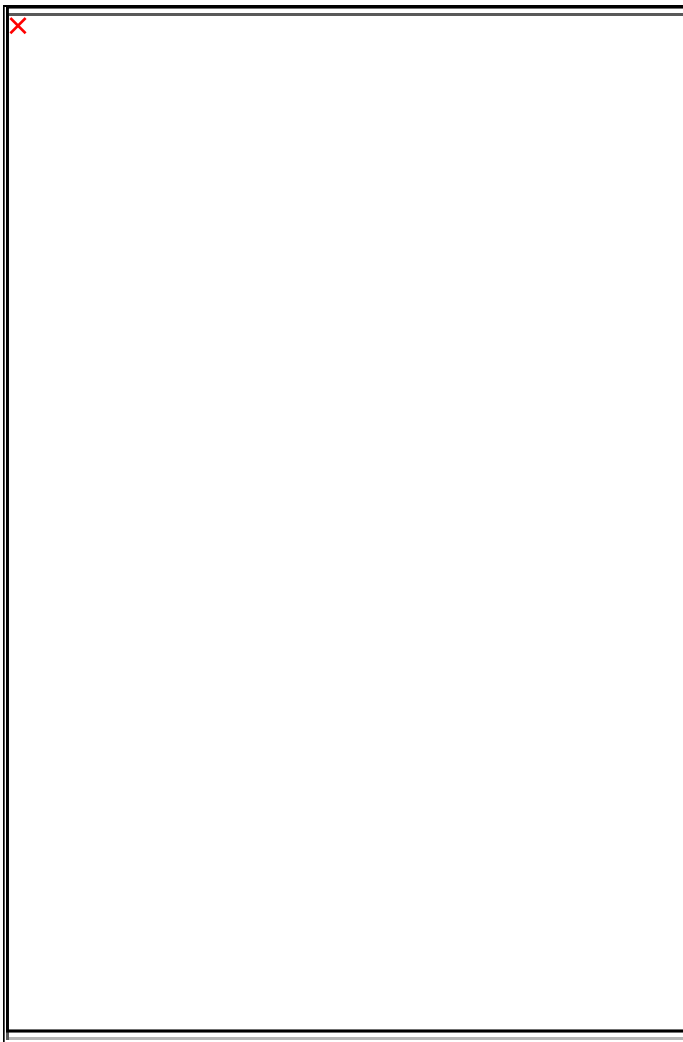


## Suicide prevention: A healthy force is a ready force

# Suicide prevention: A healthy force is a ready force

By Kirk Frady, Army Medicine



WASHINGTON (Sept. 4, 2012) -- The Army has designated September as Suicide Prevention Month and joins the nation in observing National Suicide Prevention Week, Sept. 10-14, and World Suicide Prevention Day, Sept. 10.

The Army will expand its observance with events occurring during the entire month of September, focusing efforts on total Army family well-being, resilience, stigma reduction, and positive results achieved by getting involved and reaching out for help.

"We are committed to every Soldier and our efforts are focused on prevention well before the individual chooses suicide as their only option," said Lt. Gen. Patricia D. Horoho, Army Surgeon General and Commander of the U.S. Army Medical Command.

To reduce the number of suicides, the Army is taking a holistic approach to health promotion, risk reduction, and suicide prevention. It takes into account the challenges derived from financial, relationship, legal, substance abuse, and medical issues. The Army has partnered with the National Institute of Mental Health, or NIMH, to conduct the largest behavioral health study of risk and

resilience factors among military personnel.

Agencies and organizations throughout the Army are planning appropriate educational activities to observe the Army's Suicide Prevention Month. The Department of the Army will sponsor a health fair in the Pentagon Courtyard, Sept. 12-13, with representation from various government and non-government agencies. Similar activities will occur throughout the Army.

Former NFL player Herschel Walker will attend the health fair to share his testimony with attendees. A Suicide Prevention webpage has been established on the Army Suicide Prevention website to facilitate suicide prevention training and resource needs at [www.preventsuicide.army.mil](http://www.preventsuicide.army.mil).

Public Service Announcements with senior leaders' messaging have been developed and disseminated throughout the Army to support Army leaders. A stand down has been directed by Vice Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III for Sept. 27. The theme for the stand down is "Shoulder to Shoulder, We Stand up for Life."

"Leaders across our Army recognize that the health of our Soldiers, Army civilians, and family members is a top priority," Austin said. "We remain committed to doing what is needed to care for our most precious asset -- our people -- thereby ensuring a healthy and resilient force for the future."

Defeating suicide will take active involvement from everyone. Civilian and military research on suicide has demonstrated that it is a complex phenomenon which defies easy solutions. The Army has expanded access to services and programs to help Soldiers and family members improve their ability to cope with the stresses associated with military service (i.e. separation, deployments, financial pressures, etc.).

The increased use of these services indicates that Soldiers and families are using these programs. For example, the number of Soldiers that have been seen in behavioral health clinics has steadily increased over the past five years, the total number of behavioral health clinic visits increased, and the number of Soldiers that participate in Strong Bonds marital retreats has increased. These types of programs are geared toward getting the Army out "in front" of the suicide, and will ultimately help lower suicide rates.

"Despite the tough enemies our Army encountered in Iraq and Afghanistan, suicide is the toughest enemy we've faced, and I'm confident we will defeat this enemy," said Joseph Westphal, under secretary of the Army. "I've served as a senior leader in the Army and various capacities, across several administrations, and I have never seen a challenge that, when Army leadership put their minds to it, they weren't able to address it successfully."

Stigma toward seeking behavioral health support is a national problem which the Army takes very seriously. Numerous surveys indicate that some Soldiers are reluctant to seek help because they view it as a sign of weakness, or they believe their leaders will view it as a sign of weakness.

However, over the past several years there has been a decrease in the percentage of Soldiers that hold these views. At the same time, the number of Soldiers who are using treatment programs such as behavioral health and substance abuse has steadily increased which indicates Soldiers are overcoming those stigma barriers. It will take time to change this culture, but through actions and example, Army leaders are beginning that transformation.

Army leaders have developed and implemented numerous initiatives to address the issue of stigma as it relates to seeking behavioral (mental) health services including:

- the co-location of behavioral health and primary healthcare providers (Respect-Mil and Medical Home Model) within medical service facilities
- stigma reduction messaging is included in all suicide prevention training videos
- strategic communications initiatives launched to promote help-seeking behavior for Soldiers and their Families (to include PSAs using celebrities as well as Army leaders)
- policy revisions have been promulgated to discontinue use of the term 'mental' when referring to mental health services and replace it with 'behavioral'
- continued exploration of opportunities to employ confidential behavioral health and related services

The Army has expanded its Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training, or ASIST, efforts and developed and fielded a number of training tools to facilitate units' training. Other resources include ACE cards, Suicide Prevention Training Tip cards, Leaders' Guides and videos. Additional resources may be accessed on the Army G-1, Suicide Prevention website.

Other programs designed to combat suicide include the Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness, or CSF2, program, which the Army instituted in 2012. CSF2 an update to the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program, which equips and trains Soldiers, family members and Army civilians for the psychological as well as physical rigors of sustained operations.

The CSF2 training equips individuals with valuable life skills which helps to better cope in stressful situations, bounce back from adversity, and avoid self-defeating behavior. CSF2 resilience training will help commanders with "Health of the Force" issues to include suicide prevention.

For assistance, Soldiers and family members can contact The National Suicide Prevention

Lifeline/Military Crisis Line at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

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