



Veterans' Sentinel Act

The Challenge:

Veterans make up less than eight percent of the population yet represented a [disproportionate 13.8%](#) of suicide deaths in the US in 2023. In 2019, [The Washington Post](#) and [Military Times](#) reported the troubling increase in veterans taking their own lives on Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) campuses. Many did so as a form of protest against care received from the VA, while others did so because they knew their families would be taken care of – despite many still facing difficulties showing their spouse's suicide was demonstrably linked to their service.

In response, the VA began tracking suicides deaths on VA campuses. Between October 2017 and September 2019, the [VA identified 55 veterans](#) who took their own lives on VA hospital campuses. However, a [GAO investigation](#) found [multiple mistakes](#) in the VA's reporting of on-campus suicides – including four instances of suicide on-campus that should've been counted and 10 instances of suicide that did not occur on-campus.

Preventing veteran suicide is the VA's [highest clinical priority](#). However, the [GAO found](#) that without (1) accurate information on the number of suicides and (2) comprehensive analyses of the underlying causes, it is impossible to fully understand the prevalence and nature of on-campus suicides. This hinders Congress' and the VA's ability to address the problem and care for our veterans.

The Solution:

The Veterans' Sentinel Act will improve accuracy of data collection for on-campus suicides, require analyses of the underlying cause, and enhance congressional oversight. Specifically, this bill would:

- Establish a working group focused on collecting and analyzing data regarding veteran on-campus suicides and attempted suicides. The working group will be:
 - Comprised of representatives from relevant VA offices to improve coordination;
 - Directed to use proven analytic methodology and tools to determine incident root causes when practicable; and
 - Empowered to improve data collection and management processes
- Require the VA Secretary to submit to Congress an annual report detailing on-campus veteran suicides and suicide attempts, to include trend analysis and recommendations for improving prevention efforts.