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# Understanding and addressing veteran suicide



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## RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Oklahoma is home to more than 260,000 veterans and has the 13th highest rate of veterans per capita, according to the most recent data available. Many Oklahoma veterans have mental health challenges, sometimes because of their service and sometimes caused or worsened by factors that lead to Oklahoma's high suicide rate overall.

Healthy Minds' comprehensive review of veteran suicide in Oklahoma examines the mental health services and systems available to Oklahoma veterans. We highlight opportunities for improving the state's continuum of behavioral health care services for veterans and propose feasible next steps for policymakers and community leaders.

## KEY FINDINGS

- Oklahoma veterans who die by suicide are less likely to have received mental health treatment than other Oklahomans who die by suicide.
- Veterans who died by suicide were less likely than non-veterans to have recorded indicators of suicide risk, including a history of suicidal ideation, suicidal plans, and prior suicide attempts.
- Oklahoma has the highest concentration of veterans with service-related disabilities. Physical health issues were the most common predictor of veteran suicides, implicated in 41.8% of all instances.
- Only 20% of Oklahoma by geography is within a 30-minute drive of a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs facility, the department's standard for access to care.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Integrating physical and behavioral health care can provide unique benefits to veterans. Telehealth can also be used to provide veterans much-needed convenience and privacy.
- Expanding assistance programs to improve veterans' transition and reintegration experiences can bring more veterans into an active community and reinforce Oklahoma's identity as a veteran-forward state.
- Creating mental health support structures for veterans in the workplace can help improve young veterans' experiences and provide a natural support base for Oklahoma veterans.