Governor's Challenge** partnerships with SAMHSA aim to develop and implement site-specific public health strategies to address Veteran suicide. They are critically important because local and state officials know their populations best
- **S.A.V.E.** is an online training suicide prevention course, offered in collaboration with PsychArmor Institute, that is available for free to the public. [psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e/](https://psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e/)
- The **#BeThere** suicide prevention initiative teaches members of the community how simple actions can help save the life of a Veteran in crisis. [veteranscrisisline.net/bethere.aspx](https://veteranscrisisline.net/bethere.aspx)



## Universal (all)

Universal prevention strategies are designed to reach the entire Veteran population.

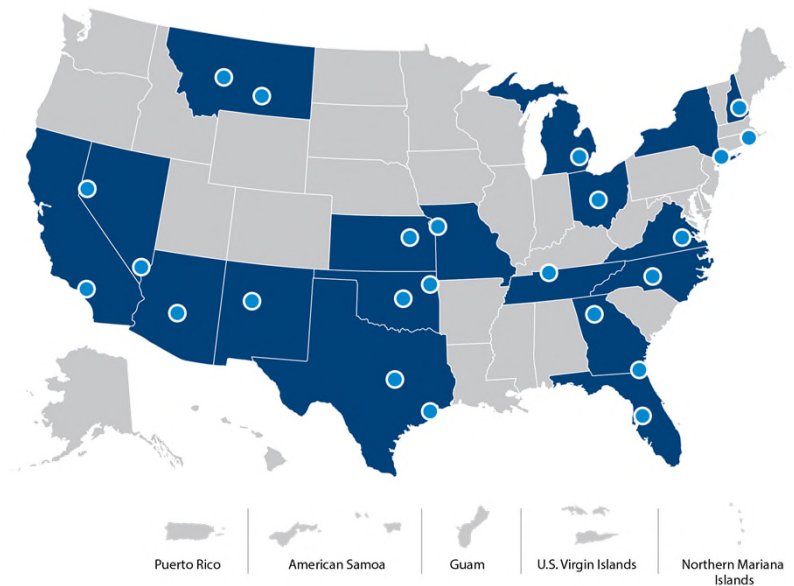
# Mayor's Challenge



**Goal:** Eliminate suicide by using a comprehensive public health approach to suicide prevention.

- Partnership between VA and HHS Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
- The teams included collaborative groups of community, municipal, military and other stakeholders
- VA provided technical assistance to support local efforts and to document outcomes and share strategies with other municipalities

One year after the launch of the Mayor's Challenge, the program expanded from seven to **24 sites nationwide.**



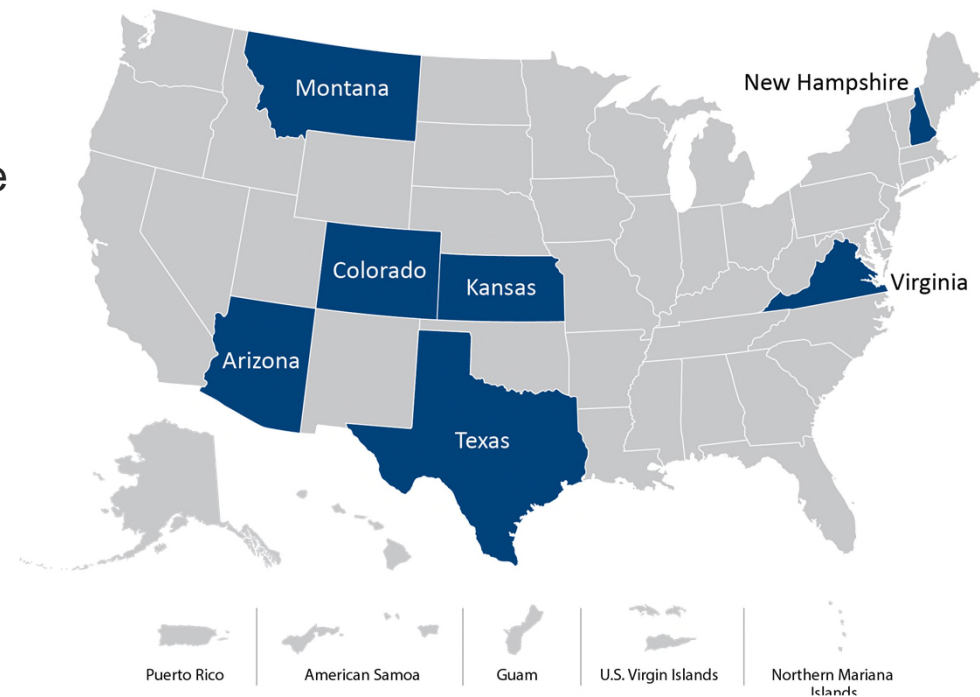
# Governor's Challenge



**Goal:** Develop state-wide plans based on the public health approach to prevent suicide.

- Partnership between VA and HHS Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
- Takes the Mayor's Challenge to the state level, incorporating existing community strategic plans within their respective states
- State leaders are meeting to develop a plan to implement the National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide

**7 states** are currently participating:



# Innovative Practices in Suicide Prevention: Selective (Some)

- The **Rocky Mountain MIRECC TBI Toolkit** gives mental health clinicians information for addressing the needs of military personnel and Veterans with co-occurring TBI and mental health conditions. [www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/tbi\\_toolkit](http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/tbi_toolkit)
- To improve **lethal means safety**, VA is training providers in lethal means safety counseling and educating Veterans and their families about how safe storage of lethal means can save lives



## Selective (some)

Selective prevention strategies are designed to reach subgroups of the Veteran population that may be at increased risk.

# Innovative Practices in Suicide Prevention: Indicated (Few)

- **REACH VET** uses data to identify Veterans at high risk for suicide, notifies VA providers of Veterans' risk assessment, and enables providers to re-evaluate and enhance Veterans' care
- The **VA Suicide Risk Management Consultation Program** provides a free, one-on-one consultation for any community or VA provider who works with Veterans. [www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/consult](http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/consult)
- The **Toolkit for Therapeutic Risk Management of the Suicidal Patient** uses clinical, medical, and legal best practices to inform a model for the assessment and management of suicide risk  
[www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/trm](http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/trm)



## Indicated (few)

Indicated prevention strategies are designed to reach individual Veterans identified as having a high risk for suicidal behaviors.

# Innovative Practices From the Field (Suicide Prevention Teams)

- **Firearm Safety Initiatives**

- Several VA facilities, including Palo Alto and Indianapolis, are building community partnerships with local gun shops to generate awareness of ways to prevent suicide

- **Tele-Mental Health**

- Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 10's Verizon Tablet Pilot Project provides iPads for delivering Video On Demand telehealth services to Veterans flagged as being at high risk for suicide
- By the end of 2020, all VA mental health providers will be capable of delivering telemental health care to Veterans in their homes or other preferred non-VA locations

# How to Talk About Suicide

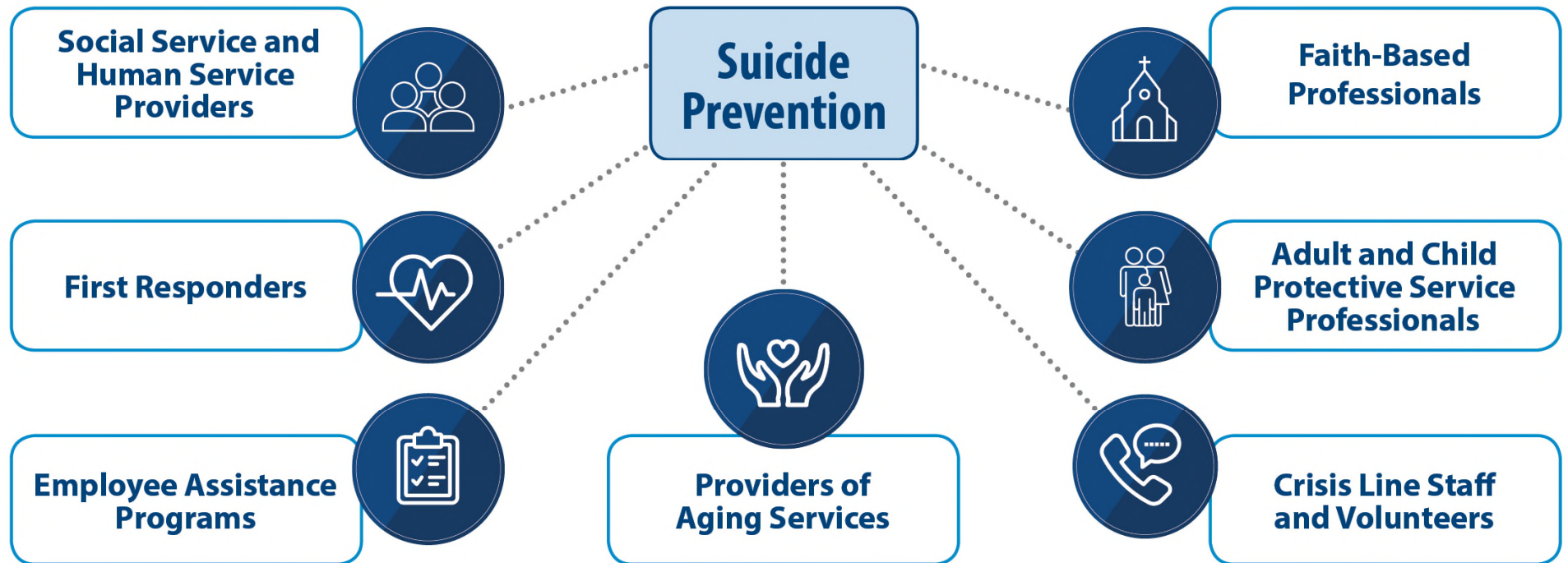
- How we communicate about suicide — both with the media and in prevention materials — matters.
- **Unsafe messaging:**
  - Discourages people from seeking help
  - Sensationalizes death
  - Reinforces inaccurate beliefs that nothing can be done about suicidal ideation or behaviors.
  - Reports on suicide in a similar matter as reporting on crimes
- **Safe messaging:**
  - Encourages hope and celebrates life
  - Helps people understand that suicide is preventable and mental illnesses are treatable
  - Reports on suicide as a public health issue

Download VA's Social Media Safety Toolkit at:  
[mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide\\_prevention/docs/OMH-074-Suicide-Prevention-Social-Media-Toolkit-1-8\\_508.pdf](https://mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/docs/OMH-074-Suicide-Prevention-Social-Media-Toolkit-1-8_508.pdf)

# Public Policy Solutions: How You Can Effect Change

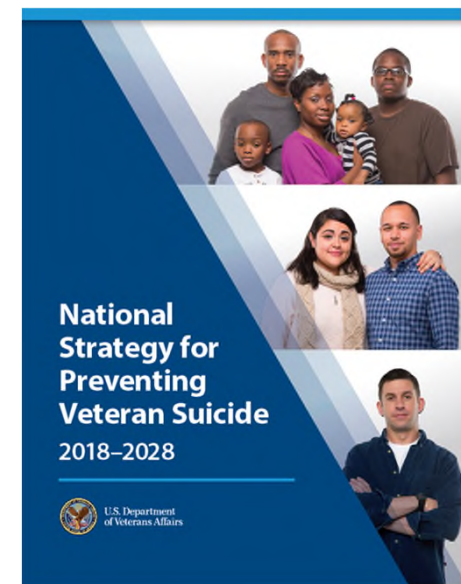


# Systems Theory



# National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide

- **Goal:** Provide a framework for identifying priorities, organizing efforts, and contributing to a national focus on Veteran suicide prevention over the next decade
  - Aligns with the 2012 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention
  - Consists of 4 strategic directions, 14 goals, and 43 objectives
  - Leverages the public health approach to suicide prevention
  - Focuses on the importance of collaboration and urgency



Download a copy at:  
[Mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide\\_prevention](https://Mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention)

# Implementing Strategic Directions



## Healthy and Empowered Veterans, Families, and Communities

Work with community partners and policymakers to promote resources for Veterans and to promote mental health awareness and treatment.



## Clinical and Community Preventive Services

Share resources, training opportunities, interventions, and lethal means safety resources with providers outside VA and with clergy, first responders, law enforcement officials, and community partners.



## Treatment, Recovery, and Support Services

Work with local emergency departments and hospitals to promote Veteran suicide prevention resources and to ensure continuity of care for all Veterans admitted to an inpatient mental health unit.

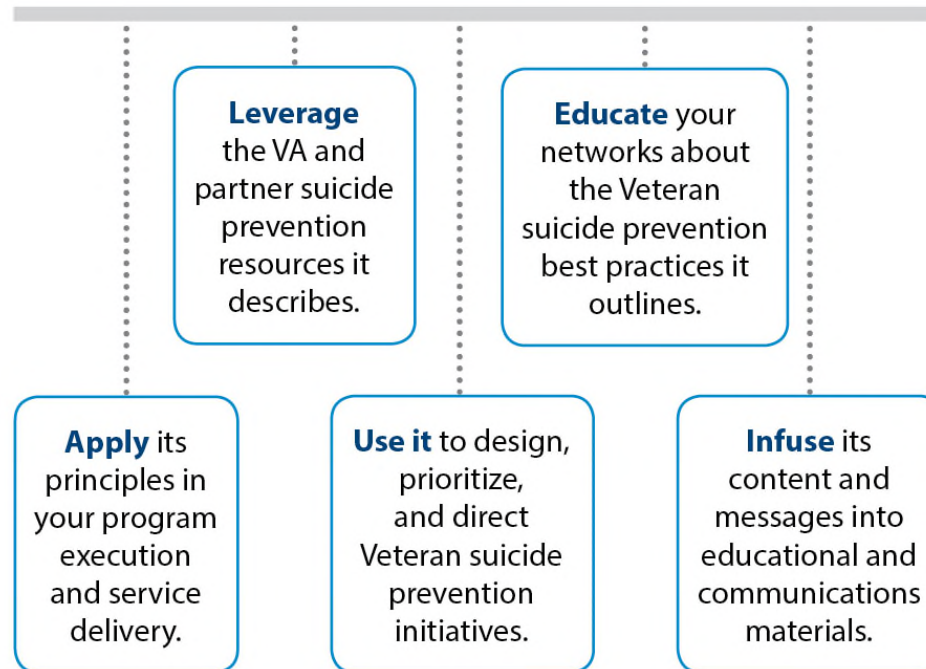


## Surveillance, Research, and Evaluation

Share the [VA National Suicide Data Report](#) and [National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide](#) with community partners.

# A Call to Action

## How can you apply this strategy?



# Public Health Video



# Free, Confidential Support 24/7/365



1-800-273-8255 **PRESS 1**

• • • Confidential chat at **VeteransCrisisLine.net** or text to **838255** • • •

- Veterans
- Service members
- Family members
- Friends

# S.A.V.E. Training

- Suicide prevention training video that's available to everyone, 24/7
- Less than 25 minutes long
- Offered in collaboration with the PsychArmor Institute



Available online for free: [psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e/](https://psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e/)

# Veteran 101: Military Culture Training

- Free 25-minute course intended for anyone with little to no background or understanding of military culture
- Offered through the PsychArmor Institute



Available online for free:

[psycharmor.org/courses/veteran-101-military-culture](https://psycharmor.org/courses/veteran-101-military-culture)



# Social Media Safety Toolkit

- As discussed in the [National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide](#), social media is an important intervention channel and a key piece of VA's comprehensive, community-based suicide prevention strategy
- The Social Media Safety Toolkit for Veterans, Their Families, and Friends equips everyone with the knowledge needed to respond to social media posts that indicate a Veteran may be having thoughts of suicide
- The toolkit includes best practices, resources, and sample responses



*#BeThere*



Download: [mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide\\_prevention/docs/OMH-074-Suicide-Prevention-Social-Media-Toolkit-1-8\\_508.pdf](https://mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/docs/OMH-074-Suicide-Prevention-Social-Media-Toolkit-1-8_508.pdf)

