

VFW Asks for Deeper Dive on Veteran Suicide

Recent VA annual report on suicide is ‘no victory lap,’ says VFW National Commander

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WASHINGTON – Despite news reports of veteran suicide numbers at their lowest since 2006, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) is urging the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to conduct further, in-depth research on the topic following the release of the [2022 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report](#) on Monday.

"We applaud the VA for stepping up its reporting data as we work to help veterans and prevent suicide, but this report is not good news," said VFW National Commander Tim Borland. "Even though the reporting of veteran suicide numbers dropping is positive, the report also includes the sobering statistic of suicide as the second leading cause of death for veterans aged 18 to 44. The report is no victory lap and demands a deeper dive."

Published every September, the report is the largest national analysis of veteran suicide rates each year. This year's report is the first to examine national veteran suicide mortality data during 2020. It also included information regarding suicide among subpopulations of veteran as it relates to contacts with the Veterans Health Administration and the Veterans Benefits Administration.

"This report's inclusion of all VA interactions, to include findings associated with VA benefits, is something the VFW has been advocating about for years," said VFW Director of National Legislative Service Pat Murray. "As suspected, this report demonstratively shows suicide is not simply a clinical issue. We are grateful to the VA for this valuable information and will continue to press Congress to make sure the VBA data is researched as much as possible to help reduce veteran suicide."

"This new data VA is presenting invites more complex questions," added VFW Deputy Executive Director Ryan Gallucci. "Things like the increased rates in certain age groups, identifying what are considered 'accidental' deaths, and the rise of opioid use disorder need

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to be explored. I also find there is no coincidence that veterans who use earned benefits through VA are being positively influenced upstream of suicidal ideation.

“We thank the VA for continuing to provide these statistics every year and ask them to refocus the Office of Suicide Prevention, so it oversees both the Benefits and Health administrations’ suicide prevention efforts within VA,” said Gallucci.

The report included findings of veteran suicide in the first year following separation from active military service, both overall and by branch, as well as method-specific suicide rates. The report also compared suicide rates between veteran and non-veteran adults in the U.S. with reporting specific to different demographics such as age, sex, race, and ethnicity. Of the 44,298 U.S. adults that died from suicide in 2020, 6,146 were veterans – a rate 57.3% higher than the rest of the population.

“The problem of veteran suicide is a complex one that deserves serious study and academic rigor. I think the nation owes our veterans that much,” said Borland.