

# FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Industry Recognizes VA Campaigns for Raising Public Awareness for Veterans Mental Health Care**

WASHINGTON – Two U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs public awareness campaigns designed to help Veterans who seek mental health care assistance have received forty-three industry and association awards for communication and design excellence.

“We are pleased that these campaigns have been recognized for creative and design excellence,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “More importantly, they have been effective in helping us address two of our highest priorities – mental health care and suicide prevention.”

The Veterans Crisis Line and Make the Connection campaigns strive to reach Veterans and their families and friends wherever they are. Using state-of-the-art online and communications tools, the campaigns have increased awareness of critical VA resources available to Veterans and their families and friends dealing with crises or other mental health challenges.

The Veterans Crisis Line has released three PSAs that collectively earned 570 million television impressions since March 2011. The last two PSAs have consistently ranked in the top five percent of PSAs tracked by Nielsen. Additionally, through its suicide prevention outreach plan, VA is creating a network of collaborating partners to spread the word, strategically placing advertising, rebranding the website, and developing new collateral materials. More than 650,000 callers have called the crisis line and over 440,000 of these callers have identified themselves as Veterans or family members or friends of Veterans. There have been over 23,000 rescues of actively suicidal Veterans to date.

“The Veterans Crisis Line public awareness initiative has resulted in more Veterans and their loved ones reaching out for and receiving support from VA—call and chat volume are at historic levels. We are very proud to have been recognized for our work in making sure Veterans know about this resource,” said Dr. Janet Kemp, VA national mental health program director for suicide prevention and community engagement.

Make the Connection is a new, online tool to help Veterans and their friends and family members find resources for overcoming life’s challenges and living well. The website, MakeTheConnection.net, has information on a variety of experiences and challenges, such as sleeping trouble, transitioning to civilian life, loss of a loved one, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Since its launch in November 2011, the website has received over1 million visits and the videos have been viewed over 3 million times. In addition, Make the Connection recently launched a Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/VeteransMTC](http://www.facebook.com/VeteransMTC)), which became the fastest growing community in the government/military space to date, reaching over 836,000 ‘likes’ in 3 months.

“We’ve seen a tremendous increase in the number of visits to the website and the video views and the response to our Facebook page has been amazing,” said Dr. Sonja Batten, VA deputy chief consultant for specialty mental health. “Our greatest success comes from Veterans who are telling us what a positive impact these stories are making. The videos are resonating because the Veterans watching can relate to the true stories that they see and hear.”

The campaigns have received recognition from many organizations and associations including the Association of Marketing and Communication Professionals, the Service Industry Advertising Awards, the Telly Awards, American Psychological Association, Interactive Media Awards, and the National Association of Government Communicators.

In recognition of September as Suicide Prevention Month, the Department of Veterans Affairs is calling on individuals and communities across the country to show their support for Veterans in crisis and help raise awareness of the VA mental health services Veterans have earned.  The theme for the outreach campaign, “Stand by Them,” is part of a joint VA and Department of Defense (DoD) effort focused on Veteran and Servicemember support networks, especially their friends and family members, who may be the first to realize a Veteran or Servicemember is in crisis.

VA recently launched a new national public service announcement “Side by Side” that focuses on the important role family and community play in supporting Veterans in crisis. To view it, please visit: www.VeteransCrisisLine.net or <http://youtu.be/3MiTS_4aafw>

On Aug. 31, President Obama issued his historic Executive Order to improve mental health services for Veterans, Servicemembers and military families.  As directed in the Executive Order, VA and DoD launched the joint “Stand by Them” outreach campaign.  VA is also increasing the workforce of the crisis line by 50 percent and hiring 1,600 new mental health professionals and 300 support staff.

To reach the Veterans Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255 and Press 1), online chat ([www.VeteransCrisisLine.net](http://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net)) and text messaging service (838255) connect Veterans in crisis with specially trained VA professionals—many who are Veterans themselves—who provide free, confidential support.

Make The Connection ([www.MaketheConnection.net](http://www.MaketheConnection.net)) connects Veterans and their friends and family to candid, unscripted videos of Veterans and their loved ones and helps visitors find resources that can benefit them.

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