



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

## Fact Sheet

Office of Public Affairs  
Media Relations

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### Veterans Crisis Line Improves Service with Expansion in Atlanta

Suicide prevention remains a top priority for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) saves lives and is an example of how VA is leading the way in suicide prevention.

#### The Veterans Crisis Line is Saving Lives

In Fiscal Year 2016, the Veterans Crisis Line answered over 510,000 calls, initiated the dispatch of emergency services over 12,000 times, handled more than 53,000 chat requests and another 15,000 texts and provided over 86,000 referrals to local VA Medical Center Suicide Prevention Coordinators ensuring Veterans were connected to care in their communities.

In October 2016, VA added a second Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) (1-800-273-8255 & Press 1) facility in Atlanta, Georgia.

- The Atlanta facility allows VA to assist nearly 600 additional Veterans each day, essentially doubling the Department's capacity to help Veterans in need.
- The addition of the second facility enhances the 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:
  - As of Dec. 8<sup>th</sup>, the VCL is answering 44 percent more calls and referring 20 percent more Veterans to local Suicide Prevention Coordinators than it was in March 2016.
  - The rollover rate (calls directed to contract call centers) has declined from 30 percent in March 2016 to 16 percent and is expect to decrease to zero by the end of the year.
  - Veterans are waiting less time to speak to a trained responder – in December Veterans waited an average of 9.2 seconds, compared to 10.4 seconds in March 2016.
- The Canandaigua, NY, and Atlanta facilities employ more than 500 professionals, and VA continues to hire 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.

VA has streamlined and standardized how crisis calls from other VA locations such as medical centers reach the VCL. By year end 2016, VA will have fully implemented the automatic transfer function to directly connect Veterans who call their local VA Medical Centers to the VCL by pressing 7 during the initial automated phone greeting.

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## **Veterans Crisis Line is the Gold Standard:**

VCL is critical to connecting Veterans with VA 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.

VCL interfaces with the VA Suicide Prevention Program Office and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to provide critical services that ultimately provide a safe haven for Veterans and Service members.

Since its launch in 2007, with the passage of the Joshua Omvig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act, the crisis line counsellors have:

- Answered over 2.6 million calls
- Dispatched emergency services to callers in imminent crisis more than 68,000 times
- Engaged over 318,000 Veterans or concerned family members through the chat option launched in 2009
- Responded nearly 63,000 requests with the launch of text services in November 2011
- Forwarded nearly 425,000 referrals to local VA suicide prevention coordinators on behalf of Veterans to ensure continuity of care with Veterans local VA providers

## **How to reach the VCL**

To reach a trained VA professional who is specially trained to attend to emotional crises for Veterans and Service members:

- Dial the National Suicide Prevention Hotline number, 1-800-273-TALK (8255). Veterans should choose option 1 to reach a VCL Responder;
- Text 838255. A VCL responder will text back;
- Chat online by visiting [Vets.gov](http://Vets.gov).

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