

VA, VFW and Walgreens Collaborate to Enhance Veterans Access to Mental Health Resources

'The mental well-being of America's veterans is of the utmost importance to the VFW'

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WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Veterans of Foreign Wars and drugstore chain Walgreens announced a collaborative agreement May 6, which will help improve mental health care for veterans through enhanced education, access to resources and outreach.

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Celebrating a collaborative agreement of their three organizations to help improve mental health care for veterans are, from left, VFW National Commander Brian Duffy, Walgreens Medical Director for Clinical Programs and Quality Dr. Chet Robson, and VA Executive Director for the Office of Suicide Prevention Dr. Caitlin Thompson.

VA, VFW and Walgreens will work together to reach veterans in communities across the country with targeted initiatives to address mental health awareness and treatment, veteran suicide prevention and opioid overdose education.

“Our work is driven by our commitment to encourage veterans to get the care and services they need and integrate mental health care as part of their overall wellness and healthy lifestyle,” said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. “Joining forces with VFW and Walgreens provides VA an opportunity to further expand our reach and connect with veterans, their families and the community to raise mental health awareness.”

As part of the collaboration, VA, VFW and Walgreens will:

- Educate VFW members to help reduce the stigma associated with mental health conditions, as well as encourage seeking help through VA. The outreach effort includes Walgreens and VA programming at several upcoming state VFW meetings.

- Jointly promote and coordinate with VA's [Make the Connection campaign](#) with the goal of helping to fundamentally change how people think and talk about mental health. Through veterans' own stories of treatment and recovery, Make the Connection shows the many benefits of opening up about mental health concerns and making mental health awareness and treatment part of a healthy lifestyle.
- Share patient education materials to help build awareness of both Walgreens and VA initiatives to prevent opioid overdose through education, proper disposal of unused medication and access to naloxone, a lifesaving medication that is an antidote to opioids that can prevent fatal opioid overdose.
- Explore training programs and opportunities for Walgreens pharmacists and Healthcare Clinic nurse practitioners, to enhance providers' ability to recognize veteran-specific needs, and to better understand the military culture, which may influence veterans' willingness to seek help.

"We know that the rate of suicide is increasing for all Americans, but the rate of increase is much slower for veterans who receive VA care," said Dr. Poonam Alaigh, Acting VA Under Secretary for Health. "With this in mind, we need to cast a wider net and meet veterans where they live to better engage them in care."

"The mental well-being of America's veterans is of the utmost importance to the VFW," said VFW National Commander Brian Duffy. "By working with several organizations including Walgreens and VA, we're able to positively impact a great number of veterans, and help to change the narrative associated with mental wellness."

"We're proud of the collaborations we've developed to provide greater access to pharmacy and health-care services for current and former members of the armed services, including retirees and their families," said Brad Fluegel, Walgreens Chief Healthcare Commercial Market Development Officer. "We look forward to working closely with VA and VFW to help heighten mental-health awareness and hope to improve the health and well-being of more veterans by connecting them with VA, VFW and other resources that can help."

VA is a leader in educating patients about the risks of opioids, including opioid medications and dispensing naloxone to interested patients. To date, VA has issued naloxone to more than 60,000 veterans to prevent overdose. Separately, other pharmacies, including Walgreens, have installed safe, medication-disposal kiosks and made naloxone available without requiring a prescription.

For more information about VA mental health services, visit www.mentalhealth.va.gov. Information about VFW may be found at www.vfw.org. More information about Walgreens may be found at www.walgreens.com.