

TAKE THIS ISSUE HOME!

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
VA Sunshine Healthcare Network (VISN 8)

FALL 2022

VETERANS Health MATTERS

*Award Winning Wellness Magazine for VISN 8 Veterans
in Florida, South Georgia, Puerto Rico & the U.S. Virgin Islands*

VA'S TOP CLINIC PRIORITY:
Preventing Veteran Suicides

Suicide Prevention
Resources Available to Help

Mind, Body, Skills Groups



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Veterans Health Matters is a quarterly health and wellness magazine for Veterans produced by the VISN 8 Office of Communication. VISN 8 is the country's largest network of VA hospitals and clinics serving Veterans in Florida, South Georgia, Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. Your feedback is welcome. If you'd like to comment on the content, please e-mail or write to:

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To Our Readers



VA's top clinical priority is preventing Veteran suicides. Losing one Veteran to suicide is one too many! On page three, Dr. Carri-Ann Gibson, VISN 8's Chief Mental Health Officer, discusses this public health crisis. Read about the work VA is doing to prevent Veteran suicides and help Veterans and their loved ones. Learn about the wide range of VA's programs, therapies, tools, and resources available to help on pages four and five. We all have a role to play in preventing Veteran suicides.

If you are wondering how to bring more mind-body practices into your life, check out page six. Read about Mind, Body, Skills Groups (MBSG). In these small and supportive groups, Veterans learn mind-body techniques that help relieve stress, reverse the damage from trauma, and enhance their resiliency.

Once you have read these articles, practice some brain training with the word search puzzle on page seven. And try out the heart healthy soup recipe, also on page seven.

Be well and stay safe!

Edward J. Cutolo, Jr., MD
Acting Network Director, VISN 8

The Veterans Crisis Line Has a New Number

The Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) is a free, anonymous, confidential resource available to Veterans in crisis, as well as concerned family members and friends. As of July 16, the VCL has a new number. Dial 988 then press 1 to connect you to crisis support 24/7. This change will make it easier for you to access the support you need in times of crisis. You will still be able to call 1-800-273-8255 and press 1 to reach crisis support. This old number will be available indefinitely. You can also connect to the VCL by visiting **VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat**, or texting 838255.



VA'S TOP CLINIC PRIORITY:

Preventing Veteran Suicides



**Dr. Carri-Ann Gibson,
VISN 8's Chief Mental
Health Officer**

VA's top clinical priority is preventing Veteran suicides. Recently, we sat down with Dr. Carri-Ann Gibson, VISN 8's Chief Mental Health Officer, to discuss this public health crisis and what VA is doing to help Veterans and their loved ones.

Q: Can you briefly introduce yourself and your responsibilities?

A: I'm a physician and started my VA career almost 20 years ago. I am the spouse of an Army Veteran and the granddaughter of two World War II Veterans who received care at VA.

I provide support and oversight for our medical facilities. This includes mental health outpatient and inpatient care along with residential treatment. Some of our specialty programs are posttraumatic stress disorder care, substance use disorders care, and suicide prevention.

Q: Can you briefly describe what VA is doing today to tackle this issue?

A: Our suicide prevention teams provide education, patient care, and coordinate follow-up for our highest risk Veterans who call the Veterans Crisis Line or are discharged from inpatient and residential services. Their work with our facility teams and community partners includes training, outreach, and lethal means safety education.



Q: VA cannot fight this battle alone. How can community organizations and individuals help?

A: Our community partners build and strengthen Veterans' connections and support, which are important in preventing death by suicide. They identify Veterans not yet enrolled in VA care, and refer them for medical and mental health services. Together, we help our Veterans build a life of meaning and purpose following their military service.

Q: What are some signs and symptoms if Veterans are thinking about self-harm?

A: Problems with sleep, pain, personal losses, or substance use are some. These signs look different for each Veteran. VA's PTSD Coach app has a safety plan to help Veterans avoid a crisis.

Q: If a Veteran is in crisis, what is the fastest way to get help?

A: We have same day access for mental health care in our hospitals and clinics. You can also go to our emergency departments or call the new number for the Veterans Crisis Line: dial 988 then press 1.

Q: What are you most proud of in VISN 8 relative to suicide prevention programs?

A: I'm most proud of our staff. They are compassionate, motivated, and work effortlessly together, putting the Veteran and their loved ones first.

For more suicide prevention information and resources visit mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/.

Suicide Prevention & Resources Available to Help

Losing one Veteran to suicide is one too many.

Many different approaches and resources are needed for suicide prevention. Some approaches are designed to support Veterans in crisis and those who are concerned about them. Other approaches are geared to reach the entire Veteran population. Suicide prevention is also about helping Veterans with challenges and issues they are facing well before they reach a suicidal crisis.

This article highlights some of VA's many evidence-based tools, treatments, resources, and programs designed to help prevent Veteran suicide. They also help strengthen suicide protective factors for Veterans. We all have a role to play in saving lives.



**Veterans
Crisis Line**
DIAL 988 then PRESS 1

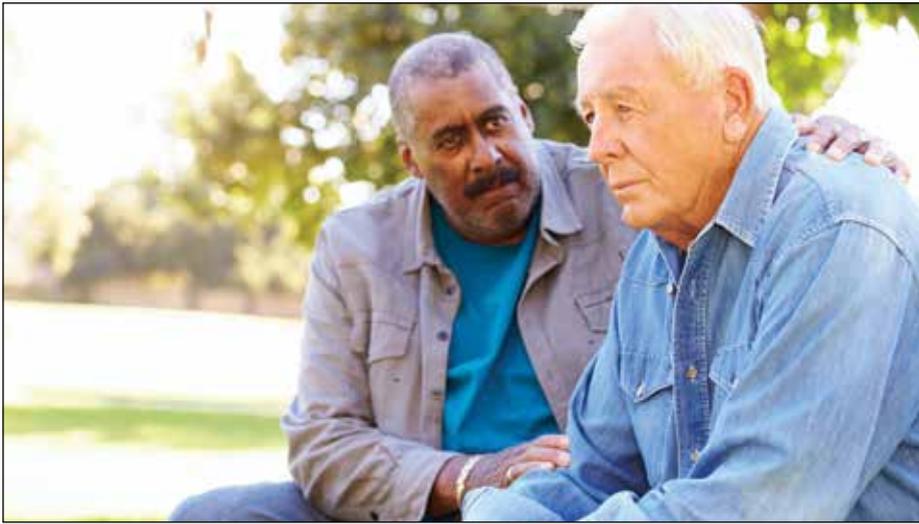
If you are a Veteran in crisis (or concerned about one), call, text 838255, or chat live online (veteranscrisisline.net) with the Veterans Crisis Line. You will reach caring, qualified VA responders 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. The call is free and confidential.

If you or the Veteran you are concerned about is in danger, the responder will help you get through the crisis and connect you with the resources you need. If you or the Veteran you are concerned about is not at imminent risk for injury or suicide, the responder will listen, offer support, and help you make a plan to stay safe.



Evidence-Based Treatment

No matter what you are experiencing, VA offers a wide range of treatment options that are proven effective for most people. These include therapy-based services, which are among the most effective treatments for suicide-related thoughts and behaviors. One example is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. This therapy helps Veterans develop new patterns of thinking to support positive feelings and positive ways of coping. For most mental health conditions, a combination of medications and therapy offers the best opportunity for recovery, reducing symptoms, and reducing risk of suicide. Treatment can happen in a variety of care settings – in-person, video and phone telehealth, and online options.



Self-Help Resources

- Make The Connection (**maketheconnection.net**): Read, hear, and watch Veterans and their family members share stories of strength, hope, and recovery from challenges they faced. Learn about mental health issues and explore the many ways you can show your support.
- Veteran Training (**veterantraining.va.gov**): Use free, online tools, courses, and resources to work on solutions for everyday challenges you face. You can work on problem-solving skills, anger management, relationship issues, getting better sleep, coping with physical injury, and more.
- Mobile Apps (**mobile.va.gov**): Explore free VA apps that equip and empower you with tools and resources to help manage symptoms, cope with stress, learn and practice mindfulness, strengthen parenting and relationship skills, and more.
- Don't Wait. Reach Out. (**VA.gov/REACH**): Find VA resources and supports designed specifically for the challenges you (or the Veteran in your life) face. Challenges may include health issues, relationship problems, career struggles, feelings of isolation or depression, living with a disability, and others.

S.A.V.E. Training

This training will help you act with concern and compassion if you encounter a Veteran who is in a crisis or experiencing suicidal thoughts.

Signs of suicidal thinking. Immediate action is needed if the Veteran says they want to, or are planning to, hurt or kill themselves. Also, learn to recognize the warning signs that a Veteran needs support so suicide risk does not increase:

- Hopelessness, feeling there's no way out
- Anxiety, agitation, sleeplessness or mood swings
- Feeling there's no reason to live
- Rage or anger
- Doing risky activities
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from loved ones

Ask "Are you thinking of killing yourself?" This question will NOT increase suicide risk.

Validate their experience. Listen and use supportive and encouraging comments as they talk.

Encourage treatment and get help quickly if needed. If they are having suicidal thoughts, do not leave them alone. Try to get them to seek immediate help or call 911.

Coaching Into Care

This is a free service that provides resources and referrals for families and friends to encourage the Veteran in their life to seek mental health treatment if needed. Visit **miracc.va.gov/coaching**.

Social Media Safety Toolkit

This toolkit identifies what you can do if you see a Veteran on social media who is expressing emotional distress, feelings of crisis, or thoughts of suicide. There are sample responses you can use to help keep them safe and encourage them to connect with resources where they can get help. Scan this QR code with your smartphone to learn more.



Firearm Safe Storage

Practicing safe household storage of firearms can decrease risk for suicide and help reduce firearm injuries. Scan this QR code with your smartphone to learn more.



Connect With Care

- Contact the Suicide Prevention Coordinator at your VA medical center to connect with counseling and other mental health services: **va.gov/find-locations**
- Find local mental health and suicide prevention services: **veteranscrisisline.net/find-resources/local-resources**

Mind, Body, Skills Groups



In 2019, VISN 8 facilities (VA hospitals and clinics in Florida, South Georgia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands) began offering Mind, Body, Skills Groups (MBSG) to Veterans. These small, educational, and supportive groups focus on teaching Veterans self-care skills and other components of your Whole Health.

The MBSG model is built on the understanding that the mind and body are connected. This has the power to improve your health and well-being. These groups can assist in bringing about positive changes in the body and the mind. Using mind-body techniques can help relieve stress, reverse the damage from trauma, and enhance resiliency.

As group members, Veterans learn about meditation, biofeedback, movement, nutrition, and other skills. These groups also encourage self-expression in words, drawings, and written dialogue. Participants can connect with sources of inner wisdom and strength using guided imagery, genograms, and other tools.



What To Expect with MBSG

Groups are small, with 8-10 people. They meet on a set day and time for 10 weekly sessions. Each session lasts approximately two hours. This is a good format for learning mind-body skills and for beginning to put them into practice in your life, in practical ways. You also have the support of the group to help you work through any difficulties that come up along the way. The groups are led by experienced facilitators, often Whole Health Coaches.

Sharing and connecting with others creates a wonderful learning and personal growth environment. Mind-Body Skills Group participants have gained:

- more self-confidence
- more self-awareness
- better ability to cope with pain, fatigue, or other symptoms
- better ability to recognize and handle stressful situations
- less anxiety and depression symptoms
- better immune system function, physical and mental well-being

If you have an interest in joining a MBSG, please reach out to your facility Whole Health team or provider to sign up for an upcoming group. For more information and resources about VA Whole Health, visit va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH.



Watch the Video!

View the video, "Improve Your Health & Well-Being with Mind, Body, Skills Groups" at visn8.va.gov/visn8/news/publications.asp.

Word Search

Find these words from the stories in this issue of *Veterans Health Matters*. Remember to also look up, down, and backwards. Good luck!

BIOFEEDBACK	N	O	I	T	N	E	V	E	R	P	M	D
CARING	O	R	E	S	I	L	I	E	N	C	Y	L
CONFIDENTIAL	I	A	P	H	N	A	G	P	E	A	T	S
CONNECTION	T	H	E	R	A	P	Y	O	S	R	I	Y
CRISIS	C	R	I	S	I	S	M	K	U	I	R	C
PREVENTION	E	I	A	P	E	U	J	R	P	N	O	V
PRIORITY	N	S	S	L	L	I	K	S	P	G	I	A
RESILIENCY	N	K	A	G	B	C	E	L	O	U	R	T
RISK	O	V	N	L	W	I	J	P	R	V	P	O
SKILLS	C	O	N	F	I	D	E	N	T	I	A	L
SUICIDE	B	I	O	F	E	E	D	B	A	C	K	Y
SUPPORT												
THERAPY												

Country Lentil Soup

INGREDIENTS

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 chopped medium onion
- 4 chopped celery stalks
- 2 chopped medium carrots
- 2-4 finely chopped garlic cloves
- 1/2 teaspoon each dried oregano, dried thyme, and ground black pepper
- 4 cups low-sodium vegetable broth
- 1 cup water
- 1 cup uncooked brown lentils
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can no-salt-added crushed tomatoes



DIRECTIONS

1. Warm a large saucepan or pot over medium-high heat. Add oil, then add onion, celery, carrots, and garlic. Cook about 8 minutes.
2. Add spices and cook for 1 minute, then add remaining ingredients. Bring to a boil over high heat, then reduce heat to simmer.
3. Cover the pot with a lid and cook until lentils are tender, about 20-30 minutes.

Nutritional information (made with feta cheese):

(4 servings). Per serving: 120 calories, 4 g total fat, 1 g saturated fat, 17 g carbohydrates, 4 g dietary fiber, 4 g protein, and 185 mg sodium.

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c/o VISN 8 – VHM
30445 Northwestern Hwy., Ste. 350
Farmington Hills, MI 48334

(Please print)

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Be sure to include the above information.

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U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
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VISN 8 Office of Communication
 140 Fountain Parkway, Ste 600
 St. Petersburg, FL 33716



NEW Veterans Crisis Line

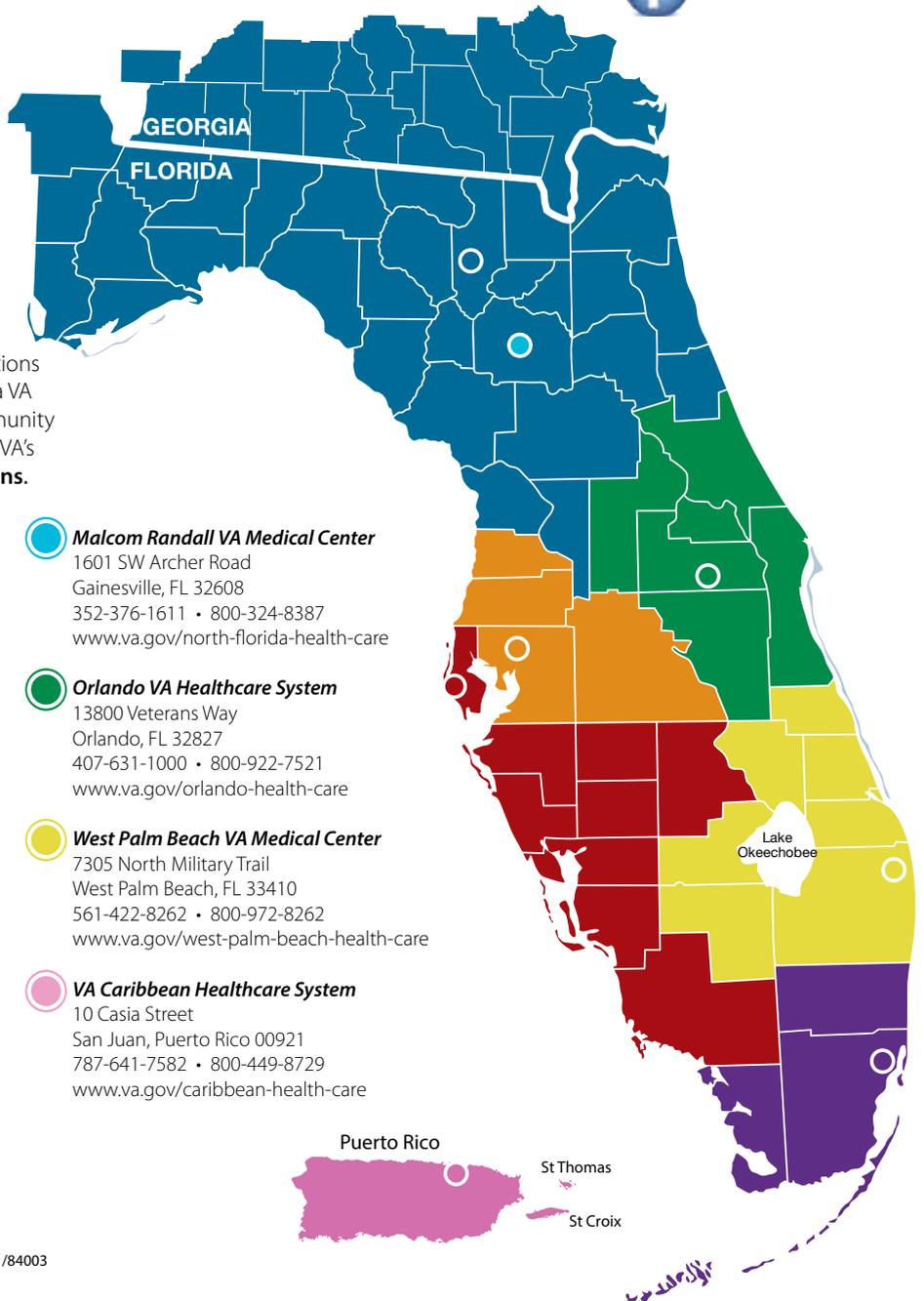
You can also chat online at www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat or text 838255.

VA Sunshine Healthcare Network
www.visn8.va.gov



The Right Care, Right Now
1-877-741-3400
 24/7/365 Virtual Urgent Care

NOTE: This map shows medical center locations only and associated service areas. To locate a VA healthcare center, outpatient clinic, or community based outpatient clinic near you, please use VA's facility locator at: www.va.gov/find-locations.



Bruce W. Carter Dept. of VA Medical Center
 1201 NW 16th Street
 Miami, FL 33125
 305-575-7000 • 888-276-1785
www.va.gov/miami-health-care

C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center
 10000 Bay Pines Blvd.
 Bay Pines, FL 33744
 727-398-6661 • 888-820-0230
www.va.gov/bay-pines-health-care

James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital
 13000 Bruce B. Downs Blvd.
 Tampa, FL 33612
 813-972-2000 • 888-716-7787
www.va.gov/tampa-health-care

Lake City VA Medical Center
 619 South Marion Avenue
 Lake City, FL 32025
 386-755-3016 • 800-308-8387
www.va.gov/north-florida-health-care

Malcom Randall VA Medical Center
 1601 SW Archer Road
 Gainesville, FL 32608
 352-376-1611 • 800-324-8387
www.va.gov/north-florida-health-care

Orlando VA Healthcare System
 13800 Veterans Way
 Orlando, FL 32827
 407-631-1000 • 800-922-7521
www.va.gov/orlando-health-care

West Palm Beach VA Medical Center
 7305 North Military Trail
 West Palm Beach, FL 33410
 561-422-8262 • 800-972-8262
www.va.gov/west-palm-beach-health-care

VA Caribbean Healthcare System
 10 Casia Street
 San Juan, Puerto Rico 00921
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www.va.gov/caribbean-health-care