

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**VA Caribbean Healthcare System Recognizes September as Suicide Prevention Month
#BeThere Campaign Urges Our Community to Support Veterans**

San Juan — In observance of Suicide Prevention Month, the VA Caribbean Healthcare System is bringing awareness to its #BeThere campaign by encouraging community leaders, colleagues, and Veterans' families and friends to help prevent suicide by showing support for those who may be going through a difficult time. Start the conversation about mental health struggles and suicide prevention. Together, we can work in breaking the stigma and create awareness that suicide is preventable and treatable.

Suicide is a complex national public health issue that affects communities nationwide, with more than 45,000 Americans, including more than 6,000 Veterans, dying by suicide every year. But suicide is preventable. VA is using a community-driven approach to prevent suicide and finding innovative ways to deliver support and care to all 20 million U.S. Veterans whenever and wherever they need it.

"The VA Caribbean Healthcare System is working diligently to end Veteran suicide, but we know that only about a third of Veterans come to VA for health care," said Carlos R. Escobar, Executive Director. "That's why we need everyone in the community to get involved and help us identify unregistered Veterans. This September, and all year, I encourage everyone to take a moment to be there for Veterans in need. One act of thoughtfulness can make a big difference and may even save a life. Join us, at the many scheduled events throughout our healthcare system and bring a Veteran."

You don't need special training to prevent suicide. Everyone can play a role by learning to recognize warning signs, showing compassion and care to Veterans in need, and offering your support. Here are some actions anyone can take to **Be There**:

- Reach out to the Veterans in your life to show them you care. Send a check-in text, cook them dinner, or simply ask, "How are you?"
- Educate yourself on the warning signs of suicide, found on the [Veterans Crisis Line website](#).
- Watch the free [S.A.V.E. training video](#) to equip yourself to respond with care and compassion if someone you know indicates they are having thoughts of suicide.

- Check out [VA's Social Media Safety Toolkit](#) to learn how to recognize and respond to social media posts that may indicate emotional distress, feelings of crisis or thoughts of suicide.

To bring awareness to suicide prevention during the month of September the VA Caribbean Healthcare System will hold the following events for Veterans and their families throughout the month of September:

- Weekly radio participation on “Todo Sobre Veteranos” on NotiUno630 AM on Sundays from 04:00pm-05:00pm.
- Events will be held at:

San Juan VA Medical Center:

September 6, 2019, Suicide Prevention Awareness Activity, Auditorium, 9:30am - 12:00pm;
 September 10, 2019, World Suicide Prevention Day, all day;
 September 18, 2019, Community and Homeless Activity (Informative table), 9:30am - 02:00pm
 September 30, 2019, Closing Suicide Prevention Month, 09:00am -12:00pm;

Arecibo Temporary Community Outpatient Clinic:

September 10, 2019, World Suicide Prevention Day, 09:00am-11:00am;
 September 20, 2019, Reduce Lethal Means, 09:00am-11:00am

Ceiba Community Outpatient Clinic:

September 19, 2019, Reduce Lethal Means, 09:30am-12:00pm

Guayama Community Outpatient Clinic:

September 6, 2019 in Guayama, Suicide Prevention Awareness, Reduce Lethal Means, Easy access to the service and Son Veteranos band, 09:00am-11:00am

Mayagüez Outpatient Clinic:

September 10, 2019, World Suicide Prevention Day, 08:00am-11:00am;
 September 13, 2019, Reduce Lethal Means, 09:00am-11:00am

Ponce Outpatient Clinic:

September 9, 2019, Orientation of Anxiety Management, 09:00am-11:00am;
 September 10, 2019, World Suicide Prevention Day and Education Activity to Elderly Population, 09:00am-11:00am;
 September 11, 2019, Therapy Dogs Activity, 09:00am-11:00am;
 September 12, 2019, Reduce Lethal Means Activity, 09:00am-11:00am
 September 13, 2019, Suicide Prevention Activity and “Son Veteranos” Band, 09:00am-11:00am; September 23, 2019, Insomnia management, 10:00am - 11:00am

Additional partner events will be held at:

Fort Buchanan, September 12, 2019, Suicide Prevention Awareness & Town Hall Meeting,
Fort Buchanan Community Club, 09:00am – 11:00am

San Juan VET Center, September 24, 2019, Activity at Vet Center, 01:00pm

Contact VA's [Coaching Into Care](#) program if you are worried about a Veteran loved one. A licensed psychologist or social worker will provide guidance on motivating your loved one to seek support.

Veterans who are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a Veteran in crisis, can call the Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, text to 838255 or chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat. Call the local Life Line (787) 622-4822 staffed by Mental Health Registered Nurses that can address your concerns in Spanish or English.

Reporters covering this issue can download [VA's Safe Messaging Best Practices](#) fact sheet or visit www.ReportingOnSuicide.org for important guidance on how to communicate about suicide.

The VA Caribbean Healthcare System (VACHS) is a Joint Commission accredited, complexity system level 1a of care serving Veterans in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. VACHS consists of a tertiary care VA Medical Center (VAMC) located in San Juan, Puerto Rico and 10 Outpatient Clinics (OPCs) throughout Puerto Rico located in Arecibo, Ceiba, Comerio, Guayama, Mayaguez, Ponce, Utuado, Vieques; and the U.S. Virgin Islands located in St. Croix and St. Thomas. The San Juan VA Medical Center includes multi-disciplinary ambulatory facilities and 280 operational acute care beds including 12 blind rehabilitation beds and 122 operational nursing home beds. Services are provided to a population of approximately 82,574 veterans residing in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In FY 2018, the VACHS registered 61,682 unique patients and recorded 906,786 outpatient visits and 8,987 hospital admissions.

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