

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Oregon House Committee on Health Care Hearing

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Issue Overview:

Suicide in the United States and in the Veteran Population

Suicide in the U.S.

- **National public health problem (as defined by CDC)**
 - 10th leading cause of death in the U.S., 8th leading cause of death in Oregon
 - Over 48,000 Americans died by suicide in 2018, including over 6,000 Veterans
- **Veteran suicide**
 - In 2018, **13.8%** of all deaths by suicide among U.S. adults were Veterans
 - The suicide rate for Veterans was **1.5** times the rate for non-Veteran adults
 - Firearms were the method of suicide in **69.4%** of male Veteran suicide deaths and **41.9%** of female Veteran suicide deaths.
 - **Oregon Veterans**
 - The suicide rate was not significantly different from the national Veteran suicide rate
 - Firearms were the method of suicide in **66%** of Veteran suicide deaths (gender data not specified)

(Sources: CDC.gov; 2020 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report; Oregon Veteran Suicide Data Sheet)

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Facts about Lethal Means Safety and Suicide Prevention

- Nine in ten of those who survive a suicide attempt do not go on to die by suicide.
- Not all methods are equal with respect to lethality. For example, **90%** of suicide attempts made with a firearm result in death, compared with around **1%** of suicide attempts made by ingestion or using sharp instruments.
- Patients may not have access to or consider multiple means of suicide and will often choose a method that is readily available. Thus, reducing access to one method might be critical.
- Suicidal crises are often brief and temporary. Among 153 survivors of nearly lethal suicide attempts, **24% said it took less than five minutes for them to act on a suicidal impulse**. Increasing the time and space required to readily access a lethal method can save lives

(Source: <https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/lethalmeanssafety/evidence/>)

VA Approach to Suicide Prevention

- **2018-2028: VA National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide**

- Public health approach to end suicide
- Goal 6 promotes efforts to reduce access to lethal means

Lethal Means Safety Strategies for 2020-2021:

1. Disseminate Lethal Means Safe Storage Information to Primary Care, Women's Health Services, Vet Centers, and Mental Health Clinics During the COVID-19 Pandemic
2. Implement a One-Time Mandatory Lethal Means Safety Training for all VHA Providers, Including Those in Mental Health, Pain, Emergency Departments, Primary Care, Women's Health Services, and Vet Centers
3. Train MISSION Act (community care) Providers in Lethal Means Safety
4. Increase Integration of Lethal Means Safety Materials and Goals Into Community-Based Coalition Work

VA Approach to Suicide Prevention

- **2019 – VA Partnership with National Shooting Sports Foundation and American Foundation for Suicide Prevention**
 - The partnership is a community-level program that delivers messaging to Veterans, their families, and communities about putting “time and space” between a Veteran in crisis and a firearm
 - “Toolkit for Safe Firearm Storage in Your Community” released
- Suicide Prevention Coordinators at local VA Medical Centers offer cable gun locks to secure firearms in the home.



Resources

- [2020 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report \(va.gov\)](#)
- [Oregon Veteran Suicide Data Sheet \(va.gov\)](#)
- [National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide \(va.gov\)](#)
- [Lethal Means Safety & Suicide Prevention - MIRECC / CoE \(va.gov\)](#)
- [Suicide Prevention is Everyone's Business: A Toolkit for Safe Firearm Storage in Your Community \(va.gov\)](#)