The Public Health Approach

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Disclosures:
• We have no financial relationships to disclose
• We will not discuss any off-label and/or investigational use of medications

Objectives
• Understand the scope of Veteran Suicide
• Identify the key components of the VA Public Health Approach
• Identify the systemic approach used by the CDC
• Know what resources to connect/refer veterans to who are needing treatment
**Suicide in the United States**

- More than 47,000 U.S. deaths from suicide per year among the general population\(^1\)\(^2\)

- Suicide is the 10\(^{th}\) leading cause of death in the U.S.\(^3\)

- Every **12.3 minutes** someone dies by suicide

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**Suicide in Minnesota**

**Suicide Facts & Figures:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>1,478</td>
<td>752</td>
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- On average, one person dies by suicide every 12.3 minutes in the state.

**Leading cause of death in Minnesota**

- Motor vehicle traffic collision
- Poisoning
- Suicide

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**Facts about Veteran suicide**

- 18\% of all deaths by suicide among U.S. adults were Veterans\(^4\)

- Veterans are more likely than the general population to use firearms as a means for suicide\(^5\)

- On average, 764 suicide attempts per month among Veterans receiving recent VA health care services\(^5\)

- 25\% of Veteran suicides have a history of previous suicide attempts\(^5\)
Veteran specific risks

- Frequent Deployments to hostile environments (though deployment to combat does not necessarily increase risk).
- Exposure to extreme stress
- Physical/sexual assault while in the service (not limited to women)
- Length of deployments
- Service-related injury

Public Health Approach to Suicide Prevention

- The public health approach seeks to answer the foundational questions:
  - Where does the problem begin?
  - How could we prevent it from occurring in the first place?
- To answer these questions, public health uses a systematic, scientific method for understanding and preventing violence.

Suicide Prevention is Everyone’s Business

- Continues to increase impact of Office for Suicide Prevention
- Reach Veterans and their families
- Develop innovative prevention strategies
- Change the conversation around suicide
- Build community engagement
Approach in Action

- **Six Action Areas:**
  - Data and Surveillance
  - Research and Program Evaluation
  - Innovation and Program Development
  - Policy, Education, and Training
  - Field Operations
  - Partnerships and Outreach
- **Data-driven:** Focuses on understanding the problem and implementing interventions based on best practices across domains
- **Community-based:** Supports communities in developed targeted program and interventions, based on their specific needs

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National Academy of Medicine (NAM) Classification

- **Universal:** Critical partnerships established
  - National Sports Shooting Foundation (NSSF) partnership
  - Johnson & Johnson PSA
  - #BeThere campaign
- **Selective:** Mental health hiring initiative
  - Lethal means safety training
  - Mental health care for Other Than Honorable discharged veterans
  - Executive Order to expand veterans eligibility for mental health care
  - DoD/VA transition MOA
  - SAMSHA Mayor’s Challenge
  - Telemental health
  - Treatment engagement
  - Open innovation safe gun storage challenge
  - VCL info printed on VA canteen receipts
- **Indicated:** REACH VET
  - Discharge planning and follow-up enforcement
  - Expansion of Veterans Crisis Line (VCL)
  - VCL services
  - S.A.V.E. training
  - Postvention: follow-up care for family members and friends of someone who has died by suicide

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Prevention Levels and Example Efforts

**Public Health Approach to Suicide Prevention**

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50% of Veterans Do Not Use VA Benefits or Healthcare

Veterans who do not use VA benefits or healthcare: 10.2 million

Veterans who use at least one VA benefit or healthcare service: 9.7 million

Of this group, about 6 million Veterans use VA health care (about 30 percent of all Veterans).

That’s where you come in.

VA Suicide Prevention Strategy

Putting Strategy Into Action
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.

- 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

Leveraging the Public Health Approach

Our Implementation Model

Policy and Education
- Promote policies, funding, and programs that address suicide prevention
- Develop evidence-based practices
- Increase public awareness and understanding

Data and Surveillance
- Collect and analyze data on suicide rates and risk factors
- Track progress towards prevention goals

Innovation and Program Development
- Develop and implement new prevention strategies
- Evaluate effectiveness and refine approaches

Field Support
- Provide resources and technical assistance to communities
- Foster collaboration among stakeholders

Partnerships
- Engage with communities, organizations, and agencies
- Build coalitions and leverage expertise from different sectors
Four Strategic Directions

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. Surveillance, Research, and Evaluation
   - Share the VA National Suicide Data Report and National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide with community partners.

Implementing Strategic Directions

Healthy and Empowered Veterans, Families, and Communities

Clinical and Community Preventive Services

Treatment, Recovery, and Support Services

Surveillance, Research, and Evaluation

The Results of a Comprehensive Approach:

- In the community:
  - Reduced prejudices leads to a greater likelihood that the person disclose needs and seek help
  - Responsible media reduces prejudice and prevents contagion
  - A public awareness campaigns raises awareness of the signs/symptoms/risks and where help is available locally
  - Training of providers makes it easier to identify the person at risk and increases appropriate referrals
  - Systems are in place to ensure that the person is referred to and safely transported to the appropriate facility for evaluation
  - Reducing access to lethal means makes it less likely that the person will engage in suicidal behaviors.
The Results of a Comprehensive Approach:

- In a providers' work setting:
  - Screening improves the likelihood that the person will receive appropriate evaluation and treatment
  - Training on recognition of risk and quality of care increases the likelihood of a good outcome
  - Increased accuracy of diagnoses
  - Improved public health surveillance of identified problems
  - Informed policies and practices ensure respectful treatment that promotes healing and recovery
  - Easy access to mental health care referrals increases the likelihood of a better outcome
  - Education efforts increase knowledge of the warning signs of suicide risk among the individual and his or her family and/or support network
  - Continuous care and improved aftercare leads to better monitoring and follow-up over time

- During a person's engagement in treatment and recovery:
  - Reduced prejudice leads to greater acceptance by family members and friends
  - The availability of high-quality mental health services makes it less likely that problems will recur
  - Sharing information among care providers allows treatment to be better coordinated and collaborative
  - Resources are available to offer social support, resiliency training, problem-solving skills, and other protective factors to the person and support network
  - Education efforts help the person and support network maintain physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health and well-being
  - Systems are in place to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the interventions provided.

Resources for Veterans:

- County Veteran Services Officers (CVSO):
  - Assist veterans and their dependents in applying for VA enrollment and benefits.
  - https://nvf.org/veteran-service-officers/

- VA Hospital and Community Clinics
  - Inpatient and outpatient mental health services that support recovery, striving to enable a person to live a meaningful life in the community and achieve his or her full potential.
  - www.mentalhealth.va.gov

- Vet Centers
  - VA community-based centers that provide a range of counseling, outreach, and referral services.
  - www.vetcenter.va.gov
Resources for Veterans:

- Veterans Crisis Line/Chat/Text
  - 1-800-273-8255, Press 1
  - http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/
  - Text to 838255

- VA Suicide Prevention Coordinators
  - Each VA Medical Center has a Suicide Prevention Coordinator to make sure Veterans receive needed counseling and services
  - Resource locator - http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/

Resources for Veterans:

- Make the Connection
  - Explore information about physical and mental health symptoms, challenging life events, and mental health conditions.
  - Veterans and their families and friends can learn about available resources and support.
  - www.MakeTheConnection.net

- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
  - Each VA medical center has PTSD specialists who provide treatment for Veterans with PTSD. For more information about PTSD and to locate the VA PTSD program nearest you visit www.ptsd.va.gov
  - PTSD Coach App: The PTSD Coach application, allows phone users to manage their symptoms, links them with local sources of support, and provides information on PTSD. Visit www.ptsd.va.gov/public/pages/PTSDCoach.asp

Questions?
Thank You!

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