VA Focuses National Attention on Suicide Prevention Month 2013

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WASHINGTON — In recognition of September as Suicide Prevention Month, the Department of Veterans Affairs is mobilizing people and organizations nationwide to support Veterans in crisis and spread the word about VA mental health services.

Throughout the month, VA suicide prevention coordinators at all 151 VA medical centers will organize community events, host health fairs, lead training sessions and work with VA Voluntary Service to improve Veterans' lives. VA is also launching a new Suicide Prevention Month public service announcement, "Talking About It Matters" nationwide in September.

"VA's highest priority is the mental health and well-being of the brave men and women who have served our Nation. Even one suicide is one too many," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "va is a leader in providing high-quality mental health care that improves and saves Veterans' lives. We know that treatment works, and there is hope for Veterans who seek mental health care."

This year's theme, "It Matters," emphasizes the people, relationships and experiences that matter to Veterans and their loved ones, reinforcing their personal connections and giving their lives hope and meaning. To spark conversation about the difficult topics of suicide risk and prevention, VA will unveil a photo-sharing campaign, "Show Us What Matters," and will invite Veterans and their loved ones to upload photos of the special people in their lives to VeteransCrisisLine.net/ItMatters.

"When a Veteran is in crisis, even one small act can make a lifesaving difference," said Dr. Robert A. Petzel, VA's Under Secretary for Health. "It's up to all of us to understand the signs of crisis and look out for the Veterans in our lives. And when we are concerned, we need to reach out and tell someone."

Throughout the summer and through September, VA is holding Mental Health Summits at all 151 VA medical centers to further engage community partners, Veteran Service Organizations, health care providers and local governments, and to address the broad mental health needs of Veterans and their families and show them they matter. VA is calling

on supporters to educate their networks to recognize suicide warning signs and encourage Veterans in crisis to call the Veterans Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255 and Press 1), chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat or text to 838255 – even if they are not registered with VA or enrolled in VA health care. All Veterans Crisis Line resources are optimized for mobile devices.

“We urge Veterans’ loved ones—and everyone—to show support for Veterans during Suicide Prevention Month and throughout the year,” said Dr. Janet Kemp, director of VA’s Suicide Prevention Program. “Learn to recognize the risk of suicide and let Veterans know that caring, confidential support is only a call, click or text away. Families, friends and co-workers need to work together to provide a network of support for Veterans in our communities. We’re all in this together.”

Anyone can support Veterans by:
• Encouraging a Veteran who needs help to call the Veterans Crisis Line. Remind them that it takes courage to seek help.
• Connecting with a local Suicide Prevention Coordinator and taking part in a local event.
• Watching the new Suicide Prevention Month public service announcement, "Talking About It Matters"
• Downloading an electronic toolkit to share Suicide Prevention Month web badges, banners, blog posts and social media content.
• Sharing a photo at VeteransCrisisLine.net/ItMatters.
• Tweeting your friends and loved ones with the following message: “One small act can make the difference. This #SuicidePreventionMonth, help #Veterans access the support they’ve earned: VeteransCrisisLine.net.”

VA has implemented comprehensive, wide-ranging suicide prevention initiatives, including a toll-free Veterans Crisis Line, placement of Suicide Prevention Coordinators at all VA medical centers and large outpatient facilities, and improvements in case management and reporting. The Veterans Crisis Line, online chat and text-messaging services offer free, confidential support, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, to Veterans, their families and friends.

Veterans, or anyone concerned about a Veteran, can call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat or text to 838255 to receive support—even if they are not registered with VA or enrolled in VA health care. All Veterans Crisis Line resources are optimized for mobile devices.

Since 2007, the Veterans Crisis Line has answered more than 890,000 calls and made more than 30,000 lifesaving rescues. In 2009, the Veterans Crisis Line added the anonymous chat service, which has had more than 108,000 chats.

To further expand access to quality mental health care, VA has hired over 1,600 mental health clinical providers to meet the goal outlined in an executive order. Additionally, VA has hired over 2,005 mental health clinical providers to fill existing vacancies.

VA's mental health workforce totals nearly 20,300. In fiscal year 2012, VA provided specialized mental health care to more than 1.3 million Veterans. The department has an aggressive recruiting campaign underway among mental health specialists to ensure Veterans continue to receive the best mental health care anywhere.
View the original press release.