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PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Roseburg VA Suicide Prevention team offers comprehensive care despite COVID-19 -Veterans are not alone

ROSEBURG, OREGON, (Aug. 28, 2020) – The Roseburg VA Health Care System’s Suicide Prevention coordinators have one mission: save Veteran lives. While the coronavirus has caused necessary changes to some in-person care and services at RVAHCS’s five facilities across Southern Oregon, suicide prevention and mental health providers remain available for every Veteran facing crisis.

September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, and the RVAHCS Suicide Prevention team – which includes Suicide Prevention coordinators in Roseburg, Eugene and along the coast from Coos Bay to Del Norte County in California – wants to remind all Veterans, Veterans’ friends and family, advocates, community mental health care providers, and the entire community that Veterans in crisis are not alone – Veterans facing a mental health crisis will always have a lifeline to support and services to help them find a road to recovery.

“The Suicide Prevention team in the Roseburg VA Health Care System has been dedicated to supporting Veterans struggling with suicidal thoughts throughout the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Caroline Mullis, a prevention coordinator at the Eugene VA Clinic. “Bottom line, we do know more people are struggling due to isolation, financial stressors, and other consequences of the pandemic, but we’ve been able to connect these Veterans to virtual mental health care.”

During the nationwide response to COVID-19, many routine activities – going to the store, eating a meal at a favorite restaurant, going to work each morning – have been altered or curtailed altogether. For many people, this has caused a heightened level of stress. For some, it has led to deeper mental health issues, including thoughts of suicide, according to Mullis. The increase of Veterans reaching out using available suicide prevention or intervention services has seen an increase during the pandemic, however, the Suicide Prevention team, emergency responders and the community have partnered to intercede quickly, refer immediately and follow-up promptly to ensure Veterans in crisis receive lifesaving care and ready access to continued treatment.

“[Our efforts have been] assisted by the Suicide Prevention in Emergency Departments and Urgent Cares (SPED) program, which includes a follow-up protocol for Veterans who are not admitted to the hospital but are positive for suicide screenings,” said Mullis. “We continue to improve our SPED measures, and coordinate with the risk manager to ensure Veterans who are going to community hospitals for suicidal ideations also have continuity of mental health care,” inside the VA.

In Southern Oregon, in counties which boasts as high as twice the national average of Veterans residing here, suicide prevention efforts are paramount. The Roseburg VA Suicide Prevention team, partnering with the RVAHCS Whole Health program, community advocates, community mental health professionals and emergency responders, makes suicide prevention resources and lifesaving care available 24/7, according to Mullis. Providers, members of the community, family and friends are all on the front line in addressing Veteran suicide and understanding the unique challenges Veterans face is an important element in a complex set of circumstances.

“[Non-Veterans] should understand there are unique struggles Veterans face, as compared to the civilian population,” said Mullis. “[VA has] a wonderful consultation for any community provider working with Veterans who might be at risk for suicide. We encourage friends and family to familiarize themselves

with the steps of *S.A.V.E.*, which we use nationwide in the VA to equip all community members with the basics of Suicide Prevention. The steps of *S.A.V.E.* are the acronym: S - Looking for warning signs; A - Asking the question, are you thinking about hurting yourself?; V - Validating the person's struggles and experience; and E - Expediting them to help and support." (NOTE: The Suicide Risk Management Consultation for community providers may be accessed here:

<https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/consult/request-a-consult.asp>).

For Veterans, there are a wide variety of resources to help address the stressors that may lead to thoughts of self-harm or suicide. The Roseburg VA Whole Health program offers complimentary services that can address Veteran-related health issues, helping improve a Veteran's mental wellness, said Mullis.

"We are huge fans of complimentary services! All evidence-based research indicates complimentary services offered through our amazing Whole Health Program aid in reducing risk factors of suicide," said Mullis, a native of Asheville, North Carolina, who worked previously at the Charles George VA Medical Center there. "Whole health programs such as Yoga Nidra or Tai Chi aid in the management of chronic pain and insomnia, which are generally risk factors for suicide. Additionally, one of the most important factors of risk for suicide is a sense of disconnection and perceived burdensomeness. Encouraging Veterans to connect with one another and support each other through Veteran groups and other complimentary services is paramount."

During Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, Mullis and the entire Roseburg VA Suicide Prevention team want all to understand that suicide prevention is a team effort. VA providers and staff, community-based mental health experts and first responders, and the community at large all have a role to play in offering Veterans critical help and care.

"Our team always reminds other staff members that we may be in the official role of 'Suicide Prevention' but this is a cause and effort that needs to be supported by every staff member," said Mullis "Our mission to implement the I CARE values and care for every Veteran in the most comprehensive and holistic way possible is intrinsically connected to supporting Veterans who are struggling with suicidal thoughts, and helping them toward believing their recovery possible, and having hope for the future."

If you or a Veteran you know are facing a mental health crisis, resources are available to help. Following is a list of 24/7 resources available to help you find assistance:

- 9-1-1 to reach emergency responders
- Be There For Veterans Website: [BeThereForVeterans.com](http://BetheThereForVeterans.com)
- VA's Suicide Prevention Site: https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/index.asp
- Veterans Crisis Line – Call 1-800-273-8255, Press 1; Text 838255; for the deaf or hard of hearing, call 1-800-799-4889; or chat online at <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/chat>
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Roseburg VA Mental Health Clinic – 541-440-1257
- VA Suicide Prevention Website – https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/index.asp
- Vets4Warriors (24/7 peer hotline): 1-855-838-8255
- *S.A.V.E.* training can be viewed online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49VgxM9L7Q&t=119s>

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