

VAU.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

News Release

Office of Public Affairs
Media RelationsWashington, DC 20420
(202) 461-7600
www.va.govFOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Dec. 20, 2016

Veterans Crisis Line Improves Service with New Call Center

Opening in Atlanta

WASHINGTON- The Department of Veteran Affairs cut the ribbon today for its new Veteran Crisis Line (VCL) satellite office in Atlanta allowing the life-saving hotline to expand capacity by nearly 600 Veterans each day essentially doubling VA's ability to help Veterans in need.

As a part of the MyVA initiative, the largest restructuring in the Department's history, improvements of the VCL are a key priority, with the goal of providing 24/7, world-class suicide prevention and crisis intervention services to Veterans, servicemembers and their family members across the globe.

"The addition of the second Veterans Crisis Line facility enhances VA's ability to provide 24/7 suicide prevention and crisis intervention services by trained, dedicated VA employees to Veterans, Service members and their families," said VA Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson who joined Veterans Crisis Line responders and partners in today's ribbon cutting. "The work at the Veterans Crisis Line is some of the most important work we do in VA. Today we follow through on our commitment to give those who save lives every day at the Crisis Line the training, additional staff and modern call center technology they need to make the Veterans Crisis Line a Gold Standard operation. The Veterans of this nation, especially those in most need of our help, deserve no less."

The VCL is critical to connecting Veterans with facility-based Suicide Prevention Coordinators (SPCs). SPC teams within each Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) work to engage Veterans and communities to raise awareness about VA's suicide prevention and behavioral health resources.

The VCL interfaces with various stakeholders, including the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Suicide Prevention Program Office and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), to provide critical services that ultimately provide a safe haven for Veterans and servicemembers.

Since VCL was launched in 2007, the crisis line counselors have:

- Answered nearly 2.6 million calls
- Dispatched emergency services to callers in imminent crisis more than 67,000 times
- Engaged nearly 314,000 Veterans or concerned family members through the chat option launched in 2009
- Responded to nearly 62,000 requests since the launch of text services in November 2011
- Forwarded more than 416,000 referrals to local VA suicide prevention coordinators on behalf of Veterans to ensure continuity of care with Veterans' local VA providers

The VCL staff has grown over the years. Initially housed at Canandaigua VAMC in N.Y., it began with 14 responders and two health care technicians answering four phone lines. Today, the combined facilities employ more than 500 professionals, and VA is hiring more to handle the growing volume of calls. Atlanta offers 200 call responders and 25 social service assistants and support staff, while Canandaigua houses 310 and 43, respectively.

Callers dial the National Suicide Prevention Hotline number 1-800-273-TALK (8255) and Veterans choose option 1 to reach a VHA VCL Responder. The text number is 838255 or Veterans may chat with our trained professionals online at Vets.gov. Calls, texts, and chats are immediately directed to a VA professional who is specially trained to handle emotional and mental health crises for Veterans and servicemembers. VA is also streamlining and standardizing how crisis calls from other locations, such as VAMCs, reach the VCL, including full implementation of the automatic transfer function that directly connects Veterans who call their local VAMC to the VCL by pressing a single digit during the initial automated phone greeting.

For more information about the Veteran Crisis Line service expansion, see the VCL expansion [fact sheet](#) on VA's website.

###