



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs



Veterans Crisis Prevention Campaign Overview

Background

The VA and the Ad Council have partnered together since 2021 on the national “*Don’t Wait. Reach Out.*” campaign, an initiative working to end Veteran suicides by encouraging Veterans to reach out for help if they are struggling. Together, VA and the Ad Council have developed a website at VA.gov/REACH, housing resources to make it easy for Veterans to navigate the challenges they may be facing.

Veterans are at higher risk for suicide compared to the general population. The suicide rate among Veterans in 2021 was 71.8% higher than non-Veteran adults in the U.S., according to the [2023 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report](#). Many events in life can cause stress including divorce, job loss, substance use or housing troubles which can be risk factors for suicide. As Veterans navigate life’s challenges, they may experience additional barriers to accessing support and resources. Things like fear of judgement, difficulties accessing care, misconceptions about support, and other concerns can impact when and how Veterans reach out for help.

Veterans are involved in the campaign every step of the way, throughout research, planning and production of all creative assets and Public Service Advertisements (PSAs).

The PSAs appear in donated media nationwide across all major advertising formats, including broadcast, print, digital, social media and out-of-home (e.g., billboards, bus stop ads, etc.).

The campaign was first launched in October 2021 with the “[Boil](#)” PSAs, which used the story of a frog in a pot of boiling water to encourage Veterans to take action before life challenges reach a crisis point.

In the second year of the campaign, PSAs were designed to reach key Veteran segments: [women Veterans](#) (who make up roughly 1 in 10 U.S. Veterans today and are the fastest-growing Veteran group) and [older Veterans](#) (aged 55 and older, who represent 65% of all Veterans).

In its third year, the campaign evolved the strategy by tapping into Veterans’ sense of collective responsibility to help break down the barriers keeping them from accessing available support. The “[The Question](#)” PSA was inspired by insight that Veterans were trained to put a mission or others before themselves, which could make it harder for them to accept or ask for help. This PSA poses the question: “When was the last time *you* asked for help?” Additionally, the campaign developed [women-focused PSA](#), helping to address the unique challenges women Veterans face within the military and when transitioning back to civilian life.

Now, in the fourth year, the campaign is expanding its messaging to engage the loved ones of Veterans as well. Upcoming PSAs will encourage both Veterans and those in their support networks to explore resources and reach out for help when challenges arise.

This new creative will launch ahead of Suicide Prevention Month in September 2024 and can be used throughout the year.

Since launch, the “*Don’t Wait. Reach Out.*” campaign has garnered over \$70 million in donated media support, resulting in millions of visits to VA.gov/REACH.

Looking to the future, the campaign will continue to drive impact through Ad Council’s strategic media partnerships, social and influencer activations, content tailored for specific high-risk Veteran groups and continued research with Veterans to build upon existing insights. We can all play a part in preventing suicide. Help us spread the word this Suicide Prevention Month, and beyond, with the “*Don’t Wait. Reach Out.*” campaign toolkit VA.gov/REACH/spread-the-word.



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Communications Objective

Encourage Veterans to proactively seek help for challenges associated with increased risk for suicide, and ultimately, prevent Veteran suicides.

Target Audience: The overall target audience is all Veterans (ages 18+). At times, the campaign also creates distinct efforts for specific audiences including:

- Veterans 18-34 years old
- Veterans over 55 years old
- Women Veterans
- Veterans living in rural areas
- Veterans recently transitioning to civilian life
- Loved ones of Veterans

Sponsor Background

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA), part of the VA, is the Nation's largest integrated health care organization with over 1,700 locations, including over 160 medical centers and hospitals, more than 300,000 employees, over 76,000 volunteers and an active database of millions of Veterans across the country and around the world. VHA is responsible for training nearly 70% of all physicians in the United States, with over 125,000 physicians annually trained in VHA facilities, accounting for over 40 specialties. In addition to the reach of the VA, there are many alliances, partnerships, and collaborations that are (or can be) put in place with Veterans service organizations (many that already work with VA), other federal agencies (e.g., Department of Defense, Health and Human Services, and others), and public and private agencies. There is no other organization more equipped to serve the needs of our nation's Veterans than VA.

About the Ad Council

The Ad Council convenes creative storytellers to educate, unite and uplift audiences by opening hearts, inspiring action and accelerating change around the most pressing issues in America. Since the non-profit's founding, the organization and its partners in advertising, media, marketing and tech have been behind some of the country's most iconic social impact campaigns – Smokey Bear, A Mind Is a Terrible Thing to Waste, Love Has No Labels, Tear the Paper Ceiling and many more. With a current focus on mental health, gun safety, the opioid epidemic, skill-based hiring and other critical issues, the Ad Council's national campaigns encompass advertising and media content, ground game and community efforts, trusted messenger and influencer engagement, and employer programs, among other innovative strategies to move the needle on the most important issues of the day.

To learn more or get involved, visit AdCouncil.org, join the Ad Council's communities on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#), and view campaign creative on [YouTube](#).

Commented [GU1]: Thoughts on refining this to VA SP?

Commented [GU2R1]: VA team to confirm adjustments on language for VHA vs SP (to make more specific).