

Healthy and Happy Holiday

On 18 December, the national Vietnam Veterans of America issued a press release demanding a hearing for the VA Abandonment of suicide-prevention outreach at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). "Veterans and Congress have spent the last decade making sure that suicide prevention is the VA's top clinical priority, and in the last two years, it appears the VA has nearly completely abandoned that mission," said John Rowan, VVA National President. "Studies have shown that veterans who receive VA healthcare are far less likely to die by suicide than their peers, which makes outreach the most important part of the VA's suicide-prevention program. For the VA to abandon suicide-prevention outreach is essentially akin to malpractice on a massive scale. Out of the \$6.2 million budget that the VA is required to spend on suicide prevention, in fiscal year 2018, they had been on track to spend less than one percent on ensuring that veterans gained access to services."

Nationally the suicide rates among Veterans is staggering. According to the 2018 VA's report on suicide in the US, rates for both Veterans and non-Veterans have increased. The reports showed that 20 Veterans die of suicide each day. The VA also concluded that the rate increased faster for those who did not seek VA health services, meaning the VA services work. In their report the VA said "Suicide remains a top clinical priority and one life lost to suicide is one too many." This conflicts with what the VVA is saying. The Military Times reported that suicide rates among younger Veterans increased by ten percent and the rate for Veterans is 1.5 times greater than for non-Veterans. Help from the VA is still an option. To contact the Veteran Crisis Line, callers can dial 1-800-273-8255 and select option 1 for a VA staffer. Veterans, troops or their family members can also text 838255 or visit VeteransCrisisLine.net for assistance.

Holidays are particularly bad for those who might commit suicide. Feelings of being alone and that no one cares are much higher during holidays than other times of the year. In our area, with bad weather, increased bills and seeing other enjoying the holidays is difficult for some of our Veterans. Please know that you are not alone. The VA in Fargo is very ready to provide assistance as needed. Our local social service organizations are staffed to help. Our local service clubs, the Vietnam Veterans of American, DAV, Legion and VFW have members who can help. Clay and Cass county Veterans Service Offices ready and able to provide help. Clergy at our local places of worship are another excellent resource people.

Many local organizations have Christmas and New Years lunches and dinner. One in particular is the American Legion in Moorhead which is sponsoring lunch and dinner specials on New Years Eve; your choice of Chicken Cordon Blue or Black Oak Ham. Check it out, even if you do not know anyone at the Legion, they really are great people.