

VA Report Shows Slight Increase in Veterans Suicide

The latest annual report found that America's youngest veterans were most at risk of suicide

Mar 19, 2024

Key findings on the VA's annual National Veteran Suicide Prevention Report last year showed a slight spike between 2020 and 2021 in suicides among veterans under 45 years old. Most concerning, though, was statistics for the youngest group of veterans.

Within the report's key findings, the VA's data showed the 2021 reported suicide rate was highest among veterans between 18 and 34 years old, followed by those between 35 and 54.

Overall, the reported rate of suicide among veterans in 2021 was at 33.9 percent, a 1.3 percent increase from the numbers in 2020. The percentages stem from a total of 6,392 reported suicides amongst the veterans population, with 6,042 of those being men.

VFW's National Veterans Service (NVS) Director Michael Figlioli believes one of the main culprits behind the increase was the COVID-19 pandemic and the psychological side-effects it had on veterans and civilians alike.

"The numbers are disappointing, but the time period covered was at the height of COVID, and that was a probable player," Figlioli said. "Veterans and people of all types experienced at times a sense of helplessness, of isolation and loneliness. Then add in the stresses of daily life that were preexistent, and it just compounded."

The report, however, mentioned that many of the top causes of death among younger veterans are preventable with access to available benefits, proper balance of care, compassion and community involvement.

In this regard, Figlioli said VFW's NVS officers provide a valuable lifeline.

"Our service officers are experts in what the VA provides, but they are also excellent

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

conduits as to what is available at the state and local level,” Figlioli said. “They are in tune with their communities and have relationships with other service providers, churches, civic groups and agencies who can all provide assistance when necessary.”

To combat veterans suicide further, the VFW was recently at the forefront of a bill introduced in the Senate in March 2023.

The *Not Just a Number Act* (S. 928) would require VA to examine veterans’ benefits usage in their annual suicide prevention report, as well as analyze which VA benefits have the greatest impact on preventing suicide. It also would require VA to issue recommendations for an expansion of those benefits.

“Individuals who have a roof over their heads, money in their wallets, food on the table and are gainfully employed are less likely to die by suicide,” Figlioli said. “We need to include economic impacts in suicide prevention efforts. This is too important to fall off everyone’s radar if not a continuous talking point and issue in the forefront.”

Figlioli added that VFW also uses social media platforms to amplify messages that it identifies as crucial and important, not only for VA benefits or VFW-backed legislation, but social and economic issues as well.

“We need to keep suicide prevention front and center, making people realize that opening up and talking about it is essential,” Figlioli said. “Continued development and assessment of available programs and implementation of new ones must be a component. Outside-the-box thinking is a big part of that, but there needs to be tangible and positive results.”

This article is featured in the 2024 March issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Ismael Rodriguez Jr.](#), senior writer for VFW magazine.

At press time, the Not Just a Number Act was being considered by the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee.