

Past Panel: Veteran Suicide Prevention

Reflections: *On August 29th, 2019 NAMI Multnomah held the last Evening with the Experts event of our summer panel series. The topic was Veteran Suicide Prevention. We had a diverse panel that consisted of two veterans who were also Peer Support Specialists, a spouse of a veteran, a social worker from the Portland VA's Suicide Prevention Team, and a Multnomah County Veteran Services Officer. All of the panelists shared similar ideas on best practices for suicide prevention and suggested resources the audience could utilize to better support the veterans in their lives.*

The first question asked was "In your experience, where have you seen improvements in the movement to end Veteran suicide? What improvements are still needed?" In response to this question, our panelists highlighted multiple improvements over the years. These include:

- More effective Peer Support Program at the VA
- VA has made suicide research one of their top priorities
- Increase in trainings and classes to educate our communities
- Overall, the tone of the conversation around veteran mental health and suicide is more positive now

Despite great progress, the panelists suggested things to make the movement better:

- Crisis line response to suicidal ideation is often extreme and makes some veterans fear disclosing how they really feel. This prevents some veterans from getting the help they need. Crisis response needs to be more carefully considered.
- There's a need to offer support and resources beyond the VA and Peer Support so folks have more options to get help
- More cultural support for veterans would be beneficial. An example used was tribal affiliated veterans, who often have unique circumstances when accessing benefits later on.

The second question was "What steps can individuals who work with veterans take to prevent suicide?"

The panelists' answers to this question show how veteran suicide is a multifaceted problem that calls for a multifaceted solution. The panelist representing the VA's Suicide Prevention Team brought up how there are still a lot of people out there spreading irresponsible messaging around mental health and social services, especially amongst veterans who were trained to have a "pull yourself up by your boot straps" mentality. About 75% of veterans who completed suicide were never enrolled at the VA, meaning they were likely not getting any kind of mental health care. Panelists highlighted the need

to educate more veterans on the VA's resources as well as other local resources they can utilize.

While the VA offers a significant amount of support to veterans and their families, the panelists did acknowledge that the VA cannot be the end all be all solution. This is why veteran care providers, family members, and local organizations need to be part of the solution too. Two panelists also recommended maintaining an open dialogue with loved ones and care providers and asking the hard questions when needed. It's okay to ask questions such as "Are you thinking of suicide?" and "Do you have a plan?" in order to get an idea of what a veteran is experiencing and whether or not they are in immediate crisis.

Finally, the third question was focused on gathering local and national resources veterans in crisis can access. Some of the resources discussed during the panel include:

- [Veteran Service Officers](#)
- Peer Support Specialists (find one in Oregon [here](#))
- [Oregon Department of Veteran's Affairs \(ODVA\)](#)
- [American Legion](#)
- [Disabled American Veteran Chapters](#)
- [Make the Connection](#)
- [Lines for Life](#)
 - [Senior Talk Line 24/7](#)
- [The Vet Center](#) (locations in Portland, Salem, Grants Pass, Bend and Eugene)
- 877-WAR-VETS (927-8387)
 - 1-877-WAR-VETS is an around the clock confidential call center where combat Veterans and their families can call to talk about their military experience or any other issue they are facing in their readjustment to civilian life. The staff is comprised of combat Veterans from several eras as well as family members of combat Veterans. This benefit is prepaid through the Veteran's military service.
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255](#)
- [Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255 Press 1 or you can Text 838255](#)
- [Military Helpline](#)
- [Returning Veterans Project](#)
- [My Healthy Vet](#)
- [Out of the Darkness Walks](#)
- [VA Women Clinics](#)
- [The SORCC](#)
- [The Military Order of the Purple Heart](#)