

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# VA Peer Specialists Roles in Suicide Prevention

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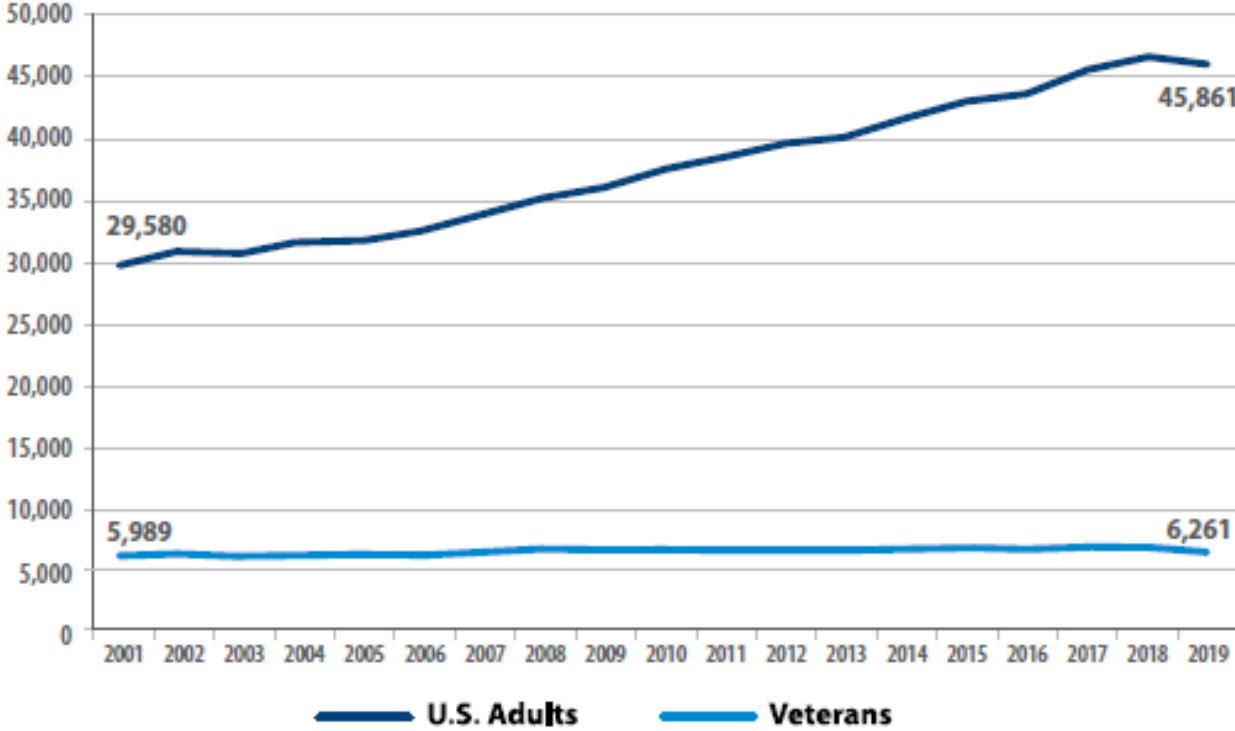
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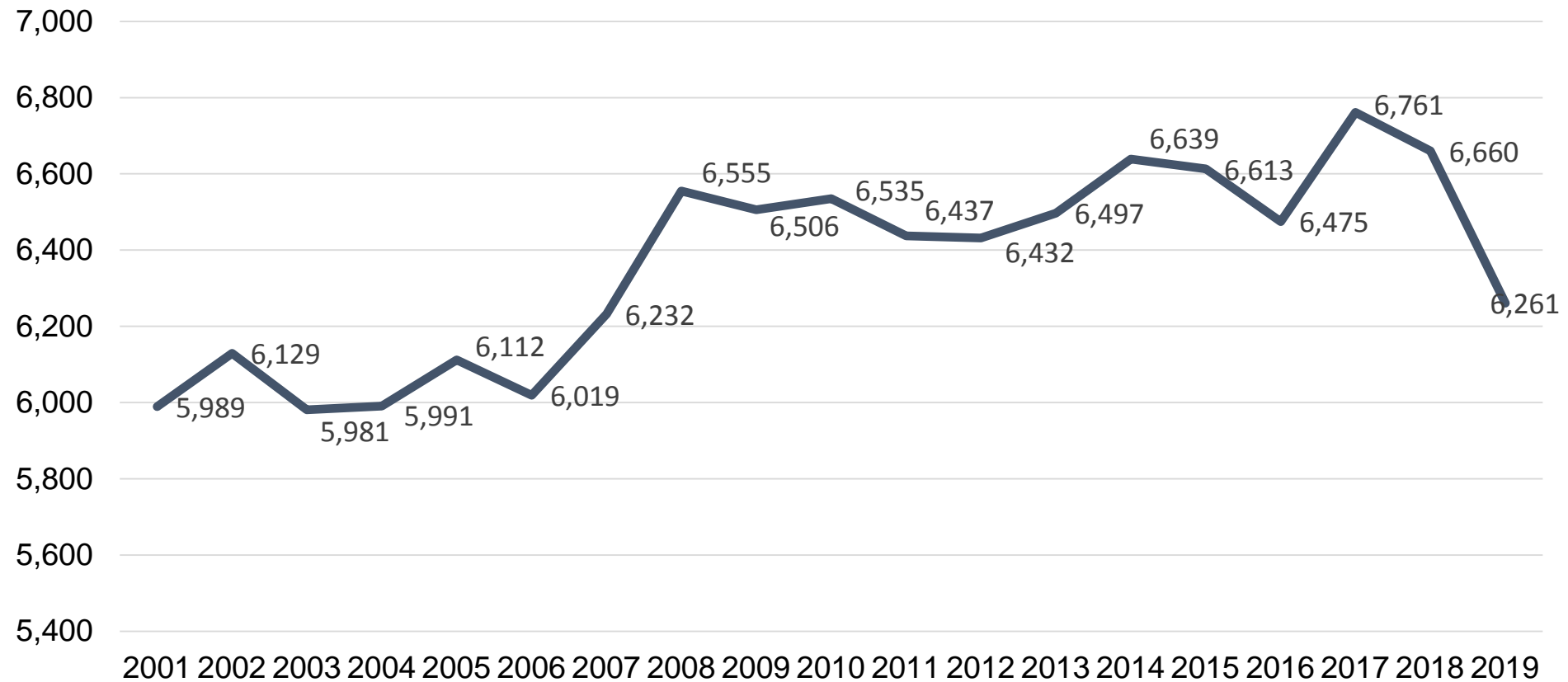
# Overview

- Facts about Veteran Suicide
- Role of Peer Specialists in Suicide Prevention
- Introduction to VA S.A.V.E.
- Resources and References

# Suicide Deaths, by Year, 2001–2019



# Veteran Suicide Deaths, 2001-2019



- In 2019, the number of Veteran suicides (6,261) was the lowest since 2007.
- An estimated 6.8 suicides per day were among those with VHA encounters in 2018 or 2019, whereas 10.4 per day were among Veterans with no VHA encounter in 2018 or 2019

# Suicide Deaths, Methods Involved, 2019 and Change from 2001

	Non-Veteran		Veterans				Non-Veteran		Veteran			
	U.S. Adults		Veterans		Women		Women		Men		Men	
	2019	Change*	2019	Change*	2019	Change*	2019	Change*	2019	Change*	2019	Change*
Firearms	47.9%	(-4.8%)	69.2%	(+2.7%)	31.3%	(-4.2%)	49.8%	(+12.8%)	53.0%	(-5.0%)	70.2%	(+2.9%)
Poisoning	13.9%	(-4.5%)	8.4%	(-4.8%)	31.0%	(-7.1%)	26.3%	(-16.6%)	8.5%	(-3.8%)	7.5%	(-4.9%)
Suffocation	29.6%	(+8.8%)	16.9%	(+2.9%)	27.7%	(+12.0%)	20.5%	(+10.1%)	30.2%	(+7.9%)	16.8%	(+2.7%)
Other	8.7%	(+0.6%)	5.4%	(-0.9%)	10.0%	(-0.7%)	3.4%	(-6.3%)	8.3%	(+1.0%)	5.5%	(-0.8%)

\* Change Versus Among Suicide Decedents in 2001

Veteran suicides were more likely to involve firearms<sup>5</sup>. This difference increased from 2001 to 2019.

# Anchors of Hope



**Anchor 1:** 399 fewer Veterans died from suicide in 2019 than in 2018.

**Anchor 2:** From 2005 to 2018, identified Veteran suicides increased on average by 48 deaths per year. A reversal totaling 399 lives within one year is unprecedented, dating back to 2001.

**Anchor 3:** Decrease in the adjusted suicide rate for Veterans from 2018 to 2019 (7%) was larger than any observed for Veterans 2001 through 2018. Veteran rate of decrease (7.2%) exceeded by four times the non-Veteran population decrease (1.8%)

**Anchor 4:** There was a nearly 13% one-year (unadjusted) rate decrease for female Veterans, which represents the largest rate decrease for Women Veterans in 17 years.

# Risk and Protective Factors

## Risk

- Prior suicide attempt
- Mental health issues
- Substance abuse
- Access to lethal means
- Recent loss
- Legal or financial challenges
- Relationship issues
- Unemployment
- Homelessness

## Protective

- Access to mental health care
- Sense of connectedness
- Problem-solving skills
- Sense of spirituality
- Mission or purpose
- Physical health
- Employment
- Social and emotional well-being



**Goal:** Minimize risk factors and boost protective factors

# Charleston VAMC Peer Specialists (PS)

**Peer Specialists are fully integrated into the treatment teams.**

- We have a total of 12 peer specialists across 5 facilities in S. Carolina and Georgia.
- Homeless Program (HUD/VASH)
- Substance Treatment and Recovery (STAR)
- Outpatient Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Centers (PRRCs)
- General Mental Health at some of the outpatient clinics
- Psychiatric Inpatient



# VHA Peer Specialists Training & Roles in Suicide Prevention

- **ASIST, SAVE QPR & Columbia Screener**
- **Peer Support Outreach Center of the Veterans Crisis Line**, Canandaigua, NY
- **Peer Specialists in Homeless Programs-*Screening for Suicide Risk in the Community***
  - Training webinar has been archived for continued access, [Peer Specialists in Homeless Programs - Screening for Suicide Risk in the Community](#)
  - VHA Peer Specialist and Peer Support Supervisor Conference, August 2<sup>nd</sup>- 5<sup>th</sup>
  - Series of Community of Practice calls
- **Peer Specialists in any program** - will engage and discuss suicidality, lethal means restriction, support use of suicide prevention safety plan

# VHA Peer Specialist Involved National Programs

**Clay Hunt was a Marine Combat Veteran** who struggled with depression, panic attacks and posttraumatic stress. Upon discharge, he threw himself into Veteran's advocacy and humanitarian work, even traveling to Haiti in 2010 with other Marine Veterans to help after a devastating earthquake. He focused on [helping other Veterans](#), who like himself were struggling with mental health conditions. Clay Hunt died by suicide in Houston, Texas on March 2011, at the age of 28.

## **Clay Hunt Act 2016 - Focuses on:**

- Access, MH & SP Resources
- Lethal Means Safety Training
- Community Outreach & Partnership

**Orders Home:** Modified version of Veteran X for active-duty military personnel

# VHA Peer Specialist Involved National Programs Continued

## Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019

- The VA must submit a plan to address the staffing of mental health providers at its facilities.
- The VA must develop a clinical provider treatment toolkit and training materials for the evidence-based management of comorbid mental health conditions, and substance use disorders, and chronic pain.
- The VA must also partner with complimentary and alternative treatment options for chronic pain.
- VA Suicide Prevention Office must seek to partner with DOD and community member to improve transition service members more resources.
- The VA and DOD must establish and report on their mental health programs.

# VHA Peer Specialist Involved National Programs Continued

## Peer Support Outreach Center of the Veterans Crisis Line, Canandaigua, NY

- Several Years in the Making
- Training started in Jan 2021
- Started pilot phase 5/24/21
- PS are reaching out to Veterans who have called the VCL in the past and have shown behaviors suggesting that they might benefit from some additional support

**VA S.A.V.E.**

# VA S.A.V.E.: Teaching Communities How to Help Veterans at Risk for Suicide

**VA S.A.V.E.** will help you act with care and compassion if you encounter a Veteran who is in suicidal crisis.

- **S**igns of suicidal thinking should be recognized.
- **A**sk the most important question of all.
- **V**alidate the Veteran's experience.
- **E**ncourage treatment and **E**xpedite getting help.

**S.A.V.E. Training:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49Vg-xM9L7Q>

# Resources

VA SAVE Online



[www.PsychArmorInstitute.org](http://www.PsychArmorInstitute.org)

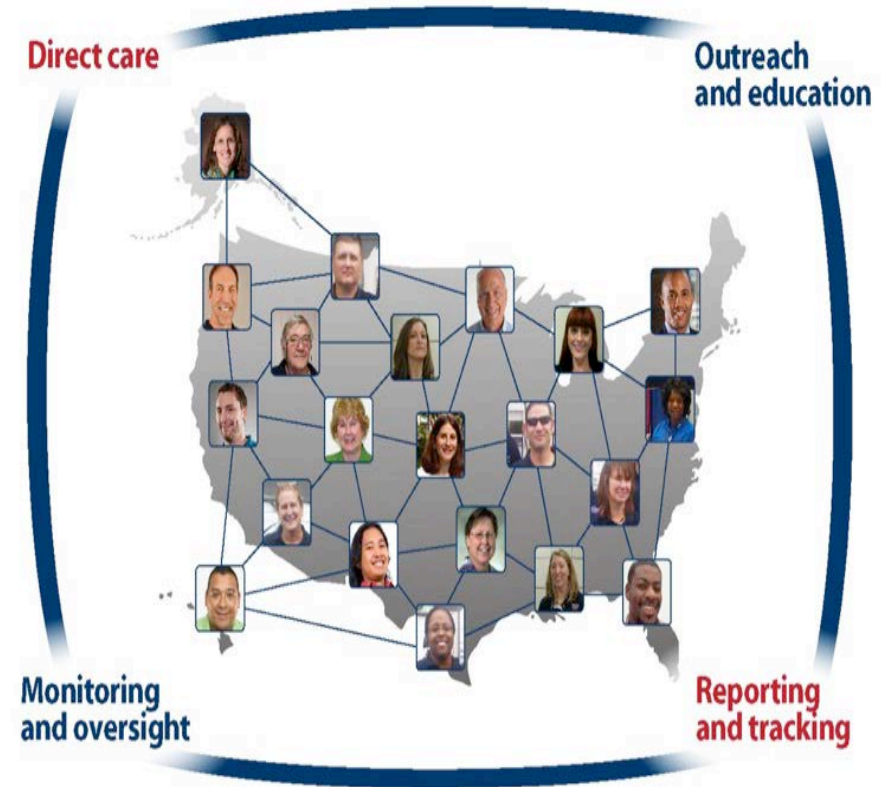


**Veterans Crisis Line** | **Military Crisis Line**

1-800-273-8255 **PRESS 1**

•••• Confidential chat at [VeteransCrisisLine.net](http://VeteransCrisisLine.net) or text to **838255** ••••

Find a Local VA SPC at  
[VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator](http://VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator)



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<b>Module III Special Topics of Interest July 2021 – September 2021</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Presenter</b>
<b>09/28</b>	<b>Hot topic</b>	<b>TBD</b>





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