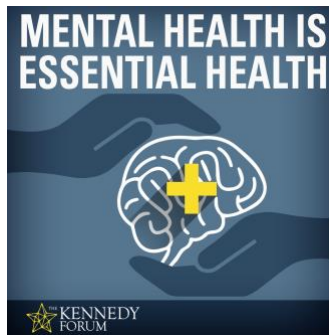


# On the Table for Mental Health



## Veterans Mental Health

**Military personnel are known for their bravery and resilience.** However, mental health and substance use disorders impact everyone from every walk of life, and active military personnel and veterans and their families are no exception. We must overcome stigma to find better ways to reach out to those impacted and encourage them to seek the help they deserve to lead a fulfilling life.

### Key Facts<sup>i, ii</sup>

- The suicide rate for Veterans was 1.5 times greater than the rate for non-Veteran population ages 18 and older in 2017.
- More than 44,000 Americans die by suicide each year and Veteran suicides have exceeded 6,000 each year from 2008 to 2017.
- Despite accounting for just 7.9% of the population, Veterans account for 13.5% of all suicide deaths in the United States.
- Firearms accounted for nearly 70% of suicides by Veterans and service members in 2017.
- 30% (approximately 730,000 men and women) of active duty and reserve military personnel deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan have a mental health condition requiring treatment; many are experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and major depression.
- Less than 50% of Veterans receive treatment for their mental health condition.
- Nearly one-third of Veterans seeking care for substance use also have PTSD.

### Possible Questions for Discussion

- Why do you believe Veterans are disproportionately impacted by mental health and substance use conditions?
- How have you been affected by suicide?
- Have you experienced a Veteran living with a mental health or substance use condition?
- How can you and your family support active-duty military and Veterans impacted by mental health or substance use?

### How You Can Support a Veteran's Mental Health<sup>iii</sup>

#### Prevent Suicide

- Suicide is a leading cause of death among Veterans. Visit our online toolkit to learn more about recognizing suicide in a person and supporting someone and their family through this challenge: <https://thekennedyforumillinois.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Suicide-SATT-one-pager.pdf>

#### Understand and Support Those Affected by PTSD

- PTSD is directly associated with exposure to traumatic events such as combat, assault, car accidents, rape, bullying, or other disasters can have long-term effects such as anger, difficulty sleeping or concentrating, and could lead to substance use.
- PTSD is not exclusive to veterans, but a report from a *JAMA Psychiatry* study found that the rate of PTSD is up to [15 times higher](#) among veterans than citizens.
- PTSD is a risk factor for suicide, and if someone [displays symptoms](#), seek professional care.

## **Understand and Support Those Affected by Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)<sup>IV</sup>**

- A [TBI](#) is a disruption in the normal function of the brain that can be caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head, or penetrating head injury.
- TBIs may result from any contact, but veterans are at risk of brain injury through explosions experienced during combat or training exercises.
- Symptoms may include headaches, irritability, sleep or memory disorders, slower thinking, and depression.

## **Understand and Support Those Affected by Depression**

- Major depressive disorder is one of the most common mental health conditions and leading cause of disability in the United States among people ages 15-44.<sup>V</sup>
- You can support someone with depression by checking in regularly, listening carefully, helping them with daily tasks, and encouraging them to seek professional help.
- Those living with depression can lead to suicide or substance use and should be taken seriously.

## **Understand and Support Those Affected by Anxiety**

- Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health condition, impacting nearly 20% of adults in the United States.
- Anxiety and stress are a normal part of being human, and they are not a problem until they become excessive and prevent a person from being productive.
- There are many ways to treat anxiety disorders, including seeing a medical professional, medication, or other lifestyle approaches to manage stress and improve self-care.

## **About The Kennedy Forum**

Just as President Kennedy rallied the nation to dream big and set audacious goals 50 years ago, The Kennedy Forum in Illinois is working toward lasting change in the way mental health and addictions are considered and treated. Our mission is to end stigma against mental health and substance use disorders in both attitudes and practice. We believe that strong, bold leadership, strategic collaboration with partners and concerted action, it is possible to build a future with a health system that fully recognizes that the brain is part of the body and all persons are treated with dignity. Join us at [www.thekennedyforumillinois.org](http://www.thekennedyforumillinois.org)

## **RESOURCES**

- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/>
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Military and Veteran suicide prevention: <https://afsp.org/military-and-veteran-suicide-prevention>
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline/Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255, <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Tools for Action: <https://www.samhsa.gov/smvf-ta-center/resources/tools>
- For Veterans and Families: Understanding PTSD and Substance Use: <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/publications/print/sudptsdflyer.pdf>
- U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Discussion Guide: <https://www.samhsa.gov/community-conversations>

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- I. U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs' National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report (2019), [https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2019/2019\\_National\\_Veteran\\_Suicide\\_Prevention\\_Annual\\_Report\\_508.pdf](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2019/2019_National_Veteran_Suicide_Prevention_Annual_Report_508.pdf).
  - II. U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs, <https://www.va.gov/PREVENTS/suicide-data.asp>
  - III. 5 Ways You Can Support Veterans' Mental Health (2019), <https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/November-2019/5-Ways-You-Can-Support-Veterans-Mental-Health>
  - IV. U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs, <https://www.research.va.gov/topics/tbi.cfm#:~:text=The%20Defense%20and%20Veterans%20Brain,TBIs%20were%20classified%20as%20mild.>
  - V. Anxiety and Depression Association of America (2020), <https://adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/depression>