



## FROM THE DIRECTOR

The 2019 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report was recently released, encompassing the most recent analysis of Veteran suicide data from 2005 to 2017. More information regarding this comprehensive report can be found below.

Interested in becoming a leader in suicide prevention research among Veterans? Applications are currently being accepted for our two-year Advanced Postdoctoral Fellowship Program. We'd love to have you join our team.

- Wilfred R. Pigeon, Ph.D.



## DATA & ANALYTICS DIVISION

### 2019 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report Released

As the largest national analysis of Veteran suicide, the 2019 National Veteran Suicide Annual Report examines:

- Veterans suicide rates by age, gender, method and more.
- Suicide rates in the Veteran population compared with rates in the non-Veteran population.
- Suicide rates among Veterans with recent VHA health care use compared with rates among those without.

#### 2017 Key Data Points

The rate of suicide was **2.2 times higher** among female Veterans compared with non-Veteran adult women.  
\* after accounting for differences in age

The rate of suicide was **1.3 times higher** among male Veterans compared with non-Veteran adult men.  
\* after accounting for differences in age

Male Veterans ages **18-34** experienced the **highest rates** of suicide.

Male Veterans ages **55 and older** experienced the **highest count** of suicide.

**69%** of all Veteran suicide deaths resulted from a firearm injury.

The Data & Analytics team at the Center of Excellence for Suicide Prevention played a key role in the development of this year's report. [View and download the updated report as well as state-level suicide findings.](#)

In addition to supporting the annual report, the CoE's Data & Analytics team manages the process for accessing VA's all-cause mortality death data, including suicide, for all Veterans through the VA Mortality Data Repository (MDR). At last count, the MDR has supported over 110 VA research and operations projects, including 22 specifically focused on examining suicide mortality in the Veteran population. With the release of the 2019 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report, 2017 NDI data requests through the MDR are now being accepted for review and approval.

For information on the MDR and requesting access, [view the MDR flyer](#) or contact the team at [VHACANMDRDataRequests@va.gov](mailto:VHACANMDRDataRequests@va.gov)

## EDUCATION & DISSEMINATION DIVISION

### VA Advanced Postdoctoral Fellowship Program in Veteran Mental Health and Suicide



Sponsored by the VA Office of Academic Affairs, the CoE's two-year postdoctoral fellowship program is designed to provide psychologists, physicians and associated health professionals with the experience necessary to become leaders and innovators in suicide prevention research among Veterans.

Consistent with the strategic mission of our Center, this program puts primary emphasis on public health approaches to suicide prevention in a vibrant interdisciplinary setting that fosters rich and creative collaborations with investigators and clinical supervisors from the fields of psychology, psychiatry, medicine, nursing, social work, epidemiology and health services. To accomplish this, we combine the rich research and education resources of the CoE and the affiliated University of Rochester Department of Psychiatry (URMC Psychiatry) with the unique clinical and crisis response programs at the Canandaigua VA Medical Center (CVAMC).

Applications for the upcoming program are due by **January 3, 2020**. For more information on eligibility requirements for MD/DO applicants, Ph.D. applicants and/or the fellowship program as a whole, please visit the [CoE website](#).



### VITAL introduces free, new webinar series

The Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL) program has begun a new webinar series for clinicians and mental health professionals on college and university campuses. The aim of this series is to provide healthcare teams, college and university health professionals with knowledge and resources to help them meet the needs of student Veterans.

The next free offering will be on **Wednesday, November 6, 2pm EST**. Presented by Joseph Geraci, Ph.D., this webinar will focus on "Understanding Military Culture" and is accredited by ANCC, NBCC, APA, ASWB, NYSED and JA IPCE.

If you are a VA employee, you may register for this offering [through TMS](#). Non-VA staff may register [through TRAIN](#).

Subscribe to [VITAL's mailing list](#) for registration information and receive notifications of upcoming offerings.

### Stay Up to Date on CoE Activities

Be sure to contact Clare Burnside ([clare.burnside@va.gov](mailto:clare.burnside@va.gov)) to ensure you are on the mailing list to receive copies of our bi-monthly newsletter.



# CENTER OF EXCELLENCE NEWS



## VA ADVANCED FELLOWSHIP IN VETERAN MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION



The VA VISN 2 Center of Excellence for Suicide Prevention and the affiliated University of Rochester Center for the Study and Prevention of Suicide (UR-CSPS) are pleased to announce the availability of postdoctoral fellowship positions for psychologists, physicians and associated health professionals. The two-year program is supported by the VA Advanced Fellowship Program in Mental Illness Research and Treatment.

**Program Goal:** To prepare the next generation of leaders and innovators in suicide prevention research, education and clinical care. We offer specialized training focused on suicide prevention strategies, with emphasis on at-risk populations including older Veterans; Veterans with depression, PTSD or other mental health disorders; Veterans with substance use disorders and comorbid conditions; and Veterans facing health challenges such as chronic pain and sleep disorders. We also offer unique clinical and research opportunities in crisis response strategies and other brief interventions to address suicide risk. The fellowship is associated with (but not identical to) the UR-CSPS NIMH T32 Research Fellowship in Suicide Prevention. Prospective fellows may apply to both fellowships.

**Fellowship Activities:** Participants spend approximately 75% time in research and 25% in related clinical activities, work closely with senior research and education mentors, participate in core didactic offerings of the VA Hub Site and UR-CSPS, obtain advanced clinical training in VA sites matched closely to research interests, prepare *at least* one paper for publication and one national presentation each year, and complete a suicide prevention education project.

**Application:** Send letter of interest, CV, graduate transcripts and 3 letters of recommendation to:

Stephanie Gamble, PhD c/o  
Tracy Dilcher  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
400 Fort Hill Ave (COE)  
Canandaigua, NY 14424 or  
[tracy.dilcher@va.gov](mailto:tracy.dilcher@va.gov)

### Training Faculty:

Lisham Ashrafioun, PhD  
Matthew J. Barry, DO  
Todd M. Bishop, PhD  
Robert M. Bossarte, PhD  
James T. Bridges, PhD  
Peter C. Britton, PhD  
Eric D. Caine, MD  
Kenneth R. Conner, PsyD, MPH  
Yeates Conwell, MD  
Wendi F. Cross, PhD  
Claudiu Dumitrescu, PsyD  
Stephanie A. Gamble, PhD  
Elizabeth Karras, PhD  
Ronald C. Kessler, PhD  
Jill E. Lavigne, PhD, MPH  
Matthew K. Nock, PhD  
Wilfred R. Pigeon, PhD  
Kelsey V. Simons, PhD, LMSW  
Tracy Stecker, PhD  
Kimberly A. Van Orden, PhD  
Gary Warner, PhD



### Fellowship Director:

Stephanie A. Gamble, PhD

### Associate Fellowship Director:

Todd M. Bishop, PhD



## RESEARCH DIVISION

### **CoE research contributes to NIMH Director's Message**

In his September message, Director of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) Joshua Gordon, M.D., Ph.D., took the opportunity to observe Suicide Prevention Month by highlighting the link between opioid use, opioid use disorder (OUD) and suicide. Several studies were cited in his message including a [2017 study](#) conducted by CoE's own Lisham Asrafioun, Todd Bishop and Wilfred Pigeon.

"A 2017 study using national survey data showed that people who misused prescription opioids were 40-60% more likely to have thoughts of suicide, even after controlling for other health and psychiatric conditions. People with a prescription opioid use disorder were also twice as likely to attempt suicide as individuals who did not misuse prescription opioids."

You can read the Director's full message and archived messages on [NIMH's website](#).

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### **Perceptions of public messaging to facilitate help seeking during crisis among U.S. Veterans at risk for suicide**

A recently completed study by CoE [Co-Research Director Elizabeth Karras, Ph.D.](#), focused on the use of suicide prevention messaging with Veterans at high risk for suicide. 40 VHA Veterans with a recent non-fatal suicide attempt were exposed to three PSAs in current circulation focused on promoting crisis line use during periods of high distress. The primary findings from this qualitative study and actionable research to practice methods [can be found here](#).

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### **Have you seen our researchers? Find out what they have been up to**

The 2019 HSR&D/QUERI National Meeting was held October 29-31 in Washington, DC, where Jill Lavigne, Ph.D., presented two poster sessions: "High Dimensional Empirical Bayes Screening (iDEAS) of Medications & Suicidal Events" as well as, "Prescription Medications for Insomnia and Suicide Attempts."

Janet McCarten, Ph.D., attended the IASR/AFSP International Summit on Suicide Research, October 27-30, in Miami and presented a qualitative research poster on "Unanticipated Responses to Suicide Prevention Messaging."

November 13-17, the Gerontological Society of America's 2019 Annual Scientific Meeting in Austin will feature a session by postdoctoral fellow Emily Bower, Ph.D., on "Physical conditions associated with suicide attempts: Do risks differ among our older Veterans?" as well as a poster presentation by [Kelsey Simons, Ph.D.](#), on "Social Functioning As a Clinical Target During Care Transitions from Skilled Nursing Facilities."

## CoE SPOTLIGHTS



**Robert M.  
Bossarte, Ph.D.**

Recently released rankings by Expertscape\* recognized our own [Dr. Rob Bossarte](#) in the **top 0.063%** of 50,429 published scholars worldwide on the topic of suicide. Over the past 10 years, he has published 64 papers specific to suicide on subjects ranging from interventions to increased firearm safety among patients in VA mental health treatment, theory-based formative research to design suicide prevention messaging for Veterans, and suicide risk among Vets who served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Dr. Bossarte is currently a CoE core investigator as well as the Director of the West Virginia University (WVU) Injury Control Research Center and Associate Professor within the Department of Behavioral Medicine and Psychiatry at WVU School of Medicine as well as the Department of Epidemiology at WVU School of Public Health.

Rob's most recent funding is provided by the Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) to conduct a pragmatic trial of remote CBT in primary care with over 3,400 patients experiencing depression in rural areas of West Virginia. This project focuses on comparing three different treatment strategies for rural depressed patients with the larger goal of reducing treatment failure and improving mental health outcomes for this group.

[View Dr. Bossarte's current and past funding on the CoE website.](#)

*\*Expertscape objectively ranks people and institutions by their expertise in more than 27,000 biomedical topics. Experts are ranked by their medical journal articles in the past 10 years and have demonstrated their expertise.*

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### **“Farewell” and “Hello”**

When September came to a close, the CoE said “farewell” to our Director of Fellowship Training, Deborah King, Ph.D. As both an educator and a scholar, Deb was instrumental in helping to launch the careers of postdoctoral fellows dedicated to preventing suicide among Veterans. The fellowship program will now be overseen by Deputy Director, Stephanie Gamble, Ph.D. We hope you enjoy retirement, Deb!

On October 31, the CoE also said “farewell” to our Administrative Officer, Kathleen Vishneski, as she too enters retirement. Not only was Kathy an integral part of the operations team, she also served as the Fellowship Training Coordinator. We wish her the best in retirement!

We welcome Tracy Dilcher to fill the position as Administrative Officer for the CoE. Tracy is a 22 year Air Force Veteran who will support several divisions of the CoE and will serve as Coordinator of the [Advanced Postdoctoral Fellowship Program](#). We welcome Tracy to the Center!

**Look for the next issue of our newsletter in  
January 2020**