



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
Montana VA Health Care System

Legislative Finance Committee Suicide Prevention Working Group

State of Suicide Prevention Related to Veteran
Population in Montana

Presented by: Douglas Stepina, LCSW
Position: Suicide Prevention Coordinator
Date of Briefing: 7/27/2022

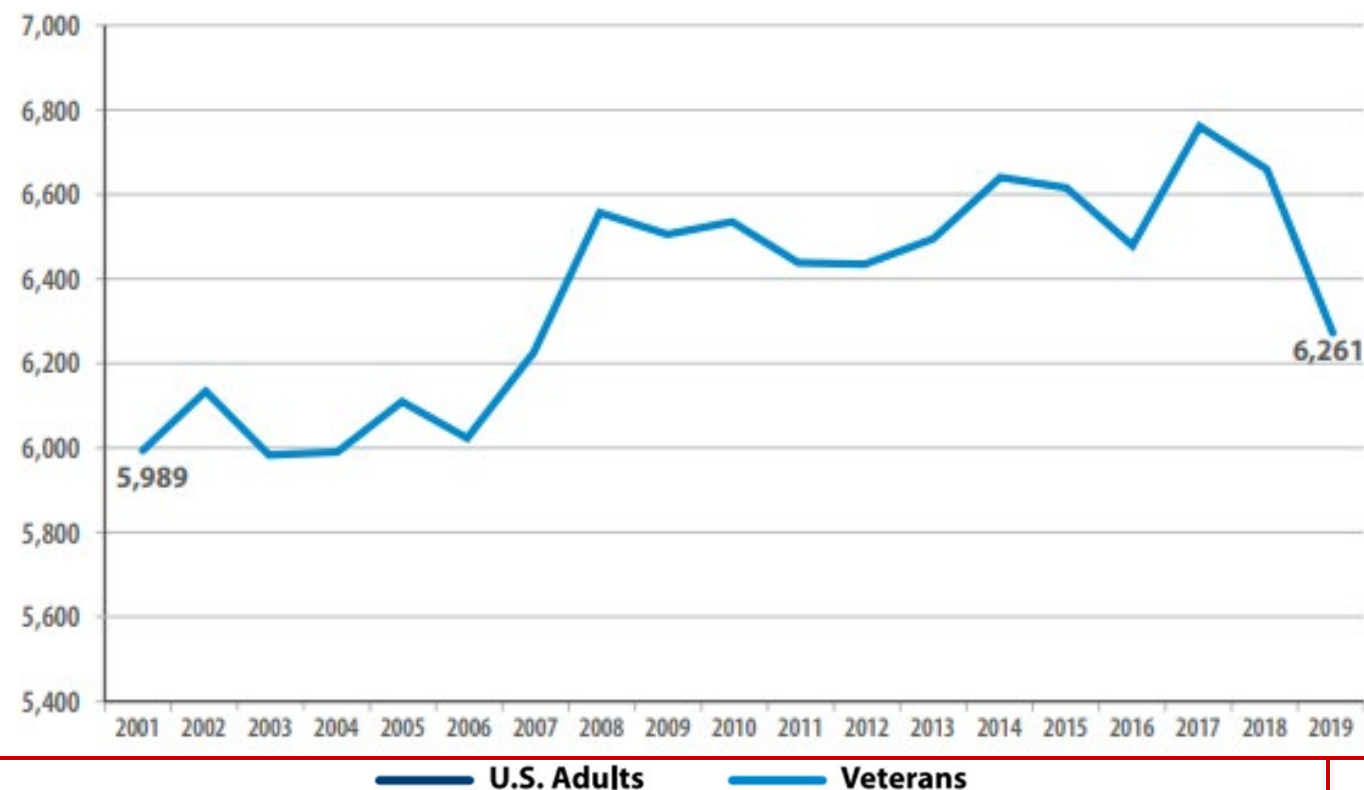




Montana Veteran Suicide Statistics

- 6261 Veteran Suicide in 2019
- Veteran Suicides represent 13.7% of all suicides among U.S. adults
- In 2019 there was an average of 17.2 Veteran suicides per day
- 6.8 per day had a VHA encounter in 2018 or 2019
- 10.4 per day did not have a VHA encounter in 2018 or 2019

Figure 2: Veteran Suicide Deaths, 2001–2019

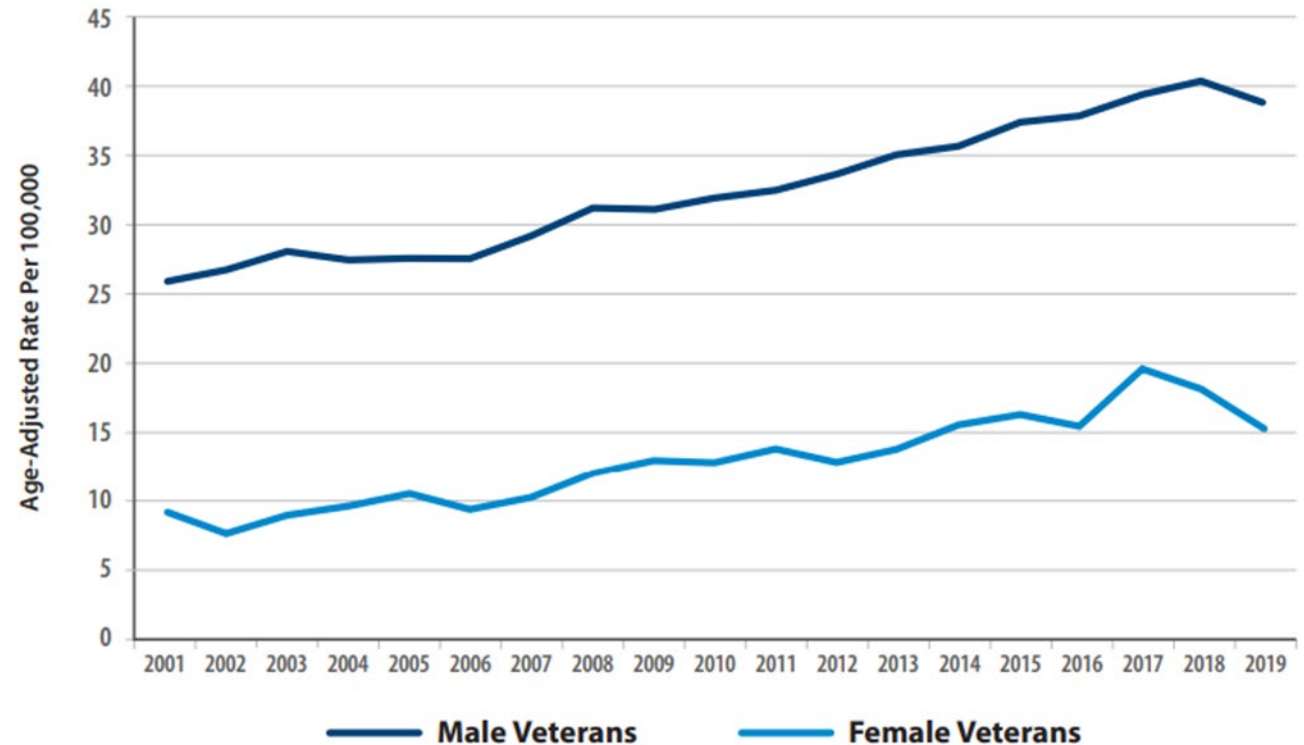




Montana Veteran Suicide Statistics

- Highest rate for men was in 2018 and dropped 3.8% in 2019
- Highest rate for women was in 2017 and has seen a 14.9% decrease in 2019
- Reduction of 399 Veteran suicides from 2018-2019

Figure 5: Age-Adjusted Suicide Rate Per 100,000, Male and Female Veterans, 2001–2019

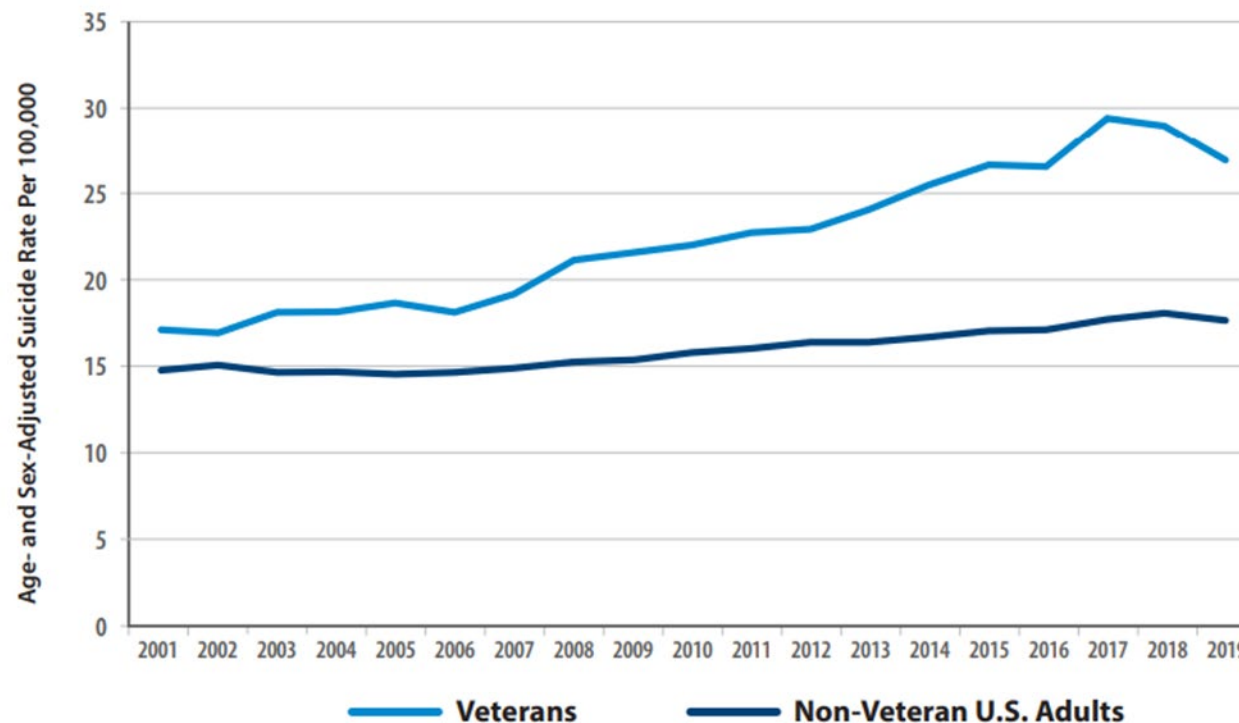




Montana Veteran Suicide Statistics

- Unadjusted rates for non-Veteran U.S. adults rose 33%, from 12.6 per 100,000 in 2001 to 16.8 per 100,000 in 2019
- Unadjusted rates for Veterans rose 35.9% from 23.3 per 100,000 in 2001 to 31.6 per 100,000 in 2019
- Keeping in mind the U.S. adult population has increased while the Veteran population has decreased

Figure 3: Age- and Sex-Adjusted Suicide Rates, Veterans and Non-Veteran U.S. Adults, 2001–2019





Montana Veteran Suicide Statistics

- Since the strategic plan was released in 2018 there is an expected decrease in MT over 12,000 Veterans

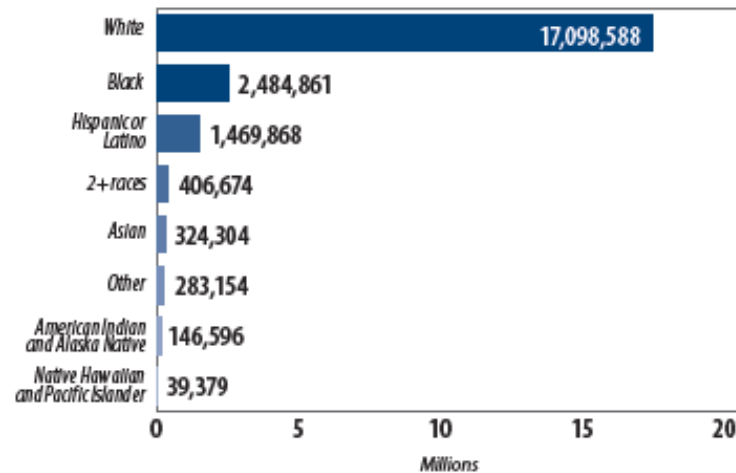
Figure 1: The U.S. Veteran Population

20.7
Million Veterans

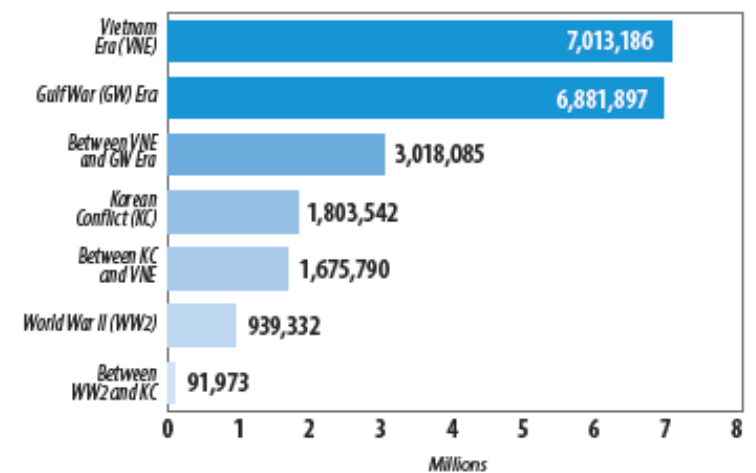
18.9
Million Males



Veterans by Race/Ethnicity



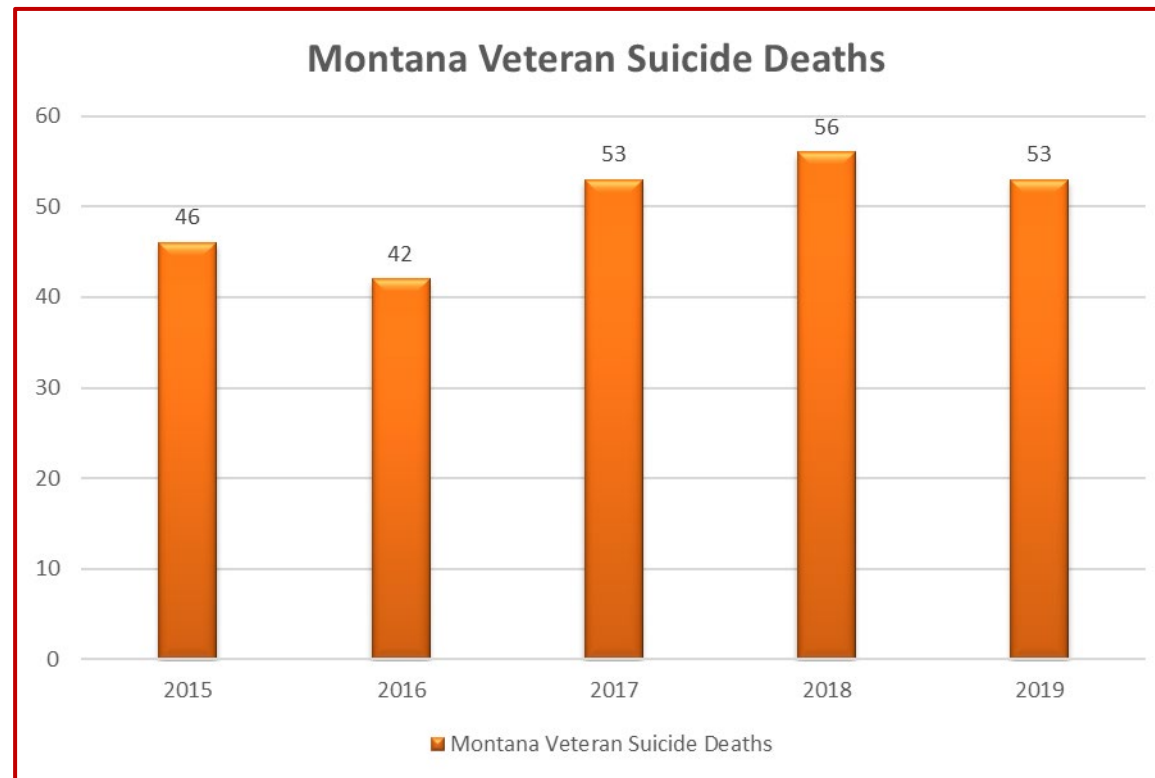
Veterans by Service Era





Montana Veteran Suicide Statistics

- Suicide trends in the state have closely aligned with national trends
- MT VA has documented between 130-150 suicide behaviors per year since 2016
- Current local records show slight increase in 2020 and a large decrease in 2021
- Gender disparities show only 1 or 2 suicides a year are a female
- About 53% of Veterans in MT who died from suicide had been enrolled in the VA at some point prior to death, most of which had not engaged in mental health in the prior 2 years if at all





Montana Veteran Suicide Statistics

- Highest count of Veteran suicide is the older population while the 18-35 year old group is the fastest increasing rate

Montana, Western Region, and National Veteran Suicide Deaths by Age Group, 2018^c

Age Group	Montana Veteran Suicides	Western Region Veteran Suicides	National Veteran Suicides	Montana Veteran Suicide Rate	Western Region Veteran Suicide Rate	National Veteran Suicide Rate
Total	56	1,627	6,435	60.9	36.0	32.0
18-34	10	218	874	111.1*	47.2	45.9
35-54	13	409	1,730	56.5*	35.8	33.4
55-74	22	658	2,587	55.0	34.9	30.4
75+	11	338	1,237	55.0*	32.9	27.4

Montana, Western Region, and National Veteran Suicide Deaths by Age Group, 2019^c

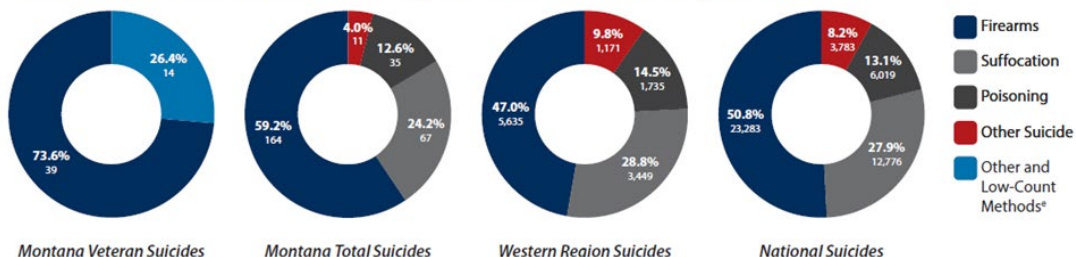
Age Group	Montana Veteran Suicides	Western Region Veteran Suicides	National Veteran Suicides	Montana Veteran Suicide Rate	Western Region Veteran Suicide Rate	National Veteran Suicide Rate
Total	53	1,627	6,261	58.2	36.6	31.6
18-34	<10	234	828	---	52.0	44.4
35-54	10-20	397	1,663	---	35.3	32.8
55-74	19	611	2,407	50.0*	33.3	28.8
75+	16	379	1,336	76.2*	36.8	29.6



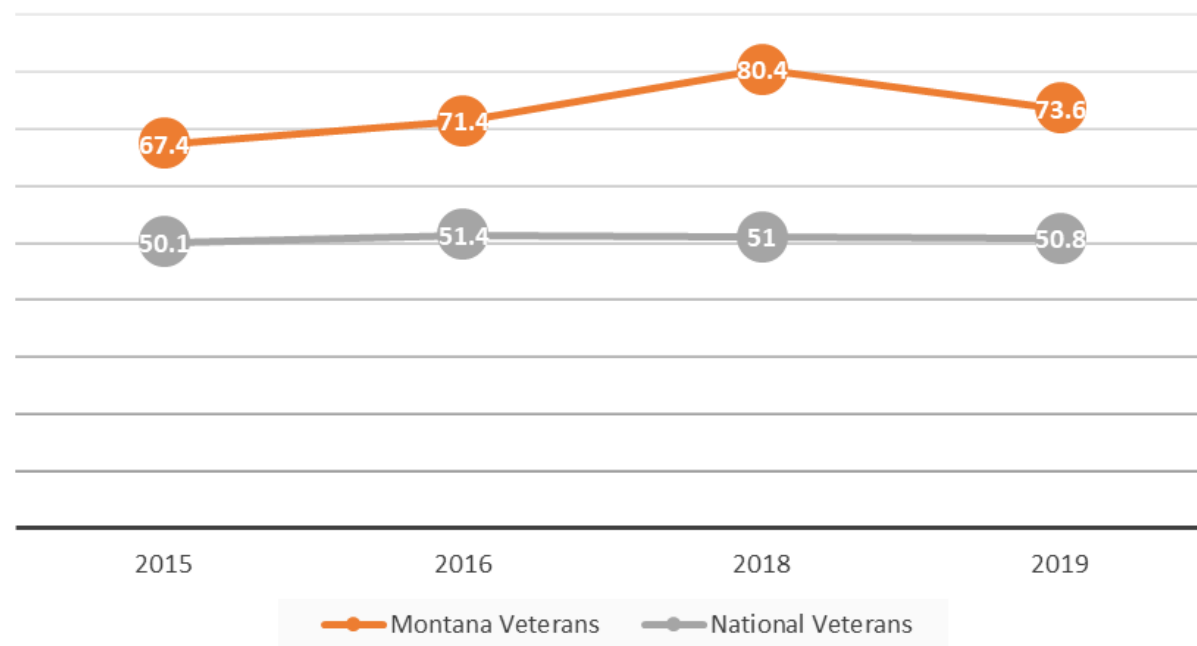
Montana Veteran Suicide Statistics

- National VA data does not provide a method statistic for 2017. Local numbers report approximately 90% of MT Veteran suicides in 2017 were by firearm.

Montana Veteran and Total Montana, Western Region, and National Suicide Deaths by Method,^d 2019



Montana Veteran Suicide by Firearms

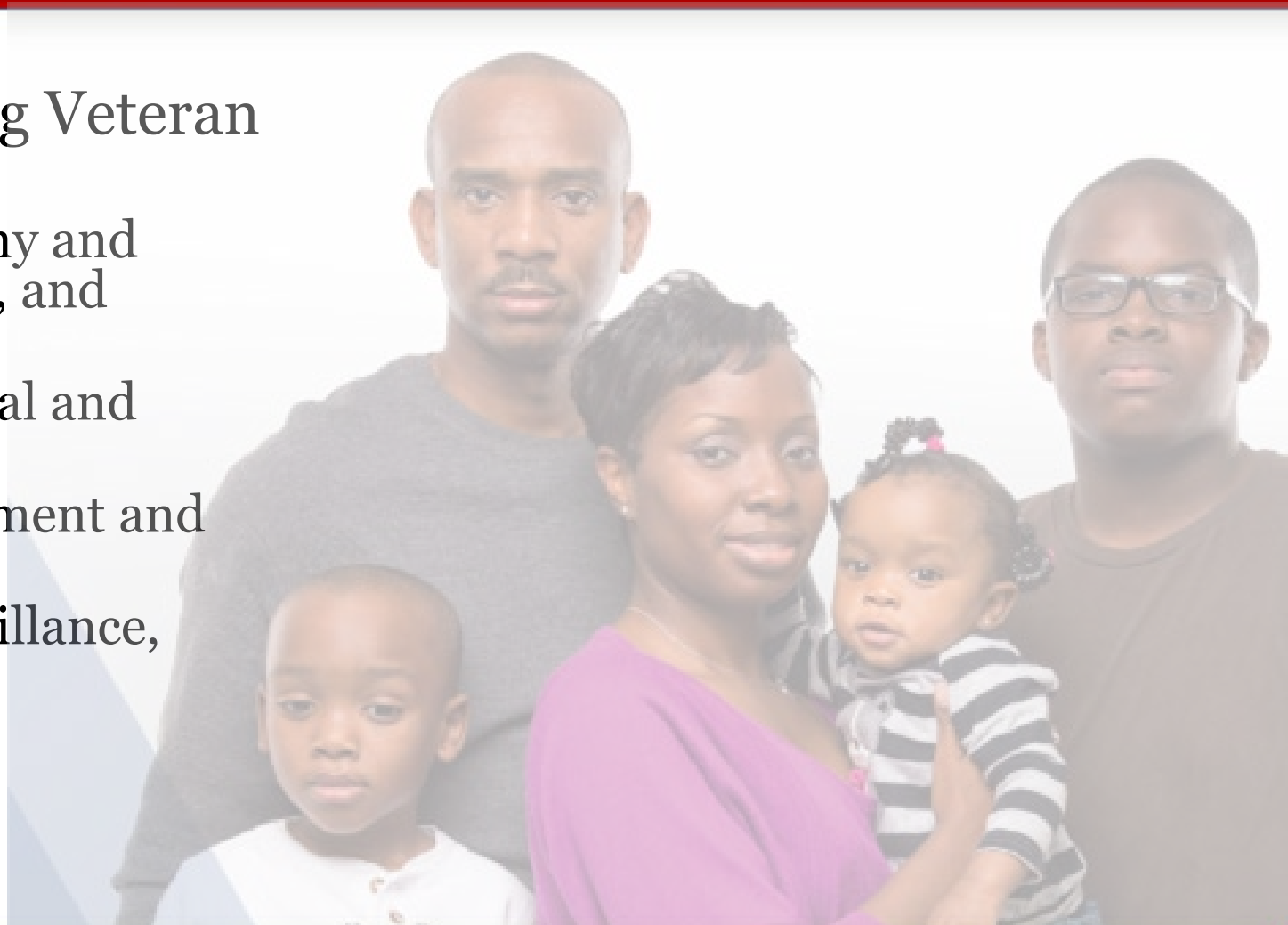




Montana Suicide Prevention Team

National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide

- **Strategic Direction 1:** Healthy and Empowered Veterans, Families, and Communities
- **Strategic Direction 2:** Clinical and community Preventive Services
- **Strategic Direction 3:** Treatment and Support Services
- **Strategic Direction 4:** Surveillance, Research, and Evaluation





Montana Suicide Prevention Team

- MTVA is increasing staffing specific to suicide prevention to:
 - Suicide Prevention Supervisor/Team Lead
 - 2 Suicide Prevention Coordinators
 - 1 Suicide Prevention Case Manager
 - 1 Reach Vet Coordinator
 - 2 Community Engagement and Partnership Coordinators
- Overall increase from 3-4 staff to 7 staff



Montana Suicide Prevention Team

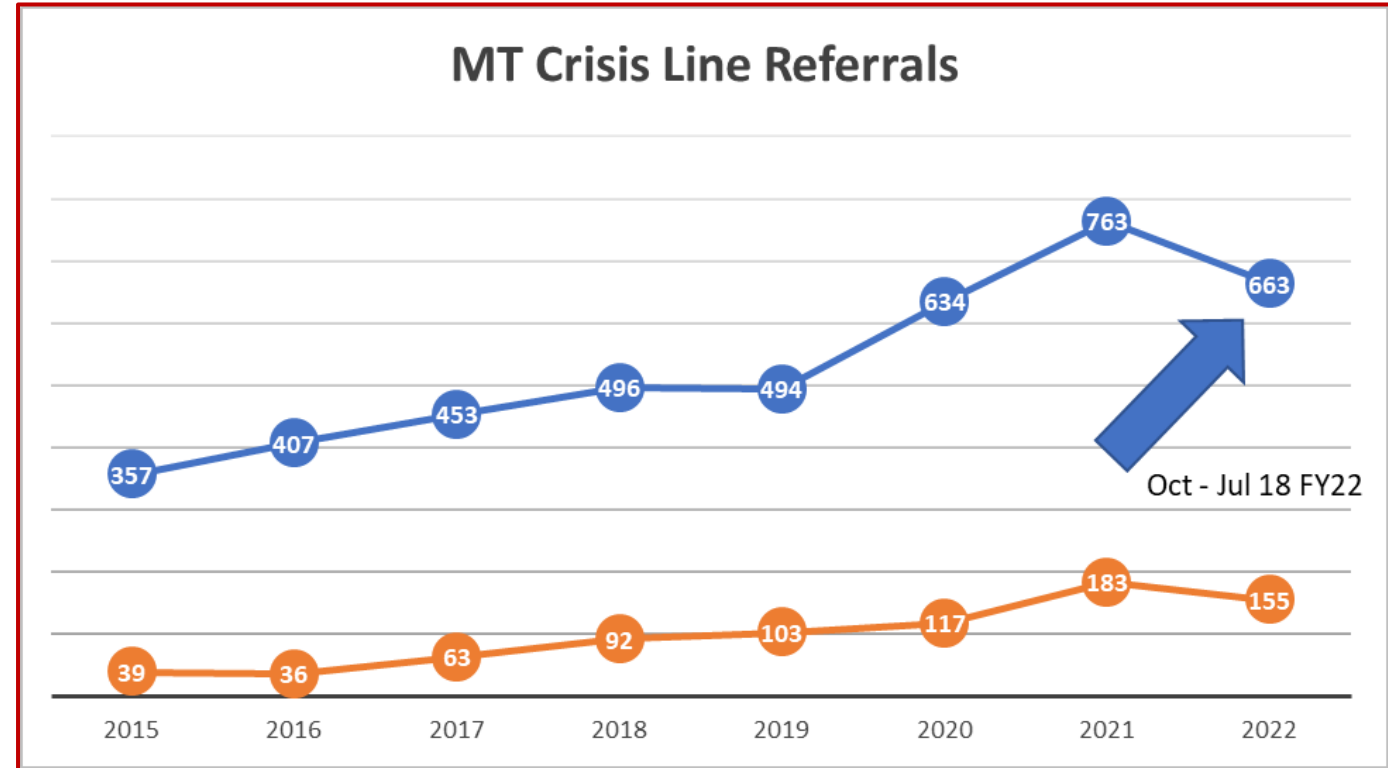
- Areas of Function
 - Administrative Items
 - Tracking and Reporting
 - Enhanced Care Delivery
 - Access and Referral
 - Outreach and Awareness
 - Education and Training



Montana Suicide Prevention Team

Veterans Crisis Line

- VCL began operation in 2007
- Each year of operation has seen steady increase (53% increase from 2016 -2021)
- The number of referrals are the count of Veterans the local VA suicide prevention teams respond to directly
- Nationally the VCL manages over 2000 calls daily
- VCL manages calls, text, and chat
- 18.4% of call over this period utilized emergency services
- 2021 & 2022 dispatch has increased to 23.7% of calls





VA Partnership & Collaboration

- Mayor's Challenges
- Governor's Challenges
- Lewis & Clark Suicide Prevention Coalition
- Suicide Prevention Coalition of Yellowstone Valley
- Project Tomorrow
- Vet Centers
- Montana 211
- SSG Parker Gordon Fox Granting
- DPPHS
- Other Community Partners



Montana Suicide Prevention Team

Barriers and Limitations

- External storage options for firearms outside of the home during times of increased risk
- Limited space for inpatient treatment
- Short durations of inpatient treatment

Gaps in Care

- Community Care and coordination between suicide prevention



Montana Suicide Prevention Team

Successes

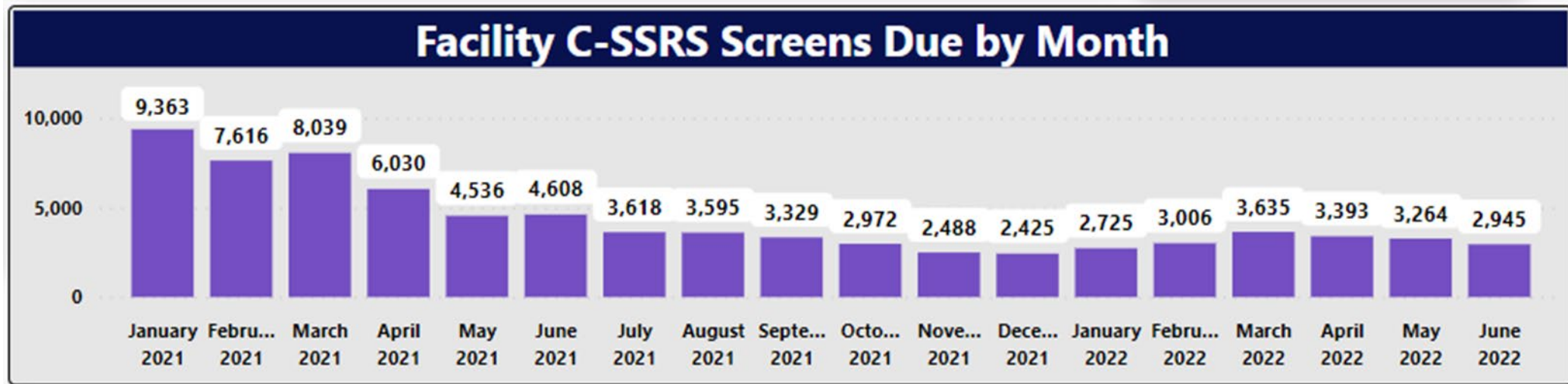
- Peer Support
- Suicide Prevention in the Emergency Department
- Universal Annual Screening
- Safety Planning Trainings
- RN Liaisons embedded within the local hospitals
- Caring Communications in suicide prevention as well as the emergency department
- Suicide Prevention 2.0 (Evidence Based Treatments for SP)
- Expansion of telehealth and VA Video Connect





Montana Suicide Prevention Team

- Increased screening by use of the Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS)
- Standardized process for evaluation per positive results
- Implementation of requirements of safety planning and standardized format of the safety plan
- Additional mandatory training for VHA staff
- Reach-Vet (Recovery Engagement and Coordination for Health
- Implementation of caring communications letters in multiple areas of care
- Continuous gathering and monitoring of data to inform and guide practice
- Implementation of evidenced based therapies specific to working with suicide ideation
- Hiring of staff to aid suicide prevention efforts in communities in conjunction with supporting SMVF



New number, same support.

| Dial 988 then Press 1.



Resources: Reach Out

- [Don't Wait. Reach out. \(va.gov\)](https://va.gov)



VA



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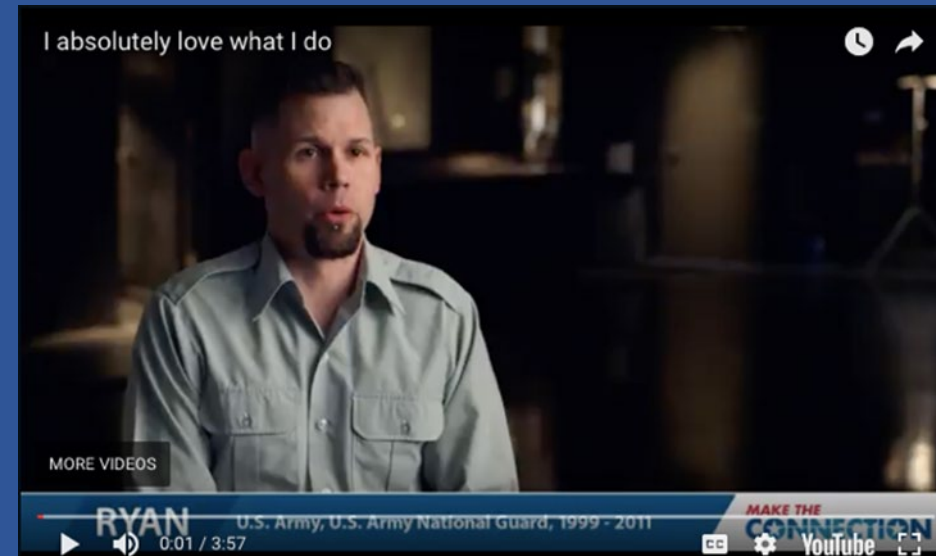


Resources: Make the Connection

- [Suicide | Warning Signs & Treatment | Military Veterans | Make the Connection](#)



Online resource featuring hundreds of Veterans telling their stories about overcoming mental health challenges.



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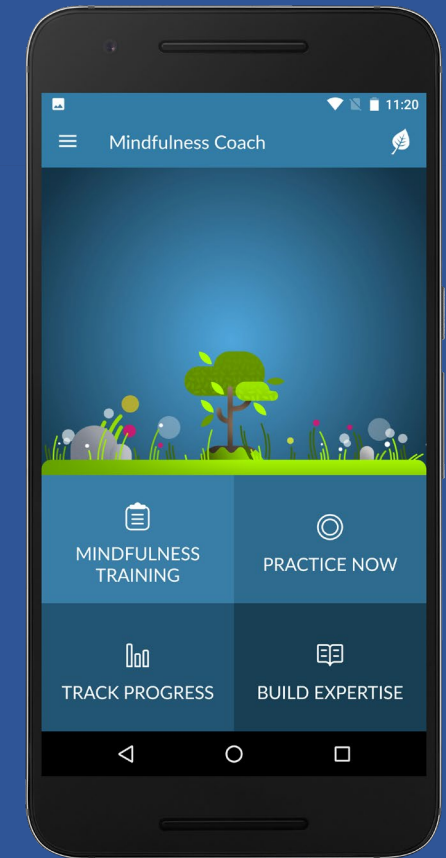
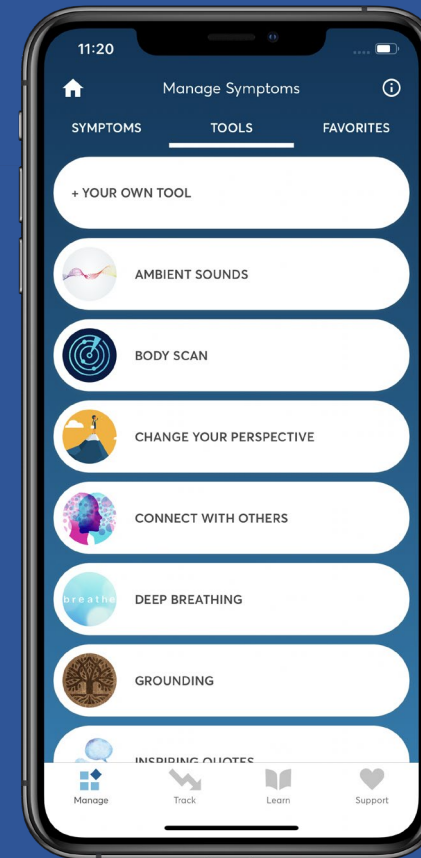
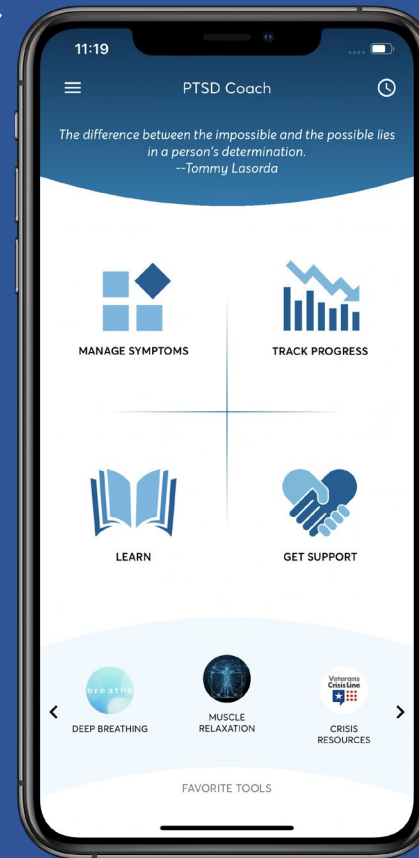
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Resources: VA Mobile App Store

- [VA App Store | VA Mobile](#)

Welcome to the



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Resources: Secure Storage


VA » Health Care » REACH » Firearm Suicide Prevention & Lethal Means Safety

REACH


- Mental Health
- More Health Care

QUICK LINKS

- Hospital Locator
Zip Code Go
- Health Programs
- Protect Your Health
- A-Z Health Topics




1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1



My Health, My Care: 24/7 Access to VA

FIREARM SUICIDE PREVENTION & LETHAL MEANS SAFETY



KeepItSecure.net

PRACTICE SAFE STORAGE OF FIREARMS, MEDICATION & OTHER LETHAL MEANS

Lethal means are objects like guns, medications, alcohol, opioids or other substances, ropes, cords, or sharp objects that can be used during a suicidal crisis. If a Veteran is in crisis or having suicidal thoughts, these items can become deadly when they are easily accessible. For example, nearly 7 out of every 10 Veteran deaths by suicide are the result of firearm injuries (Dept. of Veteran Affairs, 2018).

Increasing the time and distance between someone in a suicidal crisis and access to lethal means can reduce suicide risk and save lives. There are simple steps you can take to protect yourself and your family. On this page, you'll find:

- How to identify and handle a suicidal crisis
- Helpful tips for storing guns, medications, and other lethal means
- Additional resources about safe storage

- 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

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Resources: Coaching into Care

Program for families and loved ones of Veterans, helping them encourage the Veteran in their lives to seek support.

 **Coaching
into Care**
CALL 888-823-7458



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Resources: For Providers



Supporting Providers Who Serve Veterans

Free consultation and resources for any provider in the community or VA who serves Veterans at risk for suicide.

Request a consult: srmconsult@va.gov

-  Provider support after a suicide loss (Postvention)
-  Risk assessment
-  Lethal means safety counseling
-  Conceptualization of suicide risk
-  Best practices for documentation
-  Strategies for how to engage Veterans at high risk

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Questions

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