

## MANDATORY SUICIDE RISK AND INTERVENTION TRAINING

**1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) directive maintains policy for the implementation of mandatory training of both clinical and non-clinical VHA employees on suicide risk and intervention.

### 2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES:

Amendment, dated June 21, 2022: updates the TMS course number for VA S.A.V.E. on page 4, paragraph 6.b. of this notice from 30535 to 66979.

Major changes as of May 11, 2022 are as follows:

a. VHA has updated course content and the titles of the mandatory suicide risk and intervention trainings for VHA health care providers to: Skills Training for Evaluation and Management of Suicide (STEMS) (VA Talent Management System (TMS) Course # 39351).

b. STEMS (VA TMS Course # 39351) replaces the following mandatory suicide prevention trainings for health care providers:

(1) Suicide Risk Management Training for Clinicians (web course) VA TMS Course # 6201.

(2) Suicide Risk Management for Registered Nurses VA TMS Course # 27666.

(3) Suicide Risk Management for Clinicians (Print version) VA TMS Course # 6822.

c. STEMS Refresher (VA TMS Course # 43820) replaces the following mandatory suicide prevention trainings for health care providers: Suicide Risk Management for Clinicians (Refresher), VA TMS Course # 29376.

d. VHA health care providers are now required to complete STEMS (VA TMS Course # 43820) as an annual refresher.

e. All new VHA health care providers must complete STEMS (VA TMS Course # 39351) and pass the post-module test within 90 days of entering their position.

**3. RELATED ISSUES:** VHA Directive 1160.07, Suicide Prevention Program, dated May 24, 2021; VHA Handbook 1160.01, Uniform Mental Health Services in VA Medical Centers and Clinics, dated September 11, 2008; and VHA Handbook 1160.06, Inpatient Mental Health Services, dated September 16, 2013.

**4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (OMHSP) (11MHSP) is responsible for the content of this directive. Questions may be addressed to the Executive Director, OMHSP at [VHAOMHSPSPACTIONS@va.gov](mailto:VHAOMHSPSPACTIONS@va.gov).

**5. RESCISSIONS:** VHA Directive 1071, Mandatory Suicide Risk and Intervention Training for VHA Employees, dated December 22, 2017; and VHA Memorandum 2017-04-28, Suicide Awareness Training, dated April 11, 2017, are rescinded.

**6. RECERTIFICATION:** This VHA directive is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of May 2027. This VHA directive will continue to serve as national VHA policy until it is recertified or rescinded.

**BY THE DIRECTION OF THE OFFICE OF  
THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH:**

/s/ Erica Scavella, M.D., FACP, FACHE  
Assistant Under Secretary for Health  
for Clinical Services/CMO

**NOTE:** *All references herein to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and VHA documents incorporate by reference subsequent VA and VHA documents on the same or similar subject matter.*

**DISTRIBUTION:** Emailed to the VHA Publications Distribution List on May 13, 2022.

**CONTENTS**

**MANDATORY SUICIDE RISK AND INTERVENTION TRAINING**

1. PURPOSE..... 1

2. BACKGROUND..... 1

3. DEFINITIONS ..... 2

4. POLICY ..... 2

5. RESPONSIBILITES ..... 2

6. TRAINING..... 4

7. RECORDS MANAGEMENT..... 4

8. REFERENCES..... 5

APPENDIX A

MANDATORY SUICIDE RISK AND INTERVENTION TRAINING FOR VHA  
EMPLOYEES .....A-1

## MANDATORY SUICIDE RISK AND INTERVENTION TRAINING

### 1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) directive maintains policy for the implementation of mandatory training of both clinical and non-clinical VHA employees on suicide risk and intervention. **AUTHORITY:** 38 U.S.C. §§ 1720F(b), 7301(b).

### 2. BACKGROUND

a. Ending Veteran suicide is the top clinical priority for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). VA promotes the prevention of suicide through a comprehensive, public health approach. Several strategies have been implemented across VA to increase awareness and emphasize that suicide prevention is the responsibility of all employees. The goal is to ensure that every place of employment within VA provides ongoing suicide prevention training to support local suicide prevention efforts and provide resources for both clinical and non-clinical areas.

b. The VA Under Secretary for Health's February 2016 Preventing Veteran Suicide – A Call to Action summit (<http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/25625/answering-the-call-the-veterans-suicide-summit/>) reinforced the need for constant vigilance with regard to suicide prevention activities and recognized the need to review and certify suicide prevention training annually. To support the 2016 call, VHA released an annual refresher training, Skills Training for Evaluation and Management of Suicide (STEMS) and VA S.A.V.E., formerly titled Suicide Risk Management Training for Clinicians-Refresher and Operation S.A.V.E. Refresher.

c. In addition, VA Office of Inspector General, Office of Healthcare Inspections: Report No.: 16-03808-215, Evaluation of Suicide Prevention Programs in Veterans Health Administration Facilities, published May 18, 2017, recommended that VHA leadership ensure that clinical staff complete suicide risk management training within 90 days of hire and that VA medical facility managers monitor compliance through Talent Management System (TMS) reports. **NOTE:** *The OIG report is available at:* <https://www.va.gov/oig/pubs/VAOIG-16-03808-215.pdf>.

d. Through a collaboration between the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (OMHSP); the South Central Mental Illness Research, Education, Clinical Center (MIRECC) in Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN) 16; Rocky Mountain MIRECC located in Denver, Colorado; and the VHA Employee Education System (EES), VHA has developed a web-based learning program that educates VHA health care providers on suicide risks and interventions and incorporates best practices for suicide prevention: Skills Training for Evaluation and Management of Suicide (STEMS) (formerly entitled Suicide Risk Management Training for Clinicians). In partnership with OMHSP, EES, and the Center of Excellence (COE) for Suicide Prevention, VHA developed its flagship suicide prevention gatekeeper training program for non-clinical employees entitled VA S.A.V.E. (formerly entitled Operation S.A.V.E.).

### 3. DEFINITIONS

a. **Gatekeeper Training.** Gatekeeper training is an educational course designed to teach clinical and non-clinical professionals, or gatekeepers, the warning signs of a suicide crisis and how to respond and refer individuals to care.

b. **VHA Health Care Provider.** For the purposes of this directive, a VHA health care provider is defined as a full-time, part-time, or intermittent clinical employee serving as a licensed independent practitioner or advanced practice provider employed in the job series associated with said license, as well as any employee serving in the capacity of RN, case manager, Vet Center team leader or counselor. **NOTE:** *For trainees and transient clinical staff, please refer to VHA Directive 1052, Appropriate and Effective Use of VHA Employee Mandatory and Required Training, dated June 29, 2018, and VHA Directive 1400, Office of Academic Affiliations, dated November 9, 2018.*

### 4. POLICY

It is VHA policy that all VHA employees must complete mandatory initial suicide risk and intervention training and appropriate annual refresher training listed in paragraph 6 based on their respective position (either STEMS or VA S.A.V.E.) and, if applicable, pass the post-module test within 90 days of entering their position in order to ensure that VHA employees have adequate training to recognize the signs of suicide risk, understand proper protocols for responding to suicide crisis and understand best practices for suicide prevention among Veterans.

### 5. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. **Under Secretary for Health.** The Under Secretary of Health is responsible for:

- (1) Ensuring overall VHA compliance with this directive.
- (2) Providing oversight of the suicide risk and intervention training.

b. **Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Clinical Services.** The Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Clinical Services is responsible for supporting OMHSP with implementation and oversight of this directive.

c. **Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Operations.** The Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Operations is responsible for:

- (1) Communicating the contents of this directive to each of the VISNs.
- (2) Assisting VISN Directors to resolve implementation and compliance challenges in all VA medical facilities within that VISN.
- (3) Providing oversight of VISNs to ensure compliance with this directive and its effectiveness.

d. **Executive Director, Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention.** The Executive Director, OMHSP is responsible for:

(1) Providing oversight for VISN and VA medical facility implementation of this directive and ensuring corrective action is taken when non-compliance is identified through TMS reports.

(2) Working collaboratively with EES to produce the training modules in paragraph 6.

e. **Director, VHA Employee Education System.** The Director of VHA EES is responsible for:

(1) Collaborating with OMHSP and subject matter experts to develop and update suicide prevention training module content and to produce the training modules.

(2) Developing and maintaining the web-based training with completion reports available through TMS.

f. **Veterans Integrated Services Network Director.** The VISN Director is responsible for:

(1) Ensuring that all VA medical facilities within the VISN comply with this directive and informing OMHSP leadership when barriers to compliance are identified.

(2) Ensuring that all VHA health care providers within their VISN complete trainings as required by this directive by reviewing TMS reports.

g. **Vet Center Regional Manager.** The Vet Center Regional Manager is responsible for ensuring that all VHA staff within their area of responsibility complete suicide risk and intervention training as required by this directive.

h. **VA Medical Facility Director.** The VA medical facility Director is responsible for:

(1) Ensuring all VHA health care providers are assigned and complete mandatory suicide risk and intervention trainings listed in paragraph 6.

(2) Ensuring the Suicide Prevention Coordinator (SPC) provides VA S.A.V.E. Training (VA TMS Course #66979) as part of New Employee Orientation (NEO), in person and for a minimum of 1 hour.

(3) Ensuring that VA TMS Course # 33770, the virtual “S.A.V.E Training for Employees\_Enduring” is assigned and completed as an approved gatekeeper training when in-person VA S.A.V.E Training is not accessible.

(4) Tracking VHA health care providers’ completion of all previously noted web-based training courses and sharing with their VISN Director.

(5) Ensuring the delivery of the community version of VA S.A.V.E. training by the Suicide Prevention Coordinator.

(6) Ensuring that all new Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program residents are trained in VA S.A.V.E. (or other approved gatekeeper training) within 7 days of admission to the program.

i. **VA Medical Facility Suicide Prevention Coordinator.** The VA medical facility Suicide Prevention Coordinator is responsible for:

(1) Providing subject matter expertise for matters related to suicide including prevention, intervention, postvention efforts, suicide death and behavior reporting, education, outreach and related training as requested.

(2) Delivering the VA medical facility VA S.A.V.E. training (VA TMS Course #66979) during NEO, for a minimum of 1 hour to include time for discussion and questions, or other VA-approved gatekeeper training to all non-clinical staff.

(3) Delivering VA S.A.V.E training to the community.

j. **VA Medical Facility Staff.** VA medical facility staff are responsible for annual completion of all mandatory suicide risk and intervention training outlined in paragraph 6 based on their respective position. Requirements are assigned nationally and monitored through TMS.

## 6. TRAINING

a. Skills Training for Evaluation and Management of Suicide (STEMS; listed as VA TMS Course # 39351), is **required** for all VHA health care providers regardless of the administration or office with which they are affiliated. This training must be completed by all new health care providers within 90 days of entering their position and complete the annual refresher thereafter (VA TMS Course # 43820).

b. VA S.A.V.E. (listed as VA TMS Course # 66979, formerly entitled Operation S.A.V.E) is **required** for all VHA employees serving in a non-clinical position, regardless of the administration or office with which they are affiliated and mandatory annual refresher courses (VA S.A.V.E Refresher Training; listed as VA TMS Course # 30535).

c. Employees may complete VA TMS Course # 33770, the virtual "S.A.V.E Training for Employees\_Enduring," when face-to face VA S.A.V.E Training (VA TMS Course # 66979) is not accessible at the VA medical facility.

## 7. RECORDS MANAGEMENT

All records regardless of format (e.g., paper, electronic, electronic systems) created by this directive must be managed as required by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) approved records schedules found in VHA Records Control

Schedule 10-1. Questions regarding any aspect of records management should be addressed to the appropriate Records Officer.

## 8. REFERENCES

a. Executive Order 13625 of August 31, 2012, Improving Access to Mental Health Services for Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-09-05/pdf/2012-22062.pdf>.

b. 38 U.S.C. §§ 1720F(b), 7301(b).

c. VHA Directive 1052, Appropriate and Effective Use of VHA Employee Mandatory and Required Training, dated June 29, 2018.

d. VHA Directive 1400, Office of Academic Affiliations, dated November 9, 2018.

e. Joint Fact Sheet: DoD and VA Take New Steps to Support the Mental Health Needs of Service Members and Veterans, August 26, 2014. <https://www.va.gov/opa/docs/26-aug-joint-fact-sheet-final.pdf>.

f. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, Office of Healthcare Inspections: Report No.: 16-03808-215, Evaluation of Suicide Prevention Programs in Veterans Health Administration Facilities, published May 18, 2017. <https://www.va.gov/oig/pubs/VAOIG-16-03808-215.pdf>.

g. Vantage Point: Official Blog of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Preventing Veteran Suicide: a call to action, dated February 3, 2016. <http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/25625/answering-the-call-the-veterans-suicide-summit>.

**MANDATORY SUICIDE RISK AND INTERVENTION TRAINING FOR VHA EMPLOYEES**

VA Talent Management System (TMS) Course Title	TMS Course Number	Notes
Skills Training for Evaluation and Management of Suicide (STEMS)	39351	<p>The primary target audience is health care providers (see Definitions section).</p> <p>This course replaced Suicide Risk Management Training for Clinicians (Web course) VA TMS Course # 6201, Suicide Risk Management for Registered Nurses VA TMS Course # 27666, Suicide Risk Management for Clinicians (Print version) VA TMS Course # 6822, and Suicide Risk Management for Clinicians (Refresher), VA TMS Course # 29376.</p>
Suicide Prevention Guide Training (S.A.V.E.)	66979	<p>This training is not delivered thru the Talent Management System (TMS). TMS Administrators established VA 66979 for new hires to be registered for the new employee orientation face-to-face S.A.V.E. training.</p>
Skills Training for Evaluation and Management of Suicide (STEMS) Refresher	43820	<p>The primary target audience is health care providers (see Definitions section).</p> <p>This course replaced VA TMS Course #29376.</p>
VA S.A.V.E Refresher Training	30535	<p>The primary target audience is non-clinical employees.</p>
VA S.A.V.E Training for Employees_Enduring	33770	<p>This course is available when face-to face VA S.A.V.E Training is not</p>

		accessible at the VA medical facility.
--	--	--