



LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES & POLICY INITIATIVES

118TH ★
CONGRESS



Veteran Suicide

Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) has long been at the forefront of understanding and preventing the scourge of suicide among our nation's veterans. While progress has been made in addressing this crisis, much more must be done.

Understanding The Issue

The subject of suicide is extremely difficult to discuss. It is a topic that most of us would prefer to avoid. Accurate statistics on deaths by suicide are not readily available because many are not reported, or are misreported for insurance reasons, or according to the desire of local officials to avoid the "stigma" of suicide in a family.

According to VA's "National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report of September 2022," in each year, from 2001 through 2020, age- and sex-adjusted suicide rates of veterans exceeded those of non-veteran U.S. adults. The differential in adjusted rates was smallest in 2002, when the veteran rate was 12.1 percent higher than for non-veterans, and largest in 2017, when the veteran rate was 66.2 percent higher. In 2020, the rate for veterans was 57.3 percent higher than that of non-veteran adults.¹

Former Ranking Member of HVAC, Dr. Phil Roe (R-TN) was quoted as saying that millions of dollars are being expended to make an impact on the number of veterans who die by their own hand, yet the numbers do not seem to lessen.

The whys may be unique for every veteran who attempts to take their life, but they are no mystery: demons borne of the horrors of war, horrors they have experienced. Return from a war zone to a society that does not know, or understand, what they went through too often leads to drinking and/or drugging to ease the pain. In addition to these destructive, self-medicating behaviors, too many returned veterans experience fiscal uncertainties, failed relationships, and the loss of hope.

VVA calls on Congress to:

- Enact a law requiring death certificates to indicate whether the deceased served in the military; and
- Require the VA to establish a clear path to reimburse community providers whom the VA has referred veterans to for mental health care and treatment.

Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is the only national Vietnam veterans' organization congressionally chartered and exclusively dedicated to Vietnam-era veterans and their families. www.vva.org

¹ <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2022/2022-National-Veteran-Suicide-Prevention-Annual-Report-FINAL-508.pdf>