

Written Informed Consent for Suicide Prevention

The VFW's Concern:

Veteran suicide remains a crisis. An estimated 155,000 veterans have died by suicide since 2001, with nearly a third of these deaths occurring while under Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) care. Suicide rates among veterans ages 18–34 have more than doubled and remain significantly higher than among non-veterans.

Approximately 70 percent of veterans treated by VA are prescribed psychiatric medications and reporting has shown that nearly half of veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are prescribed multiple psychiatric medications at once, commonly referred to as “combat cocktails.” These prescription rates are substantially higher than those of non-veterans. Many of these medications also carry Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Boxed Warnings related to suicidal thoughts and behaviors, making careful monitoring and clear communication essential. VA’s Office of Inspector General has identified gaps in documentation of informed consent discussions and weaknesses in medication safety protocols. These findings make clear that we must strengthen communication and oversight across the system.

Psychiatric medications can be appropriate and life-changing when properly prescribed and monitored. But like any serious medical treatment, they require honest conversations and shared decision making. Written informed consent is already standard for many high-impact therapies and has not been shown to discourage care. By clearly explaining benefits, risks, alternatives, and expectations up front, written informed consent brings mental health treatment into the open and reinforces a simple truth—mental health care is health care. Transparency builds trust, keeps veterans engaged in care, and helps prevent avoidable crises. For these reasons, the VFW supports strengthening written informed consent and improving oversight of psychiatric prescribing practices to ensure veterans receive safe, informed, and high-quality care.

The VFW Urges Congress to:

Pass H.R.4837 / S.3314, *Written Informed Consent Act*, to expand written informed consent requirements to ensure veterans receive clear, written information about the benefits, risks, alternatives, and expectations associated with long-term psychiatric medications.

Pass H.R.6858, *Veteran Suicide Prevention Act*, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a review of the deaths of certain veterans who died by suicide, and the role prescribing practices and medication management may have played in these deaths.

Note: For H.R.4837 cosponsorship, please email Tyler Zidlicky at tyler.zidlicky@mail.house.gov.

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