

Hello Colleagues!

This month we will be focusing on **Mental Health Awareness for Veterans** in honor of Independence Day. We know this time of year can be stressful and want to ensure everyone is supported.

Please also join me in welcoming our summer intern that will be working in the Office of Disaster Mental Health. Gretchen Alexander is working towards her Master of Public Health with a concentration in Disaster Management at the University of Georgia. We welcome her to the team and thank her for her contributions in this month's newsletter!



Mental Health Awareness for Veterans



Photo of American flags in the breeze

1. Are there mental health resources available for veterans?

Yes! The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has a variety of mental health resources and treatment options on its website. On the main webpage, veterans and the public can explore mental health conditions by topic, which include depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and substance use. Each webpage provides an overview, symptoms, and testimonials from veterans. The tips listed below originate from this website.

2. How can friends and family support the veterans in their life?

- Provide a small act of kindness.
- **MaketheConnection.net** – a resource for veterans and their families where they can explore mental health information
- National Center for PTSD – provides information on ways that families can help their loved ones with PTSD
- Veterans Coffee Socials – provides information on how to organize a social event near you for veterans and other community members

3. What can you do if you encounter a veteran experiencing suicidal thoughts?

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs offers S.A.V.E. training that will help you act compassionately should you encounter a veteran in crisis.

- Signs of suicidal thinking should be recognized. These signs can include behaviors such as agitation, engaging in risky behavior, or withdrawing from loved ones.
- Ask the important question – are you thinking of killing yourself? Ask this question if you have identified the warning signs and make sure the question is not out of the blue.
- Validate the veteran's experience. Ask them to talk about their feelings and provide encouraging comments.
- Encourage treatment and expedite getting help. It's important to seek help immediately. Do not keep the veteran's suicidal ideation a secret and do not leave him/her alone.

4. As you plan for the holiday, be mindful of those with sensitivities!

While July 4th is a day for celebrating the nation's independence, the activities associated with this day impact some individuals more than others. The sounds and smells can be triggering for veterans and disaster survivors with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). There are five things to help veterans and disaster survivors cope with triggers during the holiday.

- Avoid avoidance: confront safe triggers gradually
- Remind yourself where you are and what is happening around you. Take long, slow deep breaths, and focus on the exhalation of each of these breaths.
- Change the body's temperature. Safely lowering body temperatures can remind someone where they are.
- Schedule meaningful activities that you enjoy.
- Prioritize your mental health and seek treatment.

Tools & Resources:

- [The Kim Foundation: Coping with PTSD During the Fourth of July](#)
- [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs-Mental Health Webpage](#)
- [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs-Resources for Family Member or Friend](#)
- [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs-Suicide Prevention](#)
- [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs-Lethal Means Safety](#)

Resources for Providers:

Disaster Mental Health Field Response Training: Summer Training Series

The Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities is offering this free training which covers the following topics:

- Short segment on the National Incident Management System
- The biology of stress and its impact on behavior
- Initial disaster mental health response
- Needs assessment and the FEMA Crisis Counseling Program
- Information on psychological first aid interventions
- Triage assessment and referral
- Self-care.

[Thursday, July 27, 2023](#)

10:00am – 12:00pm

Virtual (Microsoft Teams)

If you have any questions, please contact the DBHDD Office of Disaster Mental Health:

[Kalie Burke, Disaster Mental Health Coordinator](#)