



Pennsylvania Adult/Older Adult Suicide Prevention Task Force

Suicide Risk in Veterans

What's the problem?

- 5000-6500 veterans complete suicide annually in the US (approximately 20% of all US suicides)
- The suicide rate for non-veterans is 8.3/100,000; the rate for veterans is between 22.9-31.9/100,000
- A study of veterans being treated for depression in the VA system found the risk for suicide highest in younger white male veterans aged 18-44.
- More than 80% of suicides among veterans involve firearms.

What are the key risk factors of suicide veterans?

- Combat trauma/PTSD
- Hopelessness/depressive episodes
- Drug & alcohol use, misuse, abuse
- Access to firearms
- Fear of stigma for seeking help
- Readjustment difficulties- decreased vocational, physical, emotional and social functioning

What are some important protective factors for veterans?

- Camaraderie with other veterans
- Treatment for PTSD and depression
- Restricted access to guns/weapons
- Family, community and veteran support

What are some of the early warning signs of suicide risk?

Contact a mental health or medical provider if you encounter any of these behaviors:

- Feelings of hopelessness
- Rage, overwhelming anger, thoughts of revenge, reckless behavior
- Increasing alcohol and/or drug use
- Withdrawal from family, friends
- Anxiety, agitation, sleep problems

What are the immediate danger signs of high suicide risk?

Immediately call 9-1-1, local crisis center or 1-800-273-TALK (8255) and press 1 to be connected to a VA counselor if you encounter:

- Threatening to hurt or kill himself or herself
- Looking for ways to take her or his life (i.e., getting a gun, stockpiling pills, other lethal means)
- Talking, writing, or drawing about death, dying, or suicide

What can you do to help reduce suicide in a veteran?

- Call the nearest VA Medical Center or Vet Center for help with depression and PTSD
- Make sure that all family members know the warning and danger signs of suicide and what to do.
- Remove unused firearms and safely store/lock/disassemble all firearms kept in the home.
- Share this information with others in your community.

For additional fact sheets and further information on mental health services in Pennsylvania, please use the following link:
<http://parecovery.org/index.shtml>.