Veteran Suicide: A Growing Problem in Colorado

Ashlie Brown
Director, Colorado Health Institute
Inform State and National Policy
Contribute to Current Health Policy Discussions
Support Efforts to Improve Health
Three Takeaways

1. Suicide is becoming more common among veterans.

2. Stigma, not availability, is the major barrier to mental health care for veterans.

3. Colorado has solutions to prevent veteran suicides.
Suicide is Increasingly Common Among Veterans
Support for a Veteran!

Every Day 22 Veterans Commit Suicide
That's 22 Too Many

Did You Know?
Of the nearly 13,000 Coloradans who died by suicide between 2004 and 2017, nearly 2,600 were veterans.

20% of all suicides in Colorado are veterans or active-duty service members.
Suicide Rate Among Veterans Was More Than Double the Rate for Non-veterans in 2017

Figure 1: Rate of Deaths by Suicide Among Veterans and Nonveterans in Colorado per 100,000, 2004-2017

Veteran  Non-Veteran

2004: 22.1
2005: 52.1
2017: 22.1
The Rate Is Increasing

Figure 1: Rate of Deaths by Suicide Among Veterans and Nonveterans in Colorado per 100,000, 2004-2017

- Veteran
- Non-Veteran

2004: 44.1
2017: 52.1
Colorado Rate of Suicide Higher Than National Rate
Stigma, not availability, blocks mental health care for Veterans
Few Veterans Report Not Being Able to Access to Mental Health Care

Figure 4. Percentage Needing Mental Health Care or Counseling Services but Not Getting It, Colorado, 2013.

5.0% Veteran

8.9% Non-Veteran
Stigma is a Barrier to Veterans Accessing Mental Health Care

Figure 5. Reasons Coloradans Who Needed Care Give for Not Receiving Mental Health Care, 2013

- Stigma-Related Reasons: 36.5% Veteran, 69.3% Non-Veteran
- Didn’t Think Health Insurance Would Cover It: 56.3% Veteran, 48.8% Non-Veteran
- Difficulty Getting an Appointment: 22.5% Veteran, 28.2% Non-Veteran
- Concerned About the Cost: 75.4% Veteran, 77.7% Non-Veteran
Communities are creating solutions to prevent veteran suicide
Together With Veterans

- Enlists rural Veterans from the community and local partners
- Provides tailored suicide prevention training
- Equips rural communities with strategies to reduce stigma and promote help-seeking
## Together With Veterans Suicide Prevention Model

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<th><strong>Five Strategies</strong></th>
<th><strong>Five Phases</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reduce Stigma and Promote Help Seeking</strong></td>
<td><strong>Build Your Team</strong></td>
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<td>Inform veterans and community members about veteran suicide and establish a Together With Veterans team and steering committee to shepherd this work.</td>
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<td><strong>Promote Lethal Means Safety</strong></td>
<td><strong>Learn About Your Community</strong></td>
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<td>Learn the community’s strengths and needs for suicide prevention through a Community Readiness Assessment and a Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats (SWOT) analysis.</td>
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<td><strong>Improve Access to Quality Care</strong></td>
<td><strong>Teach Your Team</strong></td>
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<td>• <em>Individual Suicide Prevention</em>: Teach people what to do when speaking with someone who may be at risk of suicide.</td>
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<td>• <em>Community-Based Suicide Prevention Strategies</em>: Increase community awareness of veteran suicide and improve community response to the needs of local veterans.</td>
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<td><strong>Provide Suicide Prevention Training</strong></td>
<td><strong>Plan for Action</strong></td>
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<td>Develop an action plan for each community-based suicide prevention strategy based on what is learned in step two about the community and its suicide prevention needs as well as any local, state, and national resources that can assist in implementing an effective plan.</td>
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<td><strong>Enhance Primary Care Suicide Prevention</strong></td>
<td><strong>Follow Your Plan and Measure Results</strong></td>
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<td>Carry out the action plan, measure and track change for the five suicide prevention strategies.</td>
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More than 4,500 veterans live in northeastern Colorado
Veteran Health Connector

- Connect Veterans to existing community resources
- Create a coalition of Veterans to address suicide risk
The Mission Continues...
Three Takeaways

1. Veteran suicide is a growing problem.

2. Stigma, not availability, blocks mental health care for veterans.

3. Communities are creating solutions to prevent Veteran suicide.
Interested in Together With Veterans?

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Thank You

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