ABOUT SUICIDE PREVENTION

• Veterans can be at risk for suicide for a variety of reasons. Some are coping with aging, stress, or lingering effects stemming from their military service that have never been addressed. Many have underlying mental health conditions or substance use disorders, in some cases aggravated by their military service, that increase their risk. Many recently discharged Veterans have difficulty with their relationships or their transition back to civilian life.

• As part of its efforts to address this problem, VA has established a toll-free, confidential Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 (1-800-273-TALK). The hotline, staffed by mental health professionals 24 hours a day, seven days a week, has received more than 3 million calls (as of September 2017) since it was established in 2007. VA also offers a texting service at #838255.

• Veterans and their families can chat online with trained counselors at www.VeteransCrisisLine.net. Registration with VA or enrollment in VA health care is not necessary. VA also has full-time suicide prevention coordinators at each of its 145 hospitals.

VA RESEARCH ON SUICIDE PREVENTION: OVERVIEW

• Times of crisis can be related to chronic pain, anxiety, depression, sleeplessness, or anger, or disturbing memories of combat service. VA researchers are taking steps to protect at-risk Veterans from contemplating, attempting, and completing the act of suicide.

• Investigators are exploring risk factors for suicide in Veterans and helping to improve risk assessments. They are also working to develop effective interventions and to identify crucial time periods at which to intervene.

• Other researchers are developing national systems to capture and manage data relating to suicide, attempted suicide, and suicide reattempts among Veterans. These systems will help investigators determine risk and protective factors for suicidal behavior among Veterans.

• VA’s Center of Excellence for Suicide Prevention, located at the Canandaigua, N.Y., VA Medical Center, has a mission to reduce occurrences of suicide, primarily by studying and applying public health approaches to suicide prevention.

• VA’s Rocky Mountain Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center studies suicide with the goal of reducing suicide in the Veteran population.

• VA is part of the Military Suicide Research Consortium, a partnership that manages studies to increase knowledge on topics such as risk assessment, treatment, and prevention, as they pertain to suicidal behavior in the military and among Veterans.

SELECTED MILESTONES AND MAJOR EVENTS

2007 – Established a Center of Excellence for Suicide Prevention in Canandaigua, N.Y.

2012 – Completed a report providing data on suicides and attempted suicides among Veterans

2012 – Found that the experience of killing in war was strongly associated with thoughts of suicide

2016 – Determined that Veterans receiving high doses of opioid painkillers were more than twice as likely to die by suicide than those receiving low doses

2016 – Announced a series of actions to reduce Veteran suicide, including using data on suicide attempts and overdoses to guide prevention strategies
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