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SDDVA Secretary Whitlock's September Column – Don't Wait – Reach Out!

September is "Suicide Prevention Month." This provides us an opportunity to check in with our friends, family, and loved ones.

There are many reasons that veterans, in particular, feel like there is no way out of a difficult situation – whether it's post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), military sexual trauma (MST), survivor's guilt, financial strain, family problems, or a combination of these. It's up to all of us to help veterans recognize that they are not alone in this fight and that resources are available.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, now known as the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, is a free, confidential crisis resource that veterans and their families can access any day, any time. Trained responders are ready to listen 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. All you need to do is dial 988 and then press 1.

The VA also has a website and app called "PTSD Coach." This tool provides education about PTSD, information about professional care, a self-assessment for PTSD, opportunities to find support, and tools that can help veterans manage their stressors. Visit: <https://mobile.va.gov/app/ptsd-coach>.

South Dakota's Departments of Social Services, Health, Education, Tribal Relations, Ag and Natural Resources, and Veterans Affairs have worked together on a statewide suicide prevention plan. This group has collected data, developed education and training programs, and reinforced communication messages. The South Dakota Suicide Prevention website provides information and resources as well. Visit: <https://sdsuicideprevention.org/>.

South Dakota also has two VA medical centers, two vet centers, eight community-based outpatient clinics, numerous mental health care facilities, and 11 community mental health centers to assist veterans and their families.

In addition, we have county and tribal veteran service officers in every corner of the state. We have over 20 veteran service organizations located within the boundaries of South Dakota, and our team here at the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs is ready to help.

Remember, we are all in this together. Support is just a call, click, or text away.

Veterans, don't wait – reach out!

Greg Whitlock, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs