Washington State Department of HEALTH
Office of the Secretary
P.O. Box 47890 Olympia WA 98504
www.doh.wa.gov | TDD Relay: 711

Dear Health Care Provider:

Suicide among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF) remains a critical, public health issue, both nationwide and in Washington. Health care providers play a key role in prevention.

Under RCW 18.130.440 (effective July 1, 2023), health care providers are strongly encouraged to ask all new patients about their military or Veteran status. Consistently identifying military and Veteran status is a small step that makes a significant impact.

The most effective way to identify military affiliation is to ask directly: *"Have you or a member of your family ever served in the US Armed Forces, Guard, or Reserves?"*

This simple step helps connect patients to vital federal and state Veterans resources, including the 988 Veterans Crisis Line. It enables providers to:

- Build trust with patients who may be hesitant to share their experiences
- Recognize how military service can affect physical and mental health
- Connect patients with culturally competent, Veteran-informed care and resources

Many SMVF patients do not voluntarily disclose their military background, and only about 40% of Veterans receive care through the Veterans Health Administration. That means community-based providers are often the first, and sometimes only, point of contact.

To support this effort, the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs has developed a health care provider toolkit to help providers confidently and consistently ask this question.

Washington is home to approximately 494,383 Veterans, representing 7.6% of the adult population. In 2025 alone, 236 Veterans died by suicide, and rates are significantly higher than the general population. These numbers underscore the urgency of early identification and intervention.

We appreciate your continued collaboration in supporting suicide prevention efforts for our SMVF community across the state. Our shared goal is to ensure everyone has access to the resources and care needed to strengthen their mental health and overall well-being.

Sincerely,

Kristopher Holiday, Director
Office of Health Professions

Ask The Question

Who is a Veteran?

In the state of Washington, RCW 41.04.005 defines Veteran as someone who has received an honorable discharge, is actively serving honorably, or received a discharge for physical reasons with an honorable record and meets specific service criteria included in the RCW.

Second Substitute House Bill 2014, effective June 6, 2024, amends this definition to include any person eligible for federal Department of Veterans Affairs benefits.

The community resources that serve Veterans may not necessarily depend on this definition. Some organizations define a Veteran as someone who served for any length of time in any branch of the military.

Ask the question

Many Veterans seek health care outside of the VA. That's what makes it so important to ask your patients this question:

> **"Have you or a family member ever served in the military?"**

Asking the question can help you provide appropriate, culturally informed care, including recognizing health and mental health concerns unique to Veterans and their families.

If your patient is concerned about a family member, you can share the Worried About A Veteran website. This website provides guidance on talking to loved ones in crisis and learning the signs of crisis, along with home safety guidelines.

Washington State Department of HEALTH

DOH 820-289 CS September 2024 To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127.
Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 (Washington Relay) or email doh.information@doh.wa.gov.

Supporting Providers Who Serve Veterans

There are organizations that support health care providers who serve veterans.

Suicide Risk Management (SRM) Consultation Program

SRM is a free consultation program for Veterans Affairs (VA) or community providers who work with Veterans at risk of suicide. This program offers tailored, one-on-one support on the following topics:

- Risk assessment
- Conceptualization of suicide risk
- Lethal means safety counseling
- Strategies to engage Veterans in their own treatment
- Documentation best practices
- Provider support after suicide loss

SRM leadership and its certified, professional consultants are VA employees. The program is supported by the VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention. SRM expert consultation and resources are based on best practices and research conducted in VA and the community.

Request a consult

Providers can request and schedule a consultation by visiting the SRM Consultation Program website or emailing SRM at srmconsult@va.gov.

Program staff will typically respond within one business day and help you schedule a phone call with a consultant or answer questions over email.

All Patients Safe

This online interactive suicide prevention training was created by medical professionals for health care providers.

Targeted Interventions: Firearms, Culture, and Suicide Care

This 3-hour self-paced online course is free for all Washington state health care providers and client-facing staff. The course helps medical professionals provide culturally informed counseling on firearms safety by:

- Reviewing cultural factors related to firearm ownership and use
- Outlining frameworks for suicide risk and suicide care
- Offering tips to conduct lethal means counseling

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Veterans Crisis Line

Veterans Crisis Line
DIAL 988 then PRESS 1

Free, confidential crisis support, 24/7, for Veterans and their loved ones

Call: 988 Then press 1 **Text: 838255** **Chat:** VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat

Free, confidential support 24/7, 365 days a year

The Veterans Crisis Line provides caring, qualified support to all Veterans and military service members, including members of the National Guard and Reserve, and their loved ones. Veterans don't need to be enrolled in VA benefits or other health care to use the Veterans Crisis Line.

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

How it works

- Contact the Veterans Crisis Line by calling or texting 988 and pressing 1. Veterans in crisis can also visit the Veterans Crisis Line website to get support over online chat.
- The crisis responder will ask a few questions to learn if there's an immediate risk of suicide.
- If there's an immediate risk of danger, the crisis responder will offer support with getting through the crisis. They can also connect Veterans to VA Medical Center services and other community resources.
- For Veterans experiencing a crisis with no immediate risk of danger, crisis responders can listen, offer support, and help with safety planning.
- Help-seekers decide how much information to share with crisis responders. Veterans who choose to share contact information can get a follow-up from a Suicide Prevention Coordinator at the nearest VA Medical Center, by the next business day.

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Veteran Benefits and Services in Washington State

The Federal Veterans Affairs Administration (VA) and Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs both provide valuable support and assistance to the military community. However, there are key differences in their operation and services provided.

Federal Department of Veterans Affairs

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

The VA offers a wide range of services to eligible Veterans. Its three branches include:

- **Veterans Health Administration (VHA):** The VHA includes VA hospitals, community-based outpatient clinics, Veteran centers, and domiciliary services. Veterans can connect online, call 1-877-222-VETS (8387), or contact the enrollment coordinator at their local medical facility.
- **Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA):** The VBA helps Veterans get financial benefits. Connect online, call 1-800-827-1000, or find a local office by using the VBA website search tool.
- **National Cemetery Administration (NCA):** The NCA provides burial and memorial benefits for Veterans and eligible family members and maintains national cemeteries. Connect online or call 1-800-698-2411 to reach the MyVA411 main information line.

Learn more about these services by visiting the Federal VA website, calling 1-800-698-2411, or scanning this QR code:

SCAN HERE

Washington Department of Veteran Affairs (WDVA)

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

This state agency can help Veterans, service members, and their families apply for benefits. It also offers support through many other programs. Some examples of these programs include:

- **Free counseling**
- **Suicide prevention**
- **Transitional housing**
- **Four veteran homes**
- **Brain injury and recovery**
- **Tobacco cessation**
- **Agricultural pursuits**
- **Professional development training**
- **State cemetery**

Learn more about these services by visiting the WDVA website, calling 1-800-562-2308, or scanning this QR code:

SCAN HERE

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Be WISR:

Washington's
Identify Service Members,
Veterans, and their Families (SMVF),
Screen for Suicide Risk, and
Refer for Resources

Pathway to WISR Certification

Washington's Identify, Screen and Refer

This pathway is designed to be accessible for everyone, allowing deeper engagement with resources and knowledge to support our Service Members, Veterans, and their families (SMVF) community while helping to lower suicide risk. Psych Armor and Zero Suicide provide free training that align with our mission. Sign up is free for the trainings (links provided below).

Complete all tasks in the 3 Pillars within 12 months and submit for certification.
Document the dates you completed the trainings for submission.

Pillar 1: Toolkit

Review relevant Toolkit:

- Toolkits - Identify SMVF and screen for suicide risk | WDVA
- Print out and review the 1 page Resource Guide for WA State

Pillar 2: Military Cultural Competency

Complete both of the following asynchronous trainings through Psych Armor:

- "15 Things Veterans Want You to Know" (17 min; asynchronous)
- "Connecting with the VA" (32 min; asynchronous)

OR

Sign up an attend a virtual training offered by WDVA

- Preventing Veteran Suicide By Combating Stigma: Building Awareness and Support (1 hour online)

Pillar 3: Suicide Prevention

Complete all of the following:

- LEARN Training for groups LEARN Saves Lives: Host a training for Organizations & Teams (90 minutes in person or virtual) **or** SAVE TRAINING Psych Armor "VA S.A.V.E." (18 minutes, online asynchronous)
- Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale - Video/Interactive module (30 minutes)
- CALM (Safety Planning and Lethal Means Safety; 2 hours, asynchronous)

Use this LINK or scan the QR code to receive credit for WISR Certification.
Questions? Email connect@dva.wa.gov

Once completed, you will receive a digital or paper certification.

Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among SMVF
Washington