

SUICIDE AMONG VETERANS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS



Veterans experiencing homelessness have a [higher risk of suicide](#) compared to Veterans with no noted history of homelessness, with one study finding that homeless patients using VA services were more than [twice as likely to die by suicide](#) than those with no history of homelessness.

VA's top clinical priority is preventing suicide among all Veterans — including those who do not, and may never, seek care within the VA health care system. To understand the urgency with which we address this issue, we first must understand the risk factors that lead Veterans experiencing homelessness to suicide.

DRIVERS OF SUICIDE AMONG HOMELESS VETERANS

Several health and social factors are likely to drive risk among Veterans experiencing homelessness, including:

<p>High rates of mental health diagnoses, including substance use disorders, PTSD, and serious mental illness</p>	<p>Chronic health conditions such as sexually transmitted infections, cardiovascular concerns, and traumatic brain injury</p>	<p>Psychosocial stressors such as unemployment, financial instability, and criminal justice involvement</p>
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In addition to these factors, individuals experiencing homelessness often report feeling dismissed by their providers, stigmatized by society, and ostracized by their social support system.

INCREASE IN LIKELIHOOD

[A large national survey](#) of post-9/11 Veterans found that male and female Veterans who have experienced homelessness are at elevated risk for thoughts of suicide and suicide attempts when compared to Veterans who have not. Adding criminal justice involvement increases the likelihood even more.

GENDER	HISTORY	HOMELESSNESS	HOMELESSNESS AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT
MEN	<i>Suicidal Thoughts</i>	1.42	1.82
	<i>Attempting Suicide</i>	2.47	3.73
WOMEN	<i>Suicidal Thoughts</i>	1.29	1.45
	<i>Attempting Suicide</i>	2.33	3.33

Despite firearms being a leading method for suicide deaths among Veterans, homeless Veterans have a [higher likelihood of dying by suicide from other methods](#) than stably housed Veterans.

3.07 more likely to jump from a high location
TIMES

1.89 more likely to die from hanging, strangling, or suffocation
TIMES

1.86 more likely to die from self-poisoning or overdose
TIMES

WHAT VA IS DOING

VA currently screens for both homelessness and housing instability, and suicide risk. If either of these factors are identified, these individuals are provided brief interventions and referrals to services.

Tailored care is also provided, focused on addressing:

<p>HOUSING INSTABILITY AND ASSOCIATED FACTORS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges with transportation to appointments or childcare during visits • Competing obligations of work and healthcare • Rurality resulting in increased distance to care or an emergency shelter • Decreased social support to facilitate engagement in healthcare
<p>PRIMARY AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES</p>	

A particular strength of VA efforts is our interdisciplinary focus, which allows providers to track the health and service needs of Veterans to ensure continuity of care.

A final caveat to consider is that these Veterans may be impacted by other factors, including:

- Challenges with transportation to appointments or childcare during visits
- Competing obligations of work and healthcare
- Rurality resulting in increased distance to care or an emergency shelter
- Decreased social support to facilitate engagement in healthcare

Because of this, VA intervention should occur as early as possible, as the integration of case managers can be fundamental to ensuring the continued safety and care of Veterans.

If you or a Veteran you know is in crisis, VA is here to help.

RESOURCES FOR VETERANS

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VA Homeless National Call Center – 1-877-4AID VET (877-424-3838) • Veterans Crisis Line – Dial 988 then Press 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VA Community Resource and Referral Centers • Collaboration with Community Partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach Tools and Literature • Don't Wait. Reach Out. |
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