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New VA stats show AL veteran suicide rate higher than national average

Vast majority of Alabama veteran suicides involve a firearm

By [Bree Sison](#) | October 5, 2018 at 2:02 PM CDT - Updated October 9 at 7:35 PM

BIRMINGHAM, AL (WBRC) - The most recent data on veteran suicide rates from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) finds Alabama veterans are dying by suicide at a higher rate than the national average.

An estimated 34.2 Alabama veterans per 100,000 died by suicide in 2016, compared to the national veteran suicide rate of 30.1 per 100,000. Among the civilian population, the national suicide rate drops to 17.5.

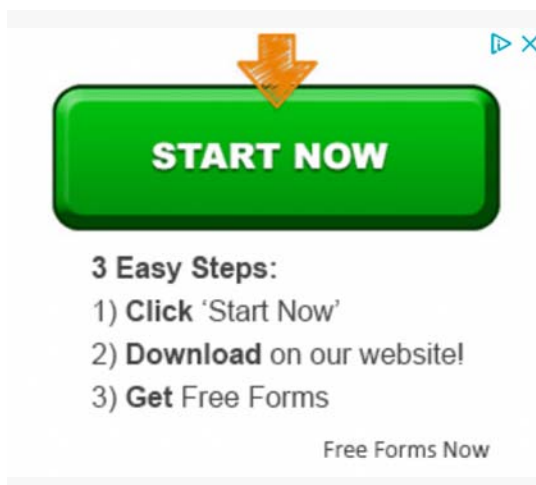
“Suicide is a public health issue. It’s the tenth leading cause of death in the United States. It is the number two killer of male veterans. It is the number one killer of female veterans,” Richard Beatty of the Tuscaloosa VA tells WBRC. “With that awareness, and knowing that it is such a significant issue, we realize that suicide prevention is everyone’s business.”

In fact, the numbers show that every veteran is at risk. More veterans over the age of 55 died by suicide, but veterans younger than 55 died at a higher rate. One accounting for the increased number of veteran suicides among older populations is that there are simply more veterans who served in the Vietnam, Korea, and WWII eras than the Gulf wars.

The state of Alabama boasts a higher percentage of its population as veterans. In 2016, the VA found 9.8 percent of the adult population of Alabama to be veterans, compared to 6.6 percent nationally. A total of 373,761 veterans live in our state.

With a higher number of veterans in our families and social circles, Beatty stresses each of us must pay closer attention to warning signs in the people we love.

“A lot of times those [suicidal] individuals aren’t aware of what’s going on,” said Beatty. “They’re not really paying attention to how they’re doing on a daily basis but other people are seeing that and they can recognize when they’re not doing so well.”



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Another reason for Alabama’s higher rate is that our veterans are choosing the most lethal method for suicide. In the 2016 numbers analyzed by the most recent report, 81.3 percent of Alabama veterans died by firearm. Nationally, only 51.4 percent of suicides were completed using a gun.

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