

# Social media outreach for veteran suicide prevention reveals promise

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New research suggests brief online video training may be an effective way to provide suicide prevention skills to friends and family members of military veterans.

The study, led by researchers at the VA Portland Health Care System and Oregon Health & Science University, highlights an easily accessible avenue for reducing suicide among U.S. veterans—rates that have exceeded the [civilian population](#).

Most of those veterans aren't seeking care through the VA health care system, making them more difficult to reach. Instead, the study used [social media](#) to recruit 214 participants considered "gatekeepers" to [military veterans](#), including spouses and partners.

"If we can roll this out effectively using social media, you can imagine the possibilities of getting [training](#) out to friends, family and other potential gatekeepers," said lead author Alan Teo, M.D., a researcher at the VA Portland and associate professor of psychiatry in the OHSU School of Medicine. "Other trainings occur behind paywalls or you have to go to a physical location."

The study was published recently in the journal *Contemporary Clinical Trials Communications*.

The next stage of research will test the effectiveness of the training in a much larger group of participants, including measures such as the number of gatekeepers who provide a mental health resource or referral to a friend or family member. The video training in the study is known as "VA S.A.V.E.," for Signs; Ask; Validate; Encourage/Expedite.

If the training proves to be effective in getting veterans at risk for

suicide into [mental health care](#), Teo said the tool could be adapted for other populations, such as adolescents.

Social media channels could be equally successful in reaching other populations as well, he said.

"We're trying to reach people out in the community who may be outside of the [health](#) care system," Teo said. "That was a strength of this study."

**More information:** Alan R. Teo et al, Feasibility of recruitment and retention in a remote trial of gatekeeper training for close supports of military veterans: Mixed methods study, *Contemporary Clinical Trials Communications* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.conctc.2022.100993](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.conctc.2022.100993)

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