

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

VA S.A.V.E. Training

Office of Suicide Prevention

Revised 3.10.2025

Before We Begin:



- Suicide can be 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**.
- Other VA employee resources:
 - You are encouraged to connect with Employee Assistance if you would like to talk about issues related to your mental health and wellness.
 - Employee Assistance Program (EAP) contact information may be found on the Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (OCHCO) Worklife website at:
<http://vaww.va.gov/OHRM/WorkLife/HealthWellness/EAP>

Overview

- Objectives
- Facts about Veteran Suicide
- VA S.A.V.E. Steps
- Resources

Objectives

At the conclusion of this training, you will be able to:

- Apply the VA S.A.V.E. approach
- Identify Veterans who may be at risk for suicide
- Ask directly about suicide
- Validate Veterans' individual needs and perspectives
- Connect Veterans to appropriate resources

Facts About Veteran Suicide

Suicide is a National Public Health Issue

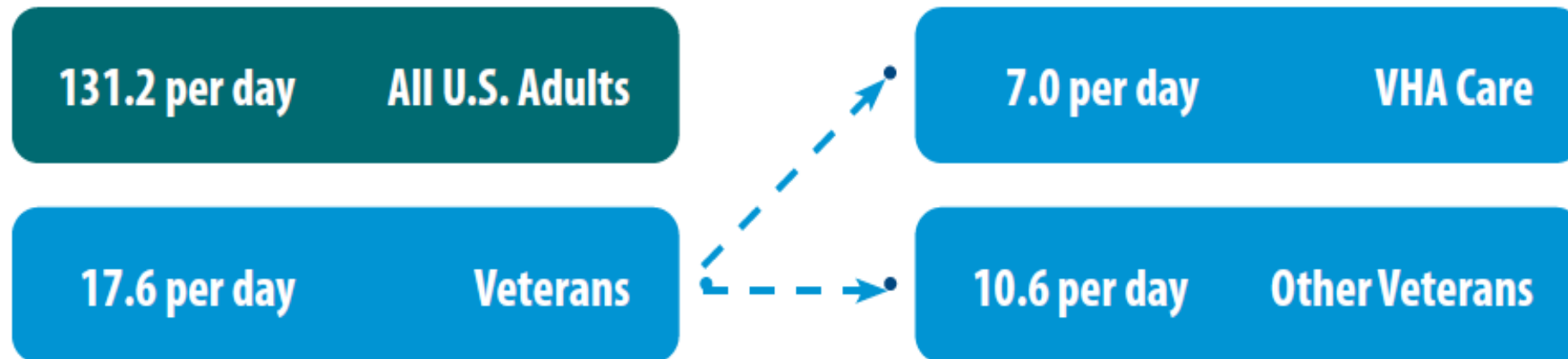
- Suicide is a national issue, with rising rates of suicide in the general population.
- For every death by suicide, approximately 135 individuals are impacted.

Reference: Cerel J, Brown MM, Maple M, Singleton M, van de Venne J, Moore M, Flaherty C. How Many People Are Exposed to Suicide? Not Six. Suicide Life Threat Behav. 2019 Apr;49(2):529-534. doi: 10.1111/sltb.12450. Epub 2018 Mar 7. PMID: 29512876.

Veteran Suicide Statistics: Rates and Averages

In 2022, the unadjusted suicide rate for Veterans was 34.7 per 100,000. It was 13.5 per 100,000 for female Veterans and 37.3 per 100,000 for male Veterans. Among non-Veteran U.S. adults, the suicide rate in 2022 was 17.1 per 100,000, and it was 7.2 per 100,000 for female non-Veteran adults and 28.7 per 100,000 among male non-Veteran adults.

Average Number of Suicides Per Day



https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/data.asp

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

What are Lethal Means?

- **Lethal means** are objects that may be used by individuals experiencing a suicide crisis.
 - They include items like firearms, medications, alcohol, opioids, other substances, ropes, cords, or sharp objects.
 - These items can become deadly if easily accessible for someone experiencing crisis or having thoughts of suicide.

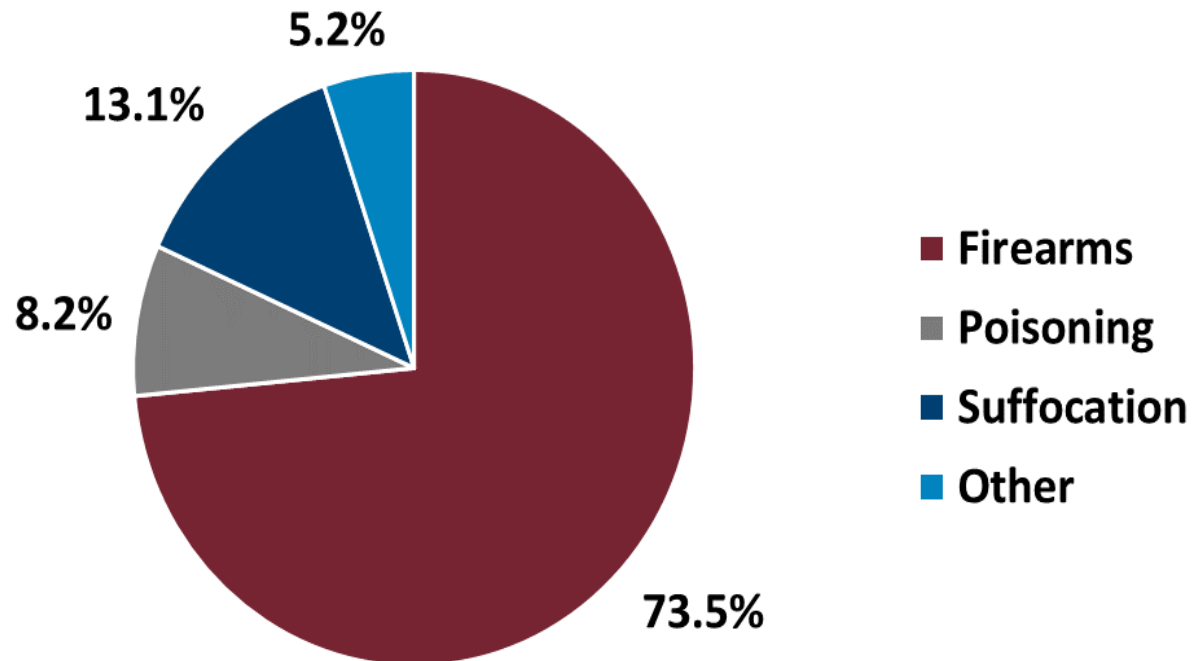
Means Matter

- The **method used** impacts how life-threatening the injury could be.
 - About **90%** of firearm-related suicide attempts are fatal.
 - Most who survive a suicide attempt **do not** go on to die by suicide.

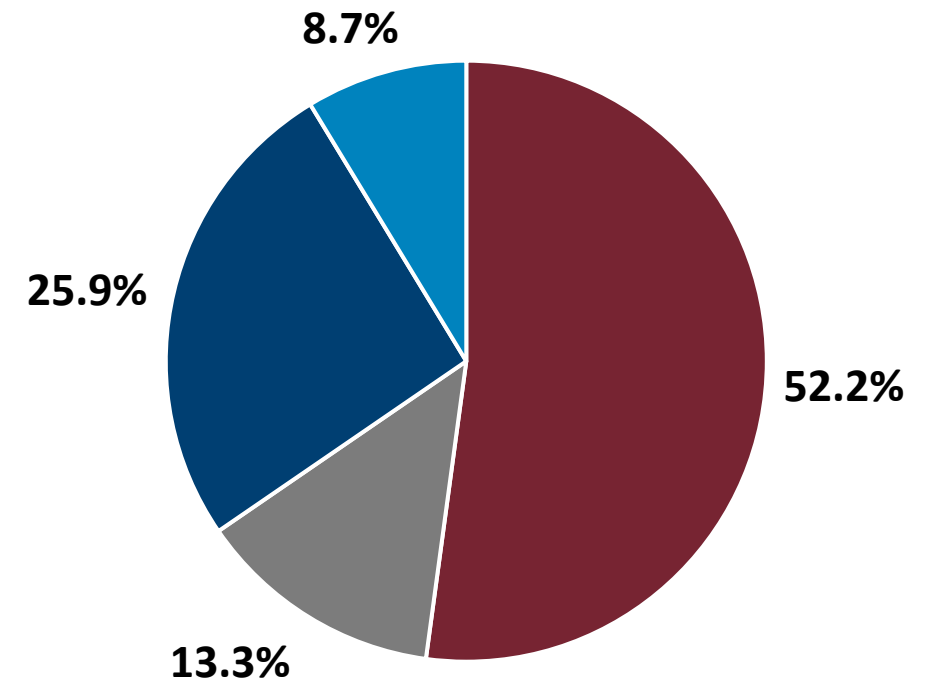
Conner, A., Azrael, D., & Miller, M. (2019). Suicide Case-Fatality Rates in the United States, 2007 to 2014: A Nationwide Population-Based Study. *Annals of internal medicine*, 171(12), 885–895. <https://doi.org/10.7326/M19-1324>

U.S. Veterans and Suicide Methods (2023)

Veterans



Non-Veteran U.S. Adults



[U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Suicide Prevention. 2024 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report. 2024.](#)

Lethal Means Safety and Suicide Prevention

- Lethal means safety reduces access to a method used to attempt suicide.
- Secure storage of lethal means is any action that builds in time and space between an impulse to die by suicide and the ability to harm oneself.

Normalize the Discussion: Secure Storage Works

- Nearly half of all Veterans own a firearm and Veteran firearm owners are dedicated to firearm safety.
- The [Keep It Secure](#) (Lethal Means Safety) campaign promotes awareness about the simple steps Veterans and their support networks can take to increase safety.

Suicide is Preventable.

Did You Know?

You don't have to be an expert to talk about suicide.

Showing you care and offering support can make a big difference when helping navigate life's challenges.

Did You Know?

The way a Veteran feels supported may vary based on their individual military experience.

Listening without judgement can help guide your conversation.

Did You Know?

When suicide is brought up in conversation, even casually, it should be taken seriously.

Use it as an invitation to find out more.

Follow VA S.A.V.E. to do your part.

The Steps of VA S.A.V.E.

VA S.A.V.E.:

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 suicidal crisis.

- **S**pot the signs a Veteran might be thinking about suicide.
- **A**sk the critical question.
- **V**alidate the Veteran's experience.
- **E**ncourage and support next steps with the Veteran.



Spot the Signs of Suicidal Thinking

Knowing what to look for can help you identify when a Veteran may need extra support:

- Hearing things like “I feel like there’s no way out/no reason to live” or “I feel hopeless”
- Changes in anxiety, agitation, or mood swings
- Rage or anger
- Changes in sleep
- Engaging in impulsive, risky activities
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from family and friends



Spot the Signs of Suicidal Thinking

Other times, a Veteran's warning signs may require immediate attention such as:

- Talking about death, dying, or suicide
- When asked, saying they wish to hurt or kill themselves
- When asked, saying they have a plan for killing themselves
- Displaying self-destructive behavior such as increased drug or alcohol use



Ask the Critical Question

Knowing the important question to ask
a Veteran can be life saving...



Ask the Critical Question

“Are you thinking about killing yourself?”



Ask the Critical Question

When and Where

As soon as possible

How

Ask in a way that fits naturally
with you and the Veteran



Validate the Veteran's Experience

- Be willing to listen and allow the Veteran to express their feelings.
- Check your biases and assumptions.
- Talk openly about suicide.
- Treat the Veteran with respect.
- Express your concern.
- Let the Veteran know that help is available.



Validate the Veteran's Experience

- Try to stay as calm as possible.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Use open body language.
- Listen more than you speak.
- Limit questions — let the Veteran do the talking.
- Use honest, supportive, and encouraging comments.



Encourage and Support Next Steps with the Veteran

What should you do if you think someone is suicidal?

- Be honest about your concern
- Reassure the Veteran that help is available
- Stay with the Veteran until help is found
- Follow the Mental Health Same Day Service SOP at your local facility

Remember VA S.A.V.E.

S

Spot the signs of suicidal thinking.

A

Ask the critical question.

V

Validate the Veteran's experience.

E

Encourage and support next steps with the Veteran.

Practice Sessions

Goal: To develop a level of comfort and confidence in asking about suicide and helping a Veteran who is thinking about suicide.



Asking the Question

Do's	Do Not's
DO ask the question if you've identified warning signs or symptoms.	Do Not ask the question as though you are looking for a "no" answer. • "You aren't thinking of killing yourself, are you?"
DO ask the question in a natural way that flows with the conversation.	Do Not wait to ask the question when someone is halfway out the door.

A Asking the Question: Check-In & Practice

- What are your thoughts about asking the question?
- What initial concerns do you have?
- Let me demonstrate a few ways of asking the question — both good and bad — and you can tell me which ones you think are most effective and direct.
- Now, turn to a neighbor and practice asking the question with one of ways you feel would be most effective.



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

- Who can share with me a validating statement?
- Turn to a partner and practice the following:
 - In response to an “invitation statement” such as, “Everything is so hard. I feel like a drag on my friends.”
 - Start by telling your partner, “Everything will be fine.” (Partner should respond.)
 - Shift instead to a statement that validates their feelings. (Partner should respond.)
- **What did you notice?**

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.

Practice Sessions

Imagine talking to a friend, family member, or co-worker whom you know well. You also know this person has been having a lot of personal problems lately, seems to be withdrawing from activities, and seems “down” much of the time. They mention that everything feels “hopeless.”

- **Step 1:** As you begin your conversation with them, listen for the problems that they believe suicide would solve and listen for a **sign** — an invitation statement. When you hear a warning sign, find a way to **ask** the question, e.g., **“You seem very overwhelmed right now. Are you thinking about suicide?”**
- **Step 2:** As you listen, make sure to **validate** their experience or feelings. Continue to listen and try to **expedite** them to the appropriate level of care.
- **Switch roles.**



Spot the Signs of Suicidal Thinking

What signs did you spot?

A Asking the Question

What did you notice about your “ask”?

Validate the Veteran's Experience

What did your partner do or
say that was validating?

E Encourage and Support Next Steps with the Veteran

What did you do to expedite getting help?
How comfortable would you be
recommending resources?

Debrief

- Thoughts, feelings, or questions about the exercise?

Resources

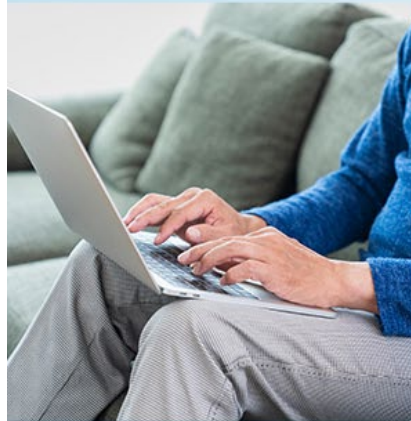
Free, Confidential Support 24/7/365

- Veterans
- Service members
- Family members
- Friends



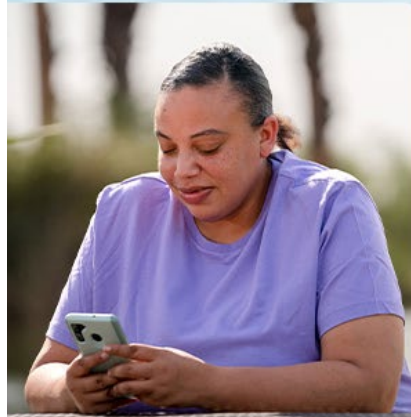
CALL

Dial 988 then Press 1



CHAT

VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat

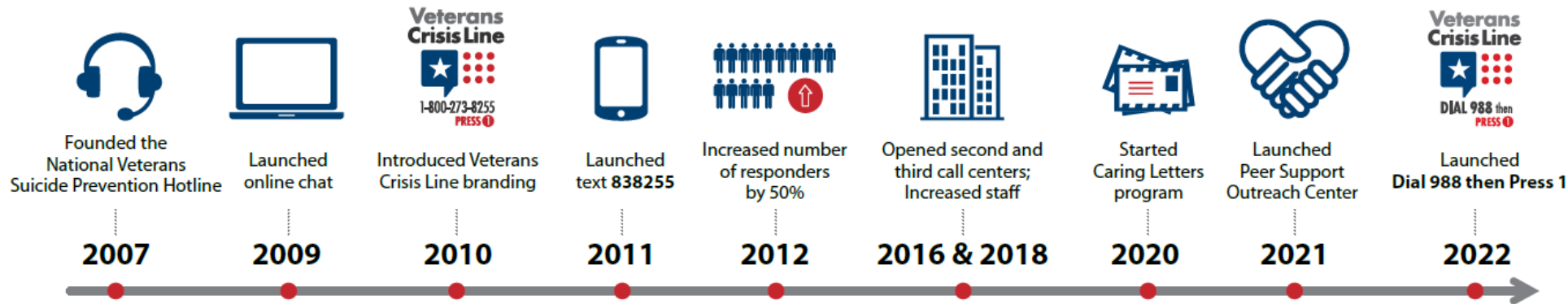


TEXT

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
8.4 million
calls



More than
447,000
texts



More than
1 million
chats



More than
1.6 million
referrals

to VA Suicide Prevention Coordinators

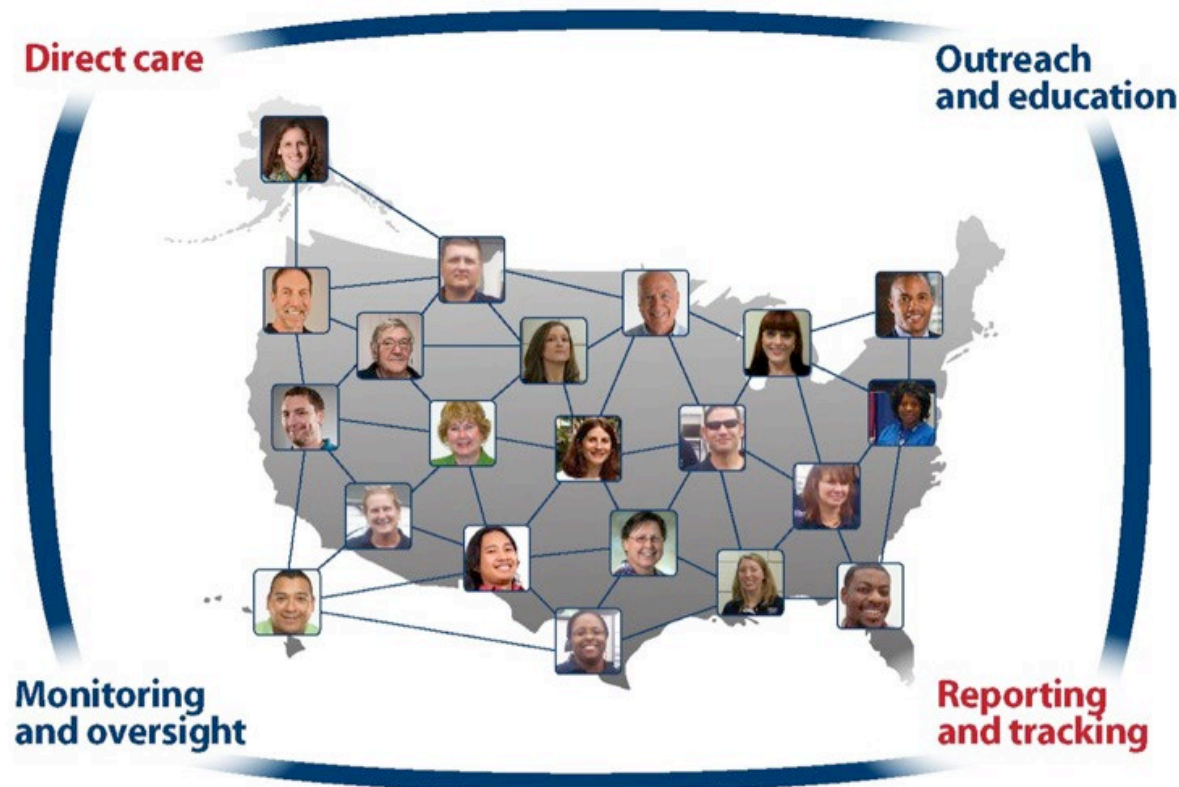
More than
369,000
dispatches of
emergency services

VCL Timeline Graphic

[Spread the Word
\(veteranscrisisline.net\)](https://veteranscrisisline.net)

01/2025

Find a Local VA SPC: VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator



More than
400 SPCs
nationwide.

Local VA Resources:

VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator

The screenshot shows the homepage of the VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator. At the top left is the VeteransCrisisLine logo with the text "DIAL 988 then PRESS 1". To the right are buttons for "Dial 988 then Press 1" and "Chat", with "or Text 838255" below them. A navigation bar includes links for "How We Help", "Signs of Crisis", "Resources and Support", and "About". Below the navigation bar is a breadcrumb trail "Home > Local Resources" and a large heading "Local Resources". A paragraph follows: "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" label. It contains a text input field "Enter City, State, or ZIP", a "Within:" dropdown menu set to "50 Miles", and a "Search" button. A link "Use Current Location" is also present.

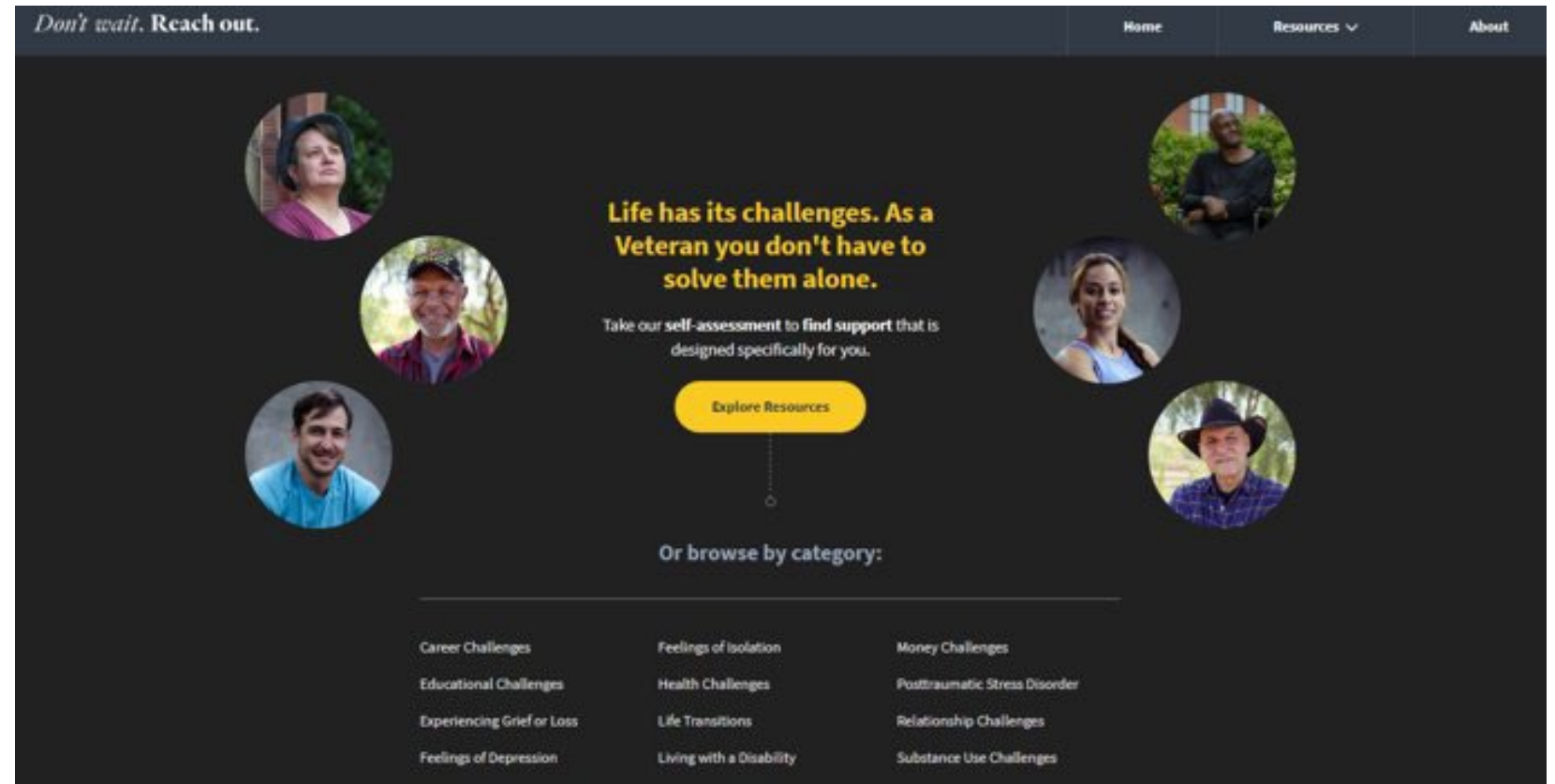


The screenshot shows the search results page for "Search Local VA Resources". It displays "Showing 10 Results out of 11 for 14424". On the left is a sidebar with filters: "Find a Resource" (text input), "Use Current Location" (link), "Within" (dropdown set to "50 Miles"), and a list of checkboxes for "Suicide Prevention Coordinators", "VA Medical Centers", "Outpatient Clinics", "Vet Centers", and "Veterans Benefits Administration Offices", each with an information icon. A "Search" button is at the bottom of the sidebar. The main content area shows two results. The first result is for "VA MEDICAL CENTERS" and "Canandaigua VA Medical Center", with address "400 Fort Hill Avenue, Canandaigua, NY 14424-1159", distance "0 miles away", phone "585-393-7100", and a "Visit website" link. The second result is for "SUICIDE PREVENTION COORDINATORS" and "Suicide Prevention, Team Canandaigua/Rochester", with the same address. An "Email" button is next to the second result.

Don't Wait. Reach Out.

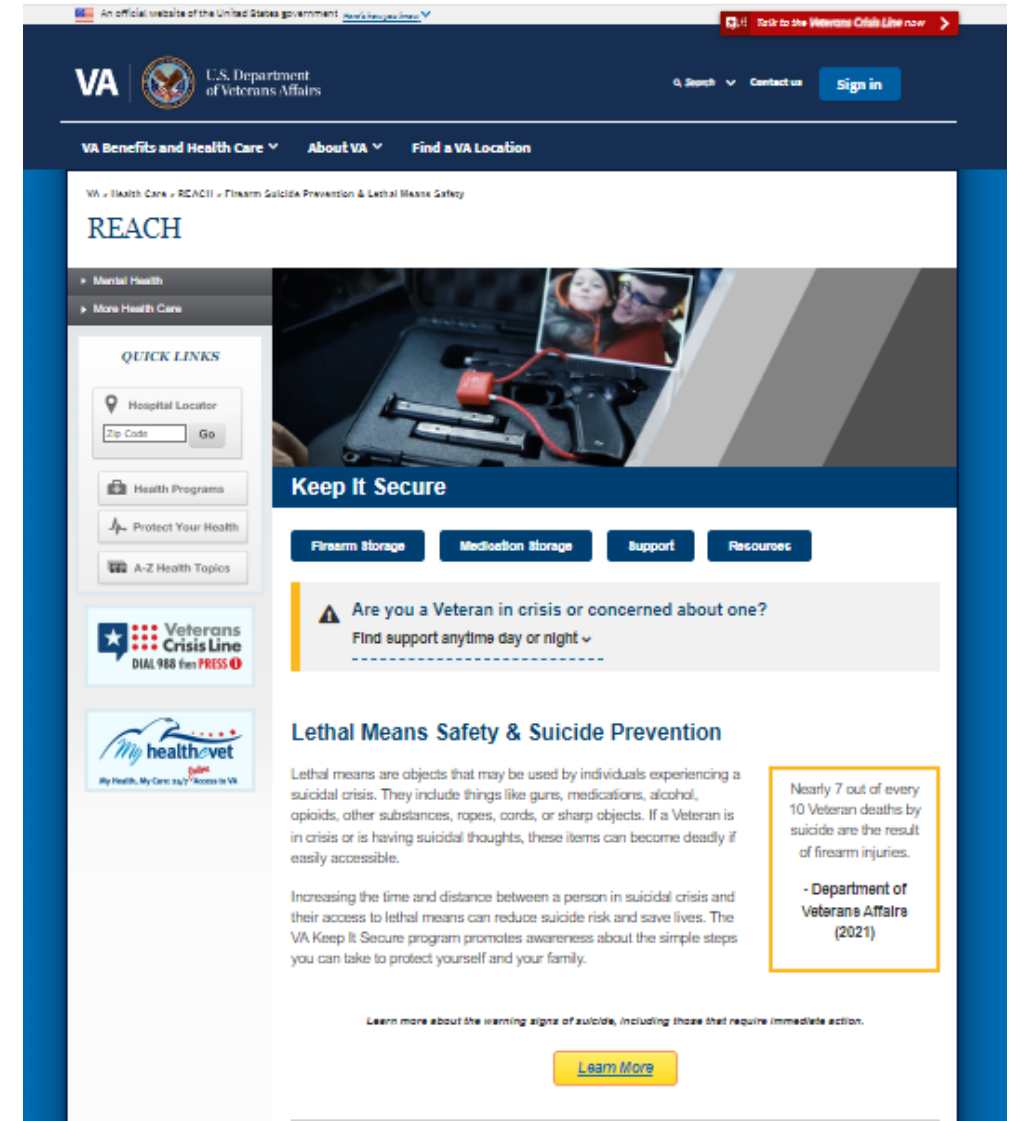
Find the right
Veteran Resources
Quickly and Easily

*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



VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

VA Benefits and Health Care | About VA | Find a VA Location

VA Health Care | RCAC | Firearm Suicide Prevention & Lethal Means Safety

REACH

QUICK LINKS

- Hospital Locator
- Health Programs
- Protect Your Health
- A-Z Health Topics

Veterans Crisis Line
DIAL 988 then PRESS 1

My healthvet
My Health, My Care, My Way - Access to VA

Keep It Secure

Firearm Storage | Medication Storage | Support | Resources

Are you a Veteran in crisis or concerned about one?
Find support anytime day or night

Lethal Means Safety & Suicide Prevention

Lethal means are objects that may be used by individuals experiencing a suicidal crisis. They include things like guns, medications, alcohol, opioids, other substances, ropes, cords, or sharp objects. If a Veteran is in crisis or is having suicidal thoughts, these items can become deadly if easily accessible.

Increasing the time and distance between a person in suicidal crisis and their access to lethal means can reduce suicide risk and save lives. The VA Keep It Secure program promotes awareness about the simple steps you can take to protect yourself and your family.

Nearly 7 out of every 10 Veteran deaths by suicide are the result of firearm injuries.
- Department of Veterans Affairs (2021)

Learn more about the warning signs of suicide, including those that require immediate action.

Learn More

Caregiver Support Program

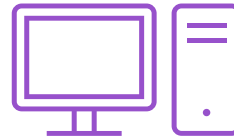
Caregiver Support Program (CSP) Mission:

Promote the health and well-being of Family Caregivers who care for our Nation's Veterans through education, resources, support and services.

CSP offers clinical, educational, and holistic services to individuals who care for Veterans enrolled in VA health care.

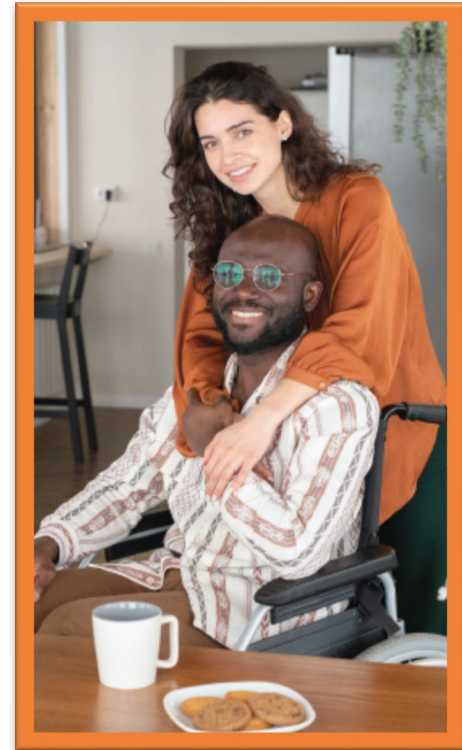
Every VA facility has a local team!

- Caregivers can access a variety of national resources while receiving tailored support from their local CSP Teams.



To learn more about CSP Programs visit:
<https://www.caregiver.va.gov/>

Questions about enrollment?
Contact the VA Caregiver Support Line (CSL) at
1-855-260-3274



VA S.A.V.E. Training for Caregivers

 For caregivers enrolled in the VA Caregiver Support Program (CSP)



VA S.A.V.E. Training for Caregivers:

- Expands the VA's flagship suicide prevention training program, [VA S.A.V.E.](#) to include:
 - Information on a caregiver's risk for experiencing suicidal thinking
 - Evidence-based treatments for caregivers
 - Resources and supports available for caregivers
- Supported time to practice skills needed to start conversations with Veterans about:
 - thoughts of suicide
 - secure storage of firearms
- Interactive, available in-person or virtually

Find your local CSP team here:

www.caregiver.va.gov/support/New_CSC_Page.asp

More information about this course, visit:

<https://www.caregiver.va.gov/support/docs/CSP-VA-SAVE-Training-Cargivers-Flyer-Final.pdf>

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Veterans Affairs](https://www.facebook.com/U.S.DepartmentofVeteransAffairs)

[Veterans Health
Administration](https://www.facebook.com/VeteransHealthAdministration)

X formerly Twitter



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[@veteranshealth](https://twitter.com/veteranshealth)

VA



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Questions?

Before we Begin, Local

