



VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Help support
VETERANS
in your life and
REACH OUT.

Don't wait. Reach out.
VA.GOV/REACH

2022

Suicide Prevention Month Internal Toolkit

“Don’t Wait. Reach Out.”

**The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Ad
Council’s Veterans Crisis Prevention Campaign**

Introduction & Campaign Overview

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (OMHSP) uses Suicide Prevention Month in September to raise awareness of Veteran suicide prevention.

Suicide Prevention Month is an opportunity to amplify the work OMHSP does year-round to increase understanding about Veteran suicide prevention and the programs and resources available.

As part of these ongoing efforts, VA partnered with the Ad Council to develop and launch a national communications campaign: “**Don’t Wait. Reach Out.**” The campaign, which has been active since October 2021, encourages Veterans to reach out for help before their challenges become overwhelming or reach a crisis point.

This toolkit contains talking points with FAQs, newsletter/email content, and an overview of the downloadable materials for Suicide Prevention Month and beyond.

We’re creating a [Spread the Word](#) digital toolkit landing page on [VA.gov/REACH](https://www.va.gov/REACH) to serve as the hub for shareable content for use by you and your broad network of colleagues, stakeholders, and supporters. Beginning August 30, 2022, downloadable materials for both internal and external audiences will be available at <https://www.va.gov/REACH/spread-the-word>.

Throughout September 2022, we ask that you join us by utilizing the items in the hub, and samples included here to further the campaign’s visibility and reach with Veterans.

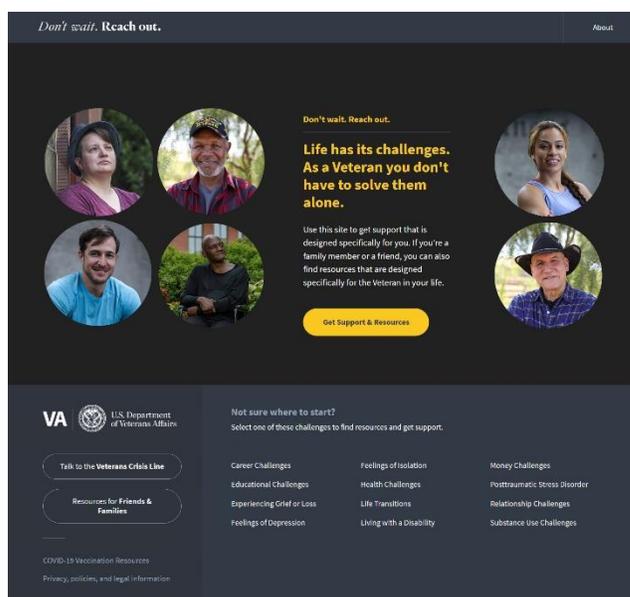


Figure 1. Preview of Don't Wait. Reach Out. Homepage for SPM

Thank you for your continued commitment to this mission.

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, VA launched a national campaign: “**Don’t Wait. Reach Out.**” The public service advertisements ([PSAs](#)) encourage Veterans to reach out for help before their challenges become overwhelming. 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+.

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.

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.

Messaging:

Beginning August 30, 2022, the digital toolkit will be live at [Spread the Word](https://www.va.gov/REACH/spread-the-word) (<https://www.va.gov/REACH/spread-the-word>) to download items to share throughout Suicide Prevention Month.

Campaign messages across materials will incorporate the call-to-action of visiting the [VA.gov/REACH](https://www.va.gov/REACH) page. As appropriate, materials can also include the campaign social media hashtag **#VetsReachOut**.

Communications Products and Materials

All will be available online at [Spread the Word](https://www.va.gov/REACH/spread-the-word) beginning 8/30/22

- Email/Newsletter Content (*included in this kit*)
 - Short-form
 - Long-form
- Social Media Graphics and Content will be available externally at [Spread the Word](https://www.va.gov/REACH/spread-the-word) and internal to VA social media managers in social studio:
 - Suite of graphics (sized for in-feed and stories)
 - Sample social copy (for public-facing toolkit)
 - Digital backgrounds (sized for desktop, phone and Zoom)
- Press Items
 - Talking points - Key messages and answers to FAQ's for the issue of Veteran suicide prevention generally, and the "Don't wait. Reach out." campaign specifically (*included in this kit*)
 - Customizable press release (for organizations to issue including the opportunity to highlight their own local efforts)

Social Media Overview

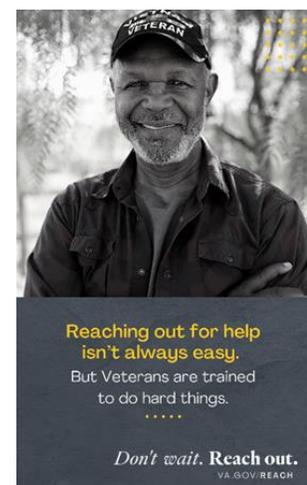
VA social media managers should watch Social Studio's Shared Content feature for content to populate under the SPM label. Social media content for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for Suicide Prevention Month will also be available [online](#) August 30.

Suggested Hashtags

During Suicide Prevention Month, we encourage you to use the following hashtags:

- #VetsReachOut (campaign hashtag)
- #SuicidePreventionMonth
- #SPM22

In addition, please consider using #SuicidePrevention, #SuicideAwareness, #VeteransCrisisLine, and #Veteran in relevant posts this month and year-round.



Public Service Advertisements (PSAs)

We're proud to continue to share powerful new PSAs as part of our national campaign with the Ad Council: **“Don’t Wait. Reach Out.”** The campaign encourages Veterans who are struggling to reach out for help—before their challenges become overwhelming.

PSA Story Backgrounds:

- The first highlights an experience of women Veterans. In addition to showing how Veterans can lean on one another, the video also promotes the resources available at REACH. Women Veterans are the fastest-growing Veteran group. Like their peers, women Veterans may struggle across a range of challenges in their civilian life. This video demonstrates how it isn’t always easy to ask for help... and how reaching out can make a difference.



Figure 2. Still photo from PSA shoot

- The second is focused on older males as the average age of Veterans in the US is 64 years old and Veterans aged 55 and over make up 65% of all Veterans. Older Veterans who are struggling with life challenges—such as issues with housing, finances, relationships, or health—are less likely than younger Veterans to reach out for help and may not believe they qualify for support after so many years since they served.

Watch for additional PSA specific supporting content in Social Studio:

Digital Channels

Campaign Website

Throughout September, the “Don’t Wait. Reach Out.” campaign website at www.va.gov/REACH will continue to be available and promoted across all ongoing campaign communications (including PSAs, social content, and press outreach).

Toolkit Landing Page

The landing page at <https://www.va.gov/REACH/spread-the-word> will serve as the hub to engage the public by building awareness about Veteran suicide prevention and encouraging individuals and organizations to download materials and share information and resources with Veterans.

**“Don’t Wait. Reach Out.” Campaign
Suicide Prevention Month 2022
Sample Email Copy for Supporters**

Throughout September 2022, you can use the email copy below to share important messages and resources about suicide prevention for Veterans.

Reminder: Suggest sending on or after 8/31 to ensure the toolkit link in the body of this document is live.

If Your Audience is Veterans: Short-Form Email Blurb (e.g., for newsletter inclusion)

September is Suicide Prevention Month, and we want Veterans to know that you don’t have to solve life’s challenges alone. Day-to-day issues with finances, jobs, housing and relationships can be stressful, and it’s important to get help before your problems feel overwhelming.

Don’t wait. Reach out. If you or a Veteran you know needs support, visit [VA.gov/REACH](https://www.va.gov/REACH).

Suicide is preventable, and we all have a role to play. Help us spread the word with the “Don’t Wait. Reach Out.” campaign toolkit <https://www.va.gov/REACH/spread-the-word> *(Reminder: send on or after 8/31 to ensure the toolkit link in this post is live)*

If Your Audience is Other Organizations/Non-Veterans (e.g., for newsletter inclusion)

September is Suicide Prevention Month, and we want Veterans to know that they don’t have to solve life’s challenges alone.

Suicide is a complex problem, and stressful life events like divorce or job loss can be risk factors. [VA.gov/REACH](https://www.va.gov/REACH) offers resources to help support Veterans across a wide range of challenges, before these problems become overwhelming.

Suicide is preventable, and we all have a role to play. Help us spread the word with the “Don’t Wait. Reach Out.” campaign toolkit <https://www.va.gov/REACH/spread-the-word>. *(Reminder: send on or after 8/31 to ensure the toolkit link in this post is live)*

Reminder: Suggest sending on or after 8/31 to ensure the toolkit link in the body of this document is live.

Longer-Form Email Announcement (e.g., for standalone email)

[customized salutation]

September is Suicide Prevention Month, and we're reminding Veterans everywhere that they don't have to solve life's challenges alone.

The Nation's Veterans are at a higher risk for suicide compared to the general population. Veterans are trained to be resilient, yet stigma can make it hard to reach out for help.

That's why the Ad Council and the Department of Veterans Affairs partnered to create the "Don't Wait. Reach Out." national campaign that encourages struggling Veterans to seek help before they reach a crisis point. Last year, the campaign launched [VA.gov/REACH](https://www.va.gov/REACH), a website offering comprehensive resources to help Veterans with a wide range of life challenges—before these problems become overwhelming.

Suicide is preventable, and we all have a role to play. Help us spread the word with the "Don't Wait. Reach Out." campaign toolkit <https://www.va.gov/REACH/spread-the-word>. At this link, you will find sample social posts and downloadable graphics to share on social media and use as digital backgrounds throughout the month. **(Reminder: send on or after 8/31 to ensure the toolkit link in this post is live)**

Thank you for joining us in helping more struggling Veterans get the support they need. Together, we can spread hope that Veterans—and all of us—can overcome difficult life challenges.

Sincerely,

Name

“Don’t Wait. Reach Out” Campaign
Suicide Prevention Month 2022
Talking Points for Campaign Supporters

You can use the talking points below to share information about the “Don’t Wait. Reach Out.” campaign and the issue of Veteran suicide prevention more broadly.

Key Messages

- September is Suicide Prevention Month, and we’re reminding Veterans everywhere that suicide is preventable and there is hope.
- Reaching out for help isn’t always easy. But Veterans are trained do hard things.
- **Don’t wait. Reach out.** If you or a Veteran you know needs support, visit [VA.gov/REACH](https://www.va.gov/REACH).
- At [VA.gov/REACH](https://www.va.gov/REACH), you can also find social media content to help spread the word to Veterans in your life. Everyone can be part of the solution and help save lives.

Additional Supporting Messages

- Tragically, US Veterans are at a higher risk for suicide compared to the general population.
- In 2021, the Ad Council and the Department of Veterans Affairs partnered to create **“Don’t Wait. Reach Out.”**—a national campaign that encourages struggling Veterans to seek help for their life challenges before they reach a crisis point.
- Through this campaign, we can spread hope that Veterans, and all of us, can overcome difficult things.
- The **“Don’t Wait. Reach Out.”** campaign is part of VA’s 10-year strategy to end Veteran suicide through a comprehensive, public health approach.
- Suicide is complex, and stressful life events like divorce or job loss can be risk factors. The **“Don’t Wait. Reach Out.”** campaign is designed to support Veterans across a wide range of life challenges, before these problems become overwhelming.
- Everyone can be part of the solution by checking in with the Veterans in their life who may be going through a rough time and encouraging them to reach out if they need help.

FAQs

Why is it important to encourage Veterans to reach out before their challenges become overwhelming?

- Veterans are trained to endure challenging situations, but stigma can make it difficult to reach out for help.
- Suicide is preventable. This campaign aims to address some known risk factors for suicide, which include stressful life events like divorce, job loss, substance use, and housing troubles.
- By encouraging Veterans who are struggling to reach out for help, and providing comprehensive resources at [VA.gov/REACH](https://www.va.gov/REACH), we can help Veterans manage their challenges before their stress reaches a boiling point.

Why is this message needed now?

- According to the [2021 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report](#), although the Veteran suicide rate significantly and meaningfully decreased in 2019, the suicide rate among Veterans was 52% higher than non-Veteran adults in the U.S.
- VA has made great strides in Veteran suicide prevention, but much work remains to be done.