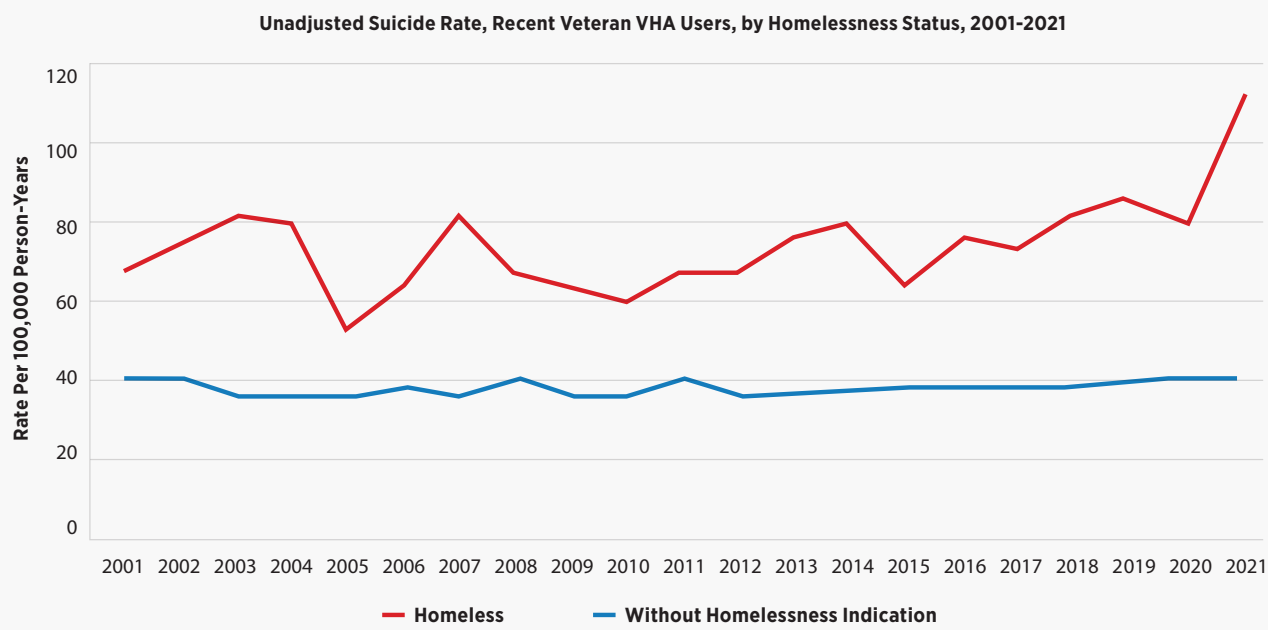


# SUICIDE AMONG VETERANS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS



According to the [2023 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report](#), Veterans enrolled in VA care with a history of homelessness had a rate of suicide that was 186.5% higher than Veterans enrolled in VA care who had no history of homelessness.

VA's top clinical priority is preventing suicide among all Veterans—including those who do not, and may never, seek care within the VA health care system. To effectively address this issue with the urgency it demands, we first must understand the risk factors that lead Veterans experiencing homelessness to suicide.



## DRIVERS OF SUICIDE AMONG HOMELESS VETERANS

Several health and social factors are likely to drive risk among Veterans experiencing homelessness, including:

**High rates of mental health diagnoses**, including substance use disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and serious mental illness

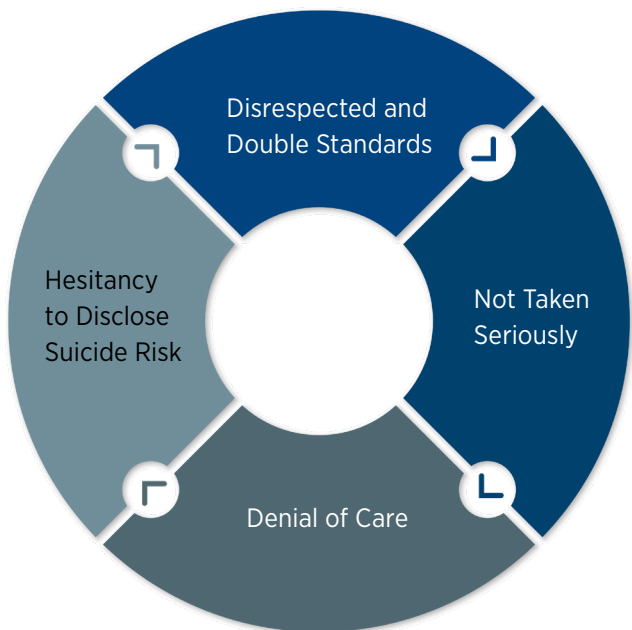
**Chronic health conditions** such as sexually transmitted infections, cardiovascular concerns, and traumatic brain injury

**Psychosocial stressors** such as unemployment, financial instability, and criminal legal involvement

In addition to these factors, individuals experiencing homelessness often report feeling dismissed by their providers, stigmatized by society, and ostracized by their social support system.

## CHALLENGES WHEN ACCESSING CARE

Creating a trusting and safe environment for Veterans to talk about their thoughts of suicide is critical to connecting Veterans to the care and resources they need. However, one study noted several factors that may contribute to Veterans' hesitancy to talk about suicide in emergency care settings<sup>1</sup>.



<sup>1</sup> Polzer ER, Thomas SM, Kinney AR, Monteith LL, Brenner LA, Holliday R. A Thematic Analysis of Perceptions of VHA Emergency Care and Suicide Risk Assessment among Veterans Experiencing Homelessness. *Jour Soc Distress & Homelessness*. (In Press) 2024

## INCREASE IN LIKELIHOOD

A [large national survey](#) of post-9/11 Veterans found that male and female Veterans who have experienced homelessness are at elevated risk for thoughts of suicide and attempts when compared to Veterans who have not. Adding criminal legal involvement increases the likelihood even more.

Gender	History	Homelessness	Homelessness and Criminal Legal Involvement
Men	Thoughts of Suicide	1.42 times more likely	1.82 times more likely
	Attempting Suicide	2.47 times more likely	3.73 times more likely
Women	Thoughts of Suicide	1.29 times more likely	1.45 times more likely
	Attempting Suicide	2.33 times more likely	3.33 times more likely

Despite firearms being a leading cause of suicide among Veterans, homeless Veterans have a [higher likelihood of other causes of suicide](#) than stably housed Veterans.

## WHAT VA IS DOING

VA currently screens for homelessness, housing instability, and suicide risk. If any of these factors are identified, Veterans are offered brief, empirically-supported interventions and referrals to services.

Specialized care is available at all VA medical centers, focused on addressing:

**HOUSING INSTABILITY AND ASSOCIATED FACTORS**

**PRIMARY AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

A particular strength of VA health care is the availability of integrated medical care, mental health care, and housing services. Integrated care allows for close collaboration between VA programs and can make the VA system more user-friendly for Veterans and caregivers.

Veterans in need of housing and mental health services may be impacted by additional factors, including:

- Challenges with transportation to appointments or child care during visits
- Competing obligations of work and health care
- Rurality resulting in increased distance to care or an emergency shelter
- Decreased social support to facilitate engagement in health care

Because of this, VA intervention should occur as early as possible, as the integration of case managers can be fundamental to ensuring the continued safety and care of Veterans.

If you or a Veteran you know is in crisis, VA is here to help.

## RESOURCES FOR VETERANS

- [VA HOMELESS NATIONAL CALL CENTER](#)  
1-877-4AID VET (877-424-3838)
- [VA COMMUNITY RESOURCE AND REFERRAL CENTERS](#)
- [VETERANS CRISIS LINE](#)  
DIAL 988 THEN PRESS 1
- [COLLABORATION WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS](#)
- [DON'T WAIT. REACH OUT](#)  
RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE AND THERE IS HOPE.
- [OUTREACH TOOLS AND LITERATURE](#)

**If you're a Veteran in crisis or concerned about one, contact the Veterans Crisis Line to receive 24/7 confidential support. You don't have to be enrolled in VA benefits or health care to connect. To reach responders, Dial 988 then Press 1, chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](https://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat), or text 838255.**