

# US Veterans Affairs announces plan to give free care to any vet in suicide crisis

January 16 2023, by Cara Murez

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While U.S. veterans are already eligible for emergency suicidal crisis

care, starting Tuesday they can get it for free.

Care available at any VA facility or any private facility will include up to 30 days of inpatient or crisis [residential care](#), the Department of Veterans Affairs announced Friday. It will also include up to 90 days of follow-up outpatient care and ambulance rides to hospitals. The veterans will not need to be enrolled in the VA system.

"Veterans in suicidal crisis can now receive the free, world-class emergency health care they deserve—no matter where they need it, when they need it or whether they're enrolled in VA care," VA Secretary Denis McDonough said in an agency [news release](#). "This expansion of care will save veterans' lives, and there's nothing more important than that."

The change will affect more than 18 million veterans, about twice as many as are enrolled in VA [medical care](#), NBC News reported.

This change was required by the [Veterans Comprehensive Prevention, Access to Care, and Treatment \(COMPACT\) Act of 2020](#).

"I am thrilled by Secretary McDonough's announcement," Rep. Mark Takano, D-Calif., former chair and now ranking member of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, told NBC News. "This new benefit removes cost from the equation when veterans are at imminent risk of self-harm and allows them to access lifesaving care when they need it most, regardless of whether the veteran has ever enrolled in or used VA healthcare benefits."

Suicide risk is a big issue for veterans, with 6,146 of those who served in the military dying by suicide in 2020 alone. The VA estimates that about 5,000 veterans are hospitalized in acute psychiatric units every month, NBC News reported. They are typically at imminent risk for harm, said

Cliff Smith, director of analytics, innovation and collaboration within the VA's Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention.

Smith said he hopes the [new policy](#) will remove a barrier to care.

"There have been a lot of situations where we know a [veteran](#) is in crisis somewhere but they're not at the hospital," Smith told NBC News.

"There were many situations where we knew there was a need, but because of financial concerns we weren't able to connect that need to a facility."

"We are addressing the anxiety associated with a bill or cost. That's off the table," Smith said, calling the new policy "hopefully life-changing for many [veterans](#)."

**More information:** The Suicide & Crisis [Lifeline](#) is available 24/7 to anyone by calling 988.

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