

## Military Veterans at Risk of Increased Suicide, Substance Use Disorder in Economic Downturn

*Report indicates that more than 500 additional veterans could be lost to suicide annually due in part to a 5% rise in unemployment*

**AUSTIN, TX, STAMFORD, CT** (June 18, 2020) - The Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute (MMHPI) and Cohen Veterans Network (CVN) today issued a report indicating that for every 5% increase in the national unemployment rate, as many as 550 additional U.S. veterans could be lost to suicide annually, and 20,000 more veterans could suffer from substance use disorder as compared to pre-COVID levels.

“America made a promise to stand behind the men and women who put their very lives on the line to protect us and keep us free,” said MMHPI President and CEO Andy Keller, PhD. “None of us are immune to the economic effects of the pandemic, and veterans as a group are at risk for increased rates of addiction and suicide as rates of unemployment rise. We need to prepare now, so we are ready when they turn to mental health providers for help.”

“While sometimes ignored or minimized in importance, financial health should be viewed as a fundamental indicator of behavioral health and wellbeing of both veteran and general population health,” said Dr. Anthony Hassan, CEO and President of Cohen Veterans Network. “Our country’s leaders must resist the tendency to reduce behavioral health care funding when local, state and federal budgets become tight.”

The goal of the report is to inform the efforts of policy makers and health systems as they prepare for potential increases in short-term and long-term needs related to mental health and addiction. Proactive efforts can address these needs before they reach crisis levels, improving, and saving lives.

Using data from recent recessions, the report projects potential impacts across a range of sustained unemployment rate increases, ranging from moderate (5%), to severe (10%), to extreme (20%), a rate approaching the unemployment rates experienced during the Great Depression. The report also notes that rates of depression among veterans will be many times higher than the number of deaths.

These models are based on data collected in previous downturns, and may not account for the unprecedented challenges of this pandemic. Further, models suggest mitigation efforts in place to fight the pandemic are reducing its scope, which could, in turn, reduce the size of some of the impacts.

The entire report can be found at:

<https://www.texasstateofmind.org/uploads/whitepapers/COVID-MHSUDImpactsVeterans.pdf>

This is the second in a series of reports by MMHPI analyzing the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health. Previous reports can be found at:

<https://www.texasstateofmind.org/resources/policy/>

CVN released the [America's Mental Health Pulse Survey](#) in April, which revealed that 70% of Americans are worried about their physical health due to COVID-19, and 58% of Americans are concerned about their mental health because of social distancing. Additionally, the survey indicated that while 14% of the general population sought mental health care during COVID-19, 50% + sought mental health care in the military-connected community.

Resources for veterans in crisis or in need of support include:

- Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-TALK (8255), Option 1
- Veterans Crisis Text: Text "HELP" to 838255
- For more crisis resources, visit: <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net>
- For mental health support, visit <https://www.cohenveteransnetwork.org>
- For peer support call Vets4Warriors 1-855-838-8255
- National Women Veterans Hotline: (855) 829-6636

Organizations sharing data from this report should be mindful of the potential effects of misreporting information on deaths from suicide on people at-risk for such outcomes and follow national guidelines on reporting published by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention that can be found [here](#).

### **About MMHPI**

Since its public launch in 2014, MMHPI has helped Texas legislators, state officials, members of the judiciary, and local leaders identify systemic mental health needs and solutions, quickly becoming Texas's most trusted source for data-driven mental health policy. The Institute has begun to make a significant impact in multiple areas, helping Texas leaders expand the mental health workforce, improve access to care for veterans and their families, shift the focus of new investments toward early intervention, and address the mental health crisis in our jails and emergency rooms. Learn more at [texasstateofmind.org](https://www.texasstateofmind.org).

### **About Cohen Veterans Network**

The Cohen Veterans Network is a 501(c)(3) national nonprofit, clinically integrated mental health system for post-9/11 veterans and their families. CVN focuses on improving mental health outcomes, via a network of outpatient mental health clinics for veterans and their families in high-need communities, in which trained clinicians deliver holistic evidence-based care to treat mental health conditions. Learn more about the Cohen Veterans Network at [cohenveteransnetwork.org](https://www.cohenveteransnetwork.org).

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