

A collective effort to prevent suicide among our nation's Veterans

A tragedy experienced nationwide

Suicide rates in the United States have steadily increased over the last decade, and suicide now stands as the 10th leading cause of death in the country.¹ The tragic impact of suicide is even higher among our Military Service Members and Veterans.

From 2008 to 2017, the number of Veteran suicides exceeded 6,000 each year, and the suicide rate among all Veterans is 1.5 times higher than non-Veteran adults. Female Veterans have a suicide rate 2.2 times higher than non-Veteran females.² Nearly 70% of Veterans who die by suicide have not recently received health care from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).³ Impacting this crisis will take partnerships across government, industry, nonprofits and academia. Health care organizations outside of the VA must develop these partnerships to create a system where our Military Service Members and Veterans get the care they need and deserve.

The PREVENTS Initiative

In response to this issue, President Trump signed an executive order in March 2019 titled "The President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide" – the PREVENTS Initiative. The initiative is an all-hands-on-deck approach to suicide prevention, and presents a roadmap to enhance community integration, prioritize research activities and implement strategies that emphasize overall health and well-being.⁴



About Optum Serve

Optum Serve is the federal health services business of Optum and UnitedHealth Group (NYSE: UNH). We are proud to partner with the Departments of Defense, Health and Human Services, Veterans Affairs and other organizations to help modernize the U.S. health system and improve the health and well-being of those we collectively serve.

This initiative calls for effective partnerships across government agencies and non-government entities and organizations, as well as a coordinated and comprehensive network of organizations at the national, state and local levels to work toward eliminating Veteran suicide. PREVENTS promotes active engagement from families, friends and communities of our Service Members and Veterans to support evidence-based interventions. Compassion, concern and a willingness to support Veterans and their families play a vital role in the success of this initiative.

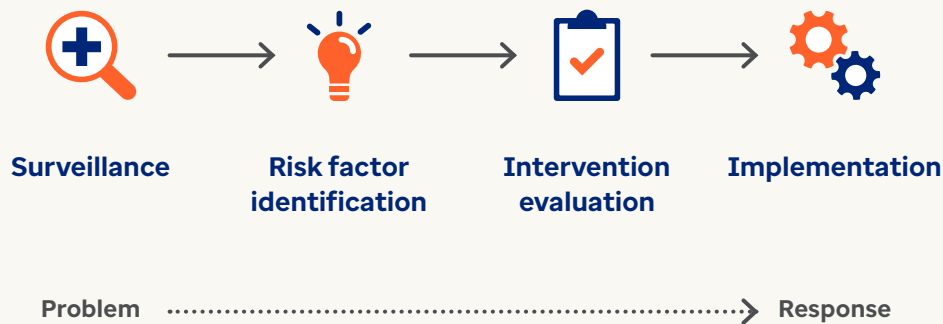
A strategic approach to combatting Veteran suicide

The White House and the VA have set forth a strategic approach to understanding and preventing suicide.⁵ This includes:

- **Surveillance:** What is the problem?
- **Risk factor identification:** What is the cause?
- **Intervention evaluation:** What works?
- **Implementation:** How do you do it?



The Optum Serve team includes highly experienced health care policy researchers and clinicians with expertise in evidence-based medicine, systematic reviews, advanced data analytics, predictive modeling and learning systems.



Representing one of the largest health care organizations in the United States, Optum Serve and the broader enterprise of Optum and UnitedHealth Group® are prepared to help fulfill the mission of the PREVENTS Initiative. With a wide array of capabilities and deep expertise in health care, we bring data-driven solutions to help address the sobering issue of suicide by our Military Service Members and Veterans.



Surveillance



Data is needed to drive proper predictions and insight

Optum maintains a database covering nearly 240 million de-identified lives of data. The database spans clinical, claims and employer benefits and is used to foster innovation and research across health care. This database includes information on socioeconomic, geographical and statistical characteristics, as well as electronic health record data. Our federal partners can leverage this de-identified data to understand and recognize who may engage in suicide ideation, self-harm or suicide among our Service Members and Veterans.



Risk factor identification



Identifying risk and protective factors that will lead to effective interventions

Optum Serve can create a predictive algorithm to identify the combination or “constellation” of risk and protective factors. Risk factors address the possible causes of why a Service Member or Veteran may be at higher risk of suicide. We can stratify the population to include protective factors emphasizing opportunities for intervention and focusing clinical resources on breaking down barriers related to the greatest possible impact on a Service Member or Veteran’s physical, mental and behavioral health.



Intervention evaluation



Evaluating an intervention will test effectiveness

Optum Serve has experience completing evidence-based clinical practice guidelines for the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs on behavioral health conditions, including the assessment and management of patients at risk for suicide, and supporting the Veterans Health Administration Suicide Prevention Data Hub to inform suicide risk at the individual, community and population level. These deliverables include completing analysis, intervention program modeling, advanced data analytics, systematic reviews and predictive modeling to evaluate selected interventions.



Implementation



Seamless transition to implementation is necessary

Optum Serve can leverage existing partnerships with academic institutions, provider organizations, health plans, and state and federal agencies to help address suicide among our Military and Veteran populations. We also offer a mental health screening solution, which provides proven and established processes to deliver face-to-face appointments and call center services conducted by trained, credentialed and experienced health care practitioners, behavioral health specialists, Military benefits advisors and administrative staff.



Optum has an extensive behavioral health network

200k+
providers nationally

108k+
providers specialized in post-traumatic stress disorder

8,400+
providers specialized in traumatic brain injury

46k+
providers specialized in trauma therapy



Continuous improvement

Continuous evaluation will determine future implementation

Optum Serve uses data surveillance methods to continuously evaluate our risk factor identification, intervention and implementation steps. Our evaluation results will inform future improvements to ensure that we continue to strategically and effectively address suicide among our Military and Veteran populations.

Development of a resilience program for Veteran suicide prevention

Optum Serve can help develop and deliver a resilience-based program for Veteran suicide prevention, to build and sustain resilient communities in response to this public crisis. We can deliver a continuum of evidence-based resilience, emotional and psychological supports to at-risk Veterans, their families, VA clinicians and staff.

Working toward a common goal

The PREVENTS Initiative built the foundation to address the devastating number of Military Service Members and Veterans ending their own lives. At Optum Serve, we are uniquely positioned to support suicide prevention initiatives, leveraging our extensive network of partnerships, expansive data analytic capabilities and rich understanding of the needs of the Military and Veteran communities and their families. Optum Serve stands by our commitment to help improve the health and well-being of those we serve. It is important for us to not only prioritize the physical health of our nation's heroes, but their mental and behavioral health as well, and work toward the common goal of eliminating suicide among the Military and Veteran populations.

Learn more about how Optum Serve can help address Military and Veteran suicide.

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Sources

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3. Federal Register. National roadmap to empower Veterans and end suicide. [federalregister.gov/documents/2019/03/08/2019-04437/national-roadmap-to-empower-veterans-and-end-suicide](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/03/08/2019-04437/national-roadmap-to-empower-veterans-and-end-suicide). March 8, 2019. Accessed January 17, 2023.
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