

WINNING THE WAR WITHIN

Legislative Point Paper



PROBLEM:

- Suicide is the **second leading cause of death** among veterans under the age of 45 and the suicide rate is nearly double that of civilians.
- Research conducted by America's Warrior Partnership and Duke University in 2022 suggests veteran suicides are underreported – and as many as **24 veterans a day die on average from suicide**; an additional 20 die by “self-injury mortality,” otherwise known as overdose.

THE LEGION'S EFFORTS:

- The American Legion created the **Be the One Suicide Prevention** initiative. The goal of this groundbreaking initiative is to talk openly and boldly about the mental health challenges affecting Americans every day.
- We, as a nation, must own the issue of suicide, understand at-risk behavior, and know what to do if you or someone you know is wrestling with thoughts of suicide.
- The American Legion **Buddy Check Program** aims to reconnect veterans who may need assistance but do not know where to turn. The VA held its first Veteran Buddy Check Summit in 2024 and included Keynote speakers, fireside chats, testimonies, and opportunities for social connection.
- The American Legion is also actively **combating the “broken veteran” narrative** and believes that trauma can be a source of strength. Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) is a recent theory rooted in the belief that veterans can grow from traumatic experiences, and the Legion supports improved access to alternative therapies.

WHAT CONGRESS CAN DO:

1. Enhance access to and funding for suicide prevention training efforts.
2. Enact evidence-based strategies to combat veteran suicide and ensure VA's data is timely, effective, and standardized.
3. Enhance access to alternative therapies, fund VA's outreach efforts, and continue to invest in cutting-edge mental-health research.
4. Update and standardize the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) codes and improve the funding, training, and standards for coroners and medical examiners for validating military service and cause of death.

24

AVERAGE NUMBER
OF VETERANS WHO
DIE BY SUICIDE
EVERY DAY

FOR MORE
INFORMATION, SCAN
THE QR CODE OR VISIT
[LEGION.ORG/ADVOCACY](https://legion.org/advocacy)

