

22 A DAY, 22 TOO MANY

Almost once an hour, 22 times a day, a US military veteran commits suicide.¹ Veteran-involved suicide accounts for 21% of the nation's suicides.² That is not only appalling and troubling, it is unacceptable. Even with an unprecedented number of organizations established to serve them, too many vets are finding themselves isolated, unable or unwilling to find or access that help.

A 2009 study by the Army of Army and Marine combat units was conducted after their return from Iraq or Afghanistan and again six months later. It found that about 10-18% of returning troops reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Risk factors include longer deployment time, severe combat exposure, severe physical injury, traumatic brain injury and poor social support.³ If the more combat troops see the greater the incidence of PTSD, then the number of deployments to active combat zones should be kept to a minimum. Since 2001, about 2.6 million members of the US armed forces have been deployed in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. Through 2012, more than one third were deployed more than once, 400,000 had been deployed at least three times, and nearly 37,000 had been deployed more than five times.⁴

The survey also showed that less than half of those with problems sought help and less than that were actually seeing someone for help. Some reasons for not getting treatment include the stigma attached to mental health disorders, concerns over being seen as weak, concerns about privacy and a belief that treatment is not effective or the side effects are worth it.⁵ Dr. Charles W. Hoge, one of the researchers at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, found this to be of particular concern. "The most important thing we can do for service members who have been in combat is to help them understand that the earlier they get help when they need it, the better off they'll be.

"I'd like to think that everyone will take notice of events going on around them, but sometimes I also think that many Americans today are just blind to what's going on," says Chuck Lewis, Sgt., USMC '70-'74, who started Standing For The Fallen as a way of remembering and honoring those who serve. Then, he learned of the homecoming of two Afghanistan veterans who had both lost both legs and part of an arm, one from his former hometown and one from his current hometown. Then another Afghanistan vet came home, this time physically intact, and wasn't home a month before taking his own life. That led Chuck to take his message to the people by walking across the United States (see article under "Profiles in Courage". Sadly, one of the first two wounded vets also took his own life.

One of the risk factors for PTSD is poor social support. Vets feel alienated from the life they're returning to and shut themselves off from family and friends. For veterans and those who care about them, there is a lot of support available. Below is a list of resources. If you're struggling, or know someone who is, please seek help. Don't "wait and see" if things get better on their own. Don't let pride stop you from finding at least enough peace of mind to make it through the day.

¹ Department of Veteran Affairs

² The New York Times, 02/01/13

^{3,5} Department of Veteran Affairs, PTSD Research Quarterly & Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards

⁴ Department of Defense

VA Mental Health Services (MHS) Website

Information on resources and initiatives for fulfilling its mission to maintain and improve the health and well-being of Veterans through excellence in health care, social services, education, and research.

Veterans Crisis Line

Free, confidential support, 24 hours a day, seven days a week at 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1. Or you can also use the Veterans Crisis Line [online chat](#).

VA Caregiver Support Program

Information and resources on [VA's Caregiver Support Program](#). VA's Caregiver Support Line, 1-855-260-3274, is available 8am-11pm Monday through Friday and Saturday 10:30am-6pm — Eastern. The line serves as a resource for Caregivers and Veterans from all eras, professions, and the general public; provides referrals to local VA Medical Center Caregiver Support Coordinators and VA/community resources; and, offers emotional support.

My HealtheVet

In-depth information on conditions, tips for managing symptoms, and steps for recovery.

Transition Assistance Resources

VA's eBenefits site, which links to resources and materials for helping transitioning Service members understand the services available through the VA and the military health system.

eBenefits

VA's one-stop shop for online benefits-related tools and information.

National Suicide Prevention Hotline PH# 1-800-273-8255 24hrs a day [Visit their site](#)

USMC Sgt Merlin German Call Center PH# 1-877-487-6299 24hrs a day [Visit their site](#)

Provides and enables assistance to wounded, ill and injured Marines, sailors attached to or in support of Marine units, and their family members in order to assist them as they return to duty or transition to civilian life.

Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury PH# 866-966-1020
[Visit their site](#)

The Focus Project: Family Resiliency Training PH# 1-310-794-2482 [Visit their site](#)

FOCUS (Families OverComing Under Stress™) provides resiliency training to military children and families.

National Resource Directory (NRD)

Connects wounded warriors, Service Members, Veterans, their families, and caregivers to programs and services that support them.

Mobile App Helps Veterans Manage PTSD

VA and the Department of Defense have created free smart phone applications—like the [PTSD Coach](#)—that can help Vets identify signs of PTSD, manage symptoms, and connect with resources and help instantly.