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# Women Veterans Forum

Instructors: Joan Suelter, Susan Kohler

2025 DEPARTMENT OF FLORIDA

# DEPARTMENT CONVENTION

# *Agenda*

- Introduction/Facilitators: Joan Suelter, Susan Kohler
- Other Introductions
- Mission
- Benefits of be a member of the American Legion
- Honoring women veterans
- Summary of concerns
- Goals to success
- Open Discussion
- Resources/social media support
- Final Thoughts

# ***Introductions***

- **Women Veterans Committee**
  - Joan Suelter, Post 347
  - Dianne Boland, Post 117
  - Jean Ware Post 418
- **Women Veteran Advocates Working Behind the Scenes**
  - Susan Kohler, District 16, Post 273, 1st Vice Commander, Service Officer, today's co-partner/instructor
  - Jean Ware, District 15, Post 418, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice Commander,
  - Hernando County Women Veteran Leader.

# *The benefits of being part of the legion family*

- Advocate for female veterans.
- Assist women veterans transition from active duty to veteran status.
- Assist our sister veterans with access to VA benefits: health care to include mental health programs addressing PTSD and MST, homelessness and compensation.
- Apply their military and life experience to further the growth of the American Legion.
- Camaraderie

# *Mission Statement*

- Engage our sister Veterans to foster female camaraderie.
- Educate and provide wellness assistance and other support as needed through networking and collaboration with Florida Department of Veteran Affairs, the American Legion and the VA system.
- Offer a safe environment that encourages a sense of belonging, recognition and appreciation for their service and sacrifices made in the defense of our country.
- Embrace their life and military experiences which will strengthen the growth of each other and the American Legion.

## ***Honoring the Resilience of Women Veterans: Acknowledging Their Struggles After Discharge***

In recent years, we have made significant strides in recognizing the sacrifices of our veterans. However, women veterans often find themselves navigating a unique set of challenges post-discharge. These challenges can encompass a broad spectrum, including mental health struggles, employment difficulties, healthcare disparities, and social reintegration.



## *Honoring (continued)*

First and foremost, mental health is a pressing concern for many women veterans. The experiences of military service, including exposure to combat and the stress of military life, can leave lasting psychological impacts. Women veterans are at an increased risk of conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety.

Unfortunately, these mental health issues are often compounded by feelings of isolation and the stigma of seeking help. It is imperative that we create a supportive environment where women veterans feel comfortable accessing the mental health resources, they need without fear of judgment.



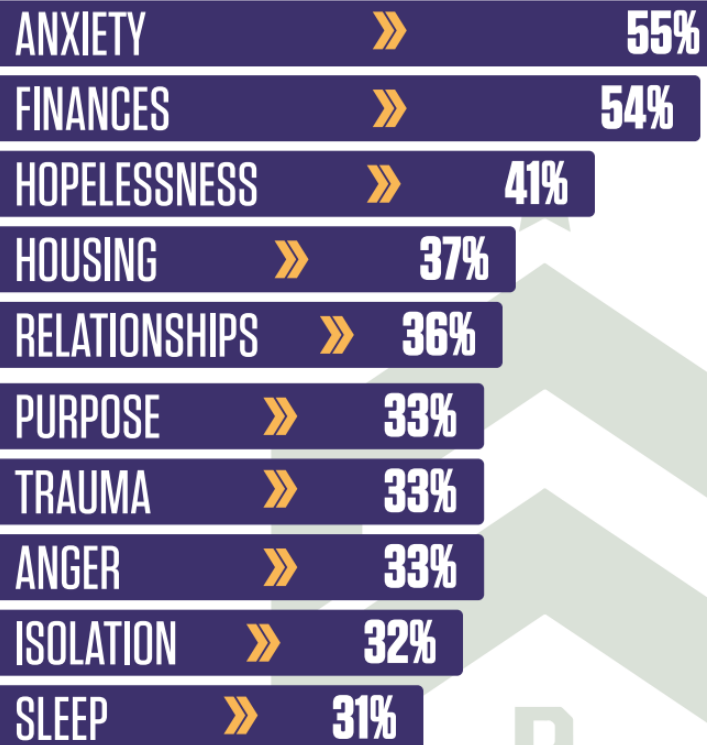
# ***Summary-Transitional Concerns for our women veterans***

- Employment
- Health Care disparities
- Mental Health - Suicide
- Social reintegration
- Essential to acknowledge the impact of MST

# Factors Driving Suicide Among Veterans



Below are the 10 most common responses to the question "What can **ROGER** help you with?"

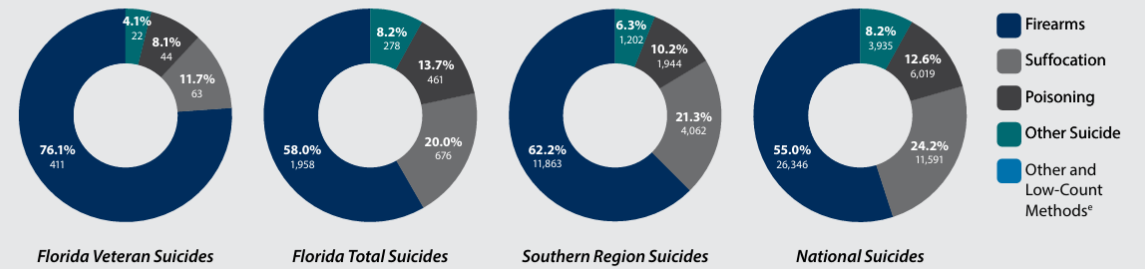


VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Florida Veteran and Total Florida, Southern Region, and National Suicide Deaths by Method,<sup>4</sup> 2022



At some point, we have to realize the connection between suicide and firearms. The overwhelming research indicates firearms are one of the leading causes of veteran suicide, in fact, nationwide, almost 3 out of 4 (71%) veterans who die by suicide use a firearm.

# *To Achieve this*

**\*\*Raise Awareness\*\***: Educate women veterans and the public about the unique struggles faced by women veterans. Increased awareness can lead to greater empathy, understanding, and support.

**\*\*Advocate for Policy Changes\*\***: Work with lawmakers to implement policies that address the specific needs of women veterans, including healthcare improvements, employment initiatives, and mental health support.

**\*\*Strengthen Support Networks\*\***: Encourage the development of veteran-focused organizations, peer support groups, and community programs that provide a sense of belonging and assistance.

**\*\*Improve Access to Healthcare\*\***: Ensure that women veterans have timely access to high-quality, gender-specific healthcare services to includes expanding mental health resources and addressing the unique medical needs of women who have served.

## *Achieve (continued)*

**\*\*Promote Employment Opportunities\*\***: Collaborate with businesses and organizations to create job training programs, mentorship opportunities, and hiring practices that recognize the value of women veterans' skills and experiences.

**\*\*Address Military Sexual Trauma\*\***: Enhance support systems for MST survivors, including counseling, legal assistance, and comprehensive care tailored to their needs.

# Strides

- The VA has recently expanded benefits for women veterans, with more than 50,000 women veterans enrolled in health care over the past 365 days, including
  - **HEALTH CARE**
    - Breast cancer screenings and mammograms who may have been exposed to toxins.
    - Increased access to reproductive health services, including birth control, preconception
    - counseling and menopausal support
  - **Disability Compensation**
    - Compensation benefits is at an all-time record number; with women veterans (717,141) receiving disability benefits. Of the 89% of women veterans who have applied from the VA for at least one condition, on average receiving \$27,109 earned benefits each year.
  - **Women Veteran Call Center**
    - Supports Women veterans in navigating all the services we might need. **1-855-829-6636**

# Open Discussion

- Boots on the ground: what's happening?
- Struggles, Opportunity, Best Practices

# References/Resources

- Arlington National Cemetery is not operated by the VA but through the department of defense. For more information visit [www.arlingtoncemetery.mil](http://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil) or National Cemetery Administration-Predetermination/eligibility [www.cem.va.gov](http://www.cem.va.gov)
- Access to Patient Medical Info: [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov). is online record system. Contact 1-877-327-0022
- Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Weekly Update. ([slatterell@legion.org](mailto:slatterell@legion.org)) **American Legion National Level**
- Florida Department of Veterans Affairs, Vanessa Thomas, State Women's Veteran Coordinator. ([Vanessa.Thomas@fdva.fl.gov](mailto:Vanessa.Thomas@fdva.fl.gov))
- Local American Legion Service Officer



# References/Resources

- **Beyond PTSD/Military Sexual Trauma “You’re not alone”.**
- Is a free easy to use mobile application, developed by the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA). It is a private self-help tool for healing from the effects of (MST). This app can help manage stress, improve your quality of life and move forward.
- [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthme.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthme.asp)
- **Crisis Hotline:** if you are in crisis or to help a fellow veteran, call the **CRISIS HOTLINE (Dial 988)**

# Social Media Support Organizations

- Hernando County Women Veterans  
[@hernando.county.women.veterans](https://hernando.county.women.veterans)
- Tri-County Women's Veteran Organization  
[tricountywomen.org](https://tricountywomen.org)
- ROGER – Free, anonymous mental health services 1-833-906-3124 [goroger.org](https://goroger.org)

## *Our Final Mission Today*

- Hug a Sister Veteran who is not a member and bring her into the American Legion Family
- Refer a Sister Veteran to the Service Officer for resources and support

# *Thank You*



**Please leave feedback.**

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