

OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

# Suicide Prevention for Female Veterans

Women veterans bring strength, resilience, and leadership to every community they join. But behind the uniform are real people with real stories that often include invisible wounds. Transitioning to civilian life can be challenging, and for many women veterans, those challenges are compounded by unique experiences that impact mental health and well-being.

## Mental Health Realities for Women Veterans

Military Sexual Trauma (MST) is one of the most significant and overlooked factors affecting women veterans' mental health. MST is strongly linked to suicidal ideation, post-traumatic stress, and long-term emotional distress. Addressing MST with compassion and trauma-informed care is essential to supporting recovery and preventing suicide.<sup>1</sup>

Suicide rates among women veterans have risen dramatically in recent years, increasing by 24% in just one year. Many also struggle with intimate partner violence, substance use, and reproductive health challenges. These experiences do not define them, but they deserve understanding, respect, and access to gender-sensitive, trauma-informed support.<sup>2</sup>

## Recognizing The Warning Signs

Women veterans may show signs of distress differently, and these signals can often be subtle. Common indicators include:

- Withdrawing from loved ones or their community
- Expressing hopelessness or feeling like a burden
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Heightened irritability or mood swings
- Talking about wanting to die or giving away possessions

Trusted friends, peers, and providers play a vital role in noticing these signs and encouraging support before a crisis escalates.

## Resources

### Veterans Crisis Line

- Dial 988 and Press 1
- Text: 838255
- Confidential support 24/7 for veterans, service members, and their families.

### Vet Centers (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs)

- Provide counseling services for combat veterans and their families.

### Center for Women Veterans (CWV)

- Advocate for improved outcomes and access to VA benefits, services, and opportunities for women veterans.

### Make the Connection

- Veteran stories and mental health resources.

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## Ways to Support Female Veterans<sup>3</sup>

Whether you're a provider, friend, or community member:

- Listen without judgment and validate their experiences.
- Understand military culture, especially gender dynamics.
- Encourage connection through peer groups, veteran organizations, and social spaces.
- Be direct and ask about suicide if you notice warning signs.
- Know the resources and offer to help navigate them.

## Changing the Conversation

Stigma around mental health and trauma remains a major barrier for women veterans. Many are trained to be strong and self-reliant, which can make asking for help feel impossible.<sup>4</sup>

We must:

- Normalize mental health care
- Promote peer support and veteran-informed providers
- Advocate for gender-sensitive, trauma-informed services

## The Power of Connection

A sense of belonging is one of the strongest protective factors against suicide. Many women veterans miss the camaraderie and shared purpose of military service. Civilian life can feel isolating, especially when their experiences aren't understood. Even one genuine conversation can be a turning point. Creating spaces where women veterans feel seen, heard, and valued can save lives.



### References

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4. Disabled American Veterans (DAV). "New DAV Report Examines Mental Health Among Women Veterans." <https://www.dav.org/learn-more/news/2024/new-dav-report-examines-mental-health-among-women-veterans/>. Accessed October 2025.

### ABOUT

#### OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation (OSPF) educates, advocates for, and builds connections and support for individuals, families, and communities to prevent suicide.



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