

May is Mental Health Awareness Month

Encourage everyone to start a conversation about mental health and how people perceive it

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One in five Americans experience some form of mental illness each year, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness. This includes the nation's veterans.

To this end, the Department of Veterans Affairs recognizes May as [Mental Health Awareness Month](#).

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According to Dr. Wendy Tenhula, VA Deputy Chief Consultant for Specialty Mental Health, the theme of the month is Use Your Voice (#useyourvoice).

Tenhula said the goal is to encourage everyone to start a conversation about mental health and how people perceive it.

“Start a conversation with a veteran you are concerned about,” Tenhula said. “Let’s bring our country together around this idea of using our voices to increase the understanding.”

For those unsure of how to start such a conversation, visit www.maketheconnection.net.

Make the Connection also offers an information and resource locator, as well as self-assessments.

“I encourage VFW members to speak up and talk about their own challenges,” Tenhula said.

“Use your voices to spark conversations that might help others who are struggling.”

Tenhula noted that the VA has seen an increase year after year in the number of veterans reaching out to VA for mental health care. Incidentally, with more than 11,000 mental healthcare professionals, VA is the country’s largest provider of mental health services.

The most common mental health issues for all people are PTSD, depression, anxiety disorders and substance abuse.

“It’s important to recognize that the majority of veterans finish out their service and don’t have mental health diagnoses,” Tenhula said. “But just as important is the key message that if a vet is struggling, there is treatment. Recovery is possible, and they are not alone.”

[VFW launched its own mental health awareness](#) campaign last fall.

This article was written by [Janie Dyhouse](#), associate editor, [VFW magazine](#).