



“Don’t Wait. Reach Out.” Campaign Overview

Background:

Veterans are at higher risk for suicide compared to the general population. The suicide rate among Veterans in 2019 was 52% higher than non-Veteran adults in the U.S., according to the [2021 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report](#). Stressful life events like divorce, job loss, substance use or housing troubles can be risk factors for suicide. Among Veterans, these challenges can be compounded by stigma around sharing their problems with others and seeking help.

But there is hope – resources are available and treatment works. Suicide is preventable. In October 2021, as part of their ongoing efforts to address this public health issue, the U.S. Department of Veterans’ Affairs (VA) launched a national campaign: “*Don’t Wait. Reach Out.*” The campaign encourages Veterans to reach out for help before their challenges become overwhelming.

The campaign directs those seeking and providing, support to [VA.gov/REACH](https://www.va.gov/REACH), a website that makes it easier to find guidance and support services from across the full breadth of the VA’s offerings. The user-friendly experience invites Veterans to identify the specific life challenges they may be struggling with—like trouble sleeping or financial stress—then serves up the appropriate resources for their unique needs.

Communications Objective:

Encourage Veterans to proactively seek help for challenges associated with increased risk for suicide; and ultimately, prevent Veteran suicides.

Target Audience: All Veterans, 18+.

Veteran population estimate, 2019, by age		
18-34	1,863,000	9.4
35-54	5,075,000	25.6%
55-74	8,352,000	42.2%
75+	4,507,000	22.8%
Total	19,797,000	100.0%

The largest Veteran cohort (Veterans 55 years of age and older) have the highest number of deaths by suicide, while rates of death by suicide relative the size of their population are highest among 18–34-year-olds. Also of note, in the US, 90% of Veterans are men and 10% are women.

Campaign Sponsor Background:

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA), part of the VA, is the Nation’s largest integrated health care organization with over 1,700 locations, including over 160 medical centers and hospitals, more than 300,000 employees, over 76,000 volunteers and an active database of millions of Veterans across the country and around the world. VHA is responsible for training nearly 70% of all physicians in the United States, with over 125,000 physicians annually trained in VHA facilities, accounting for over 40 specialties. In addition to the reach of the VA, there are many alliances, partnerships, and collaborations that are (or can be) put in place with Veterans service organizations (many that already work with VA), other federal agencies (e.g., Department of Defense, Health and Human Services, and others), and public and private agencies. There is no other organization more equipped to serve the needs of our nation’s Veterans than VA.

About the Ad Council:

The Ad Council is a national non-profit that uses the donated resources of the communications industry to take on the most pressing issues facing our country.

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs



Public service campaigns produced by the Ad Council over the last 75 years have raised awareness and changed attitudes around many of the most critical social issues facing our country – including such iconic campaigns as “Friends don’t let friends drive drunk,” Smokey Bear, and the “Love Has No Labels” diversity and inclusion campaign.