

Past Panel: Supporting Veterans in Crisis or Emergency

Reflections: *On July 30th, NAMI Multnomah held the third Evening with the Experts event of our summer panel series. The topic was Supporting Veterans Experiencing a Mental Health Crisis. We had a dynamic panel that consisted of a veteran, a spouse of a veteran and two professionals from the Portland VA, a clinical psychologist on the VA's PTSD Team and an integrative health nurse on the Caregiver Support Team, who both work directly with veterans. While the VA professionals brought great insight to the psychology behind trauma and the clinical approach to addressing crisis, our panelists with lived experience were able to share their real stories and give us a non-clinical perspective. Our discussion primarily focused on what to do when you're working with a veteran who is experiencing a mental health crisis. The panel provided many tips for de-escalation and intervention.*

Some of the takeaways were:

- *Ask the veteran what they need and listen to them (one panelist used the term "Generous Listening")*
- *Communicate slow, clear and simple.*
- *Understand that what is an emergency to someone isn't always an emergency to others- be compassionate and acknowledge their concern.*
- *Remove the person in crisis from the situation- put them in a calm area.*
- *Sometimes it can be helpful to change your language to match theirs. If they are using military language, respond using the vocabulary they are using.*

There was some discussion on how to prevent a mental health crisis from happening in the first place. One panelist stated that it's impossible to prevent a crisis from occurring- "it's not a matter of if, but when." The panel recommended equipping yourself with useful de-escalation tools like the ones listed above and encouraged folks who work with veterans to make a plan in the event a crisis does happen. This can look as simple as just asking the veteran what they want you to do in such an event (call their spouse, take them to the hospital, utilize calming techniques they know work for them, etc.).