

## September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month

During the month of September, mental health care providers, suicide survivors, and the general public come together to network, collaborate, share best practices, and remove barriers to improve quality of life for service members and their families.

Suicide and suicidal behavior impacts everyone, regardless of gender, race, sexual, or religious orientation. There are approximately 45,000 suicide deaths in the United States each year and that number increases to almost 1 million worldwide.<sup>1</sup> In 2017, the Total Force Air Force community lost 103 Airmen to suicide and 60 percent of those individuals were Active Duty Airmen.

No Airmen are exempt from the risk of suicide; we know early intervention, support from others, and a focus on brain health and performance can enhance resilience and reduce vulnerability.

### Air Force Statistics

The following statistics are from the Calendar Year 2016 Department of Defense Suicide Event Report (DoDSER):

- 19.7% of Airmen who died by suicide communicated their desire to die prior
- 71% of Air Force Total Force suicide deaths included the use of firearms
- 52.5% of non-lethal suicide attempts reportedly involved a drug and/or alcohol overdose
- The most common demographic associated with non-lethal suicide attempts were non-Hispanic white males, age 20-24, rank/grade E1-E4, and a high school education
- Female Airmen accounted for 7.6% of DoDSER suicide cases and 38.7% of DoDSER suicide-attempt cases

### Know the Warning Signs

There are many signs that may indicate someone you know is in crisis. The list below identifies some warning signs and behaviors that may mean an individual is at risk for attempting suicide.

Warning Signs and Behaviors Associated with Thoughts of Suicide	
➤ Hopelessness; expressing no reason to live	➤ Engaging in risky activities without thinking
➤ Anxiety and agitation	➤ Loss of a loved one
➤ Rage or anger	➤ Neglects appearance or household
➤ Displaying extreme mood swings	➤ Changes in sleeping and eating habits
➤ Increasing alcohol or drug abuse	➤ Health, financial, or relationship problems
➤ Withdrawing from family and friends	➤ Experiencing difficulties at work

### Air Force Suicide Prevention Program

The Air Force is dedicated to the physical and psychological health and well-being of Airmen and their families. Leadership engagement at all levels is [suicide prevention](#) and it is the responsibility of all Airmen. Being a good Wingman includes encouraging fellow Airmen to seek care early and intervening if someone is in distress. **#BeThere**



#### ASK YOUR WINGMAN

Have the courage to ask the question but stay calm: "Are you thinking of killing yourself?"

#### CARE FOR YOUR WINGMAN

Calmly control the situation; do not use force; be safe. Actively listen to show understanding and produce relief. Remove any means that could be used for self-injury.

#### ESCORT YOUR WINGMAN

Never leave your Wingman alone. Escort to leadership, a Chaplain, behavioral health professional, or primary care provider.

The Air Force [Wingman Online](#) program provides suicide prevention training, a comprehensive video library, and multiple resources for Airmen.

If you or someone you know appears to be in crisis, there are helpful resources available to assist you.



The Military Crisis Line is a Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) resource that connects Service members in crisis with qualified professionals through a confidential toll-free hotline (1-800-273-8255) and [online chat](#).



Military OneSource is a free service provided by the DoD for Service members to help with a broad range of concerns including complex issues like stress and grief. Services are available 24 hours a day by telephone (1-800-342-9647) and [online](#).

In addition to the resources listed above, there are a variety of options available to Airmen and their family members:

[Defense Suicide Prevention Office](#)

[Air Force Medicine Suicide Prevention](#)

[Real Warriors Campaign](#)

[VA Suicide Prevention](#)

<sup>1</sup> Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2018). CDC Vital Signs. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/pdf/vs-0618-suicide-H.pdf>