

ASK THE QUESTION

A training and toolkit to develop cultural competency in partnership of the

Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs,
SAMHSA & DHHS

NEBRASKA

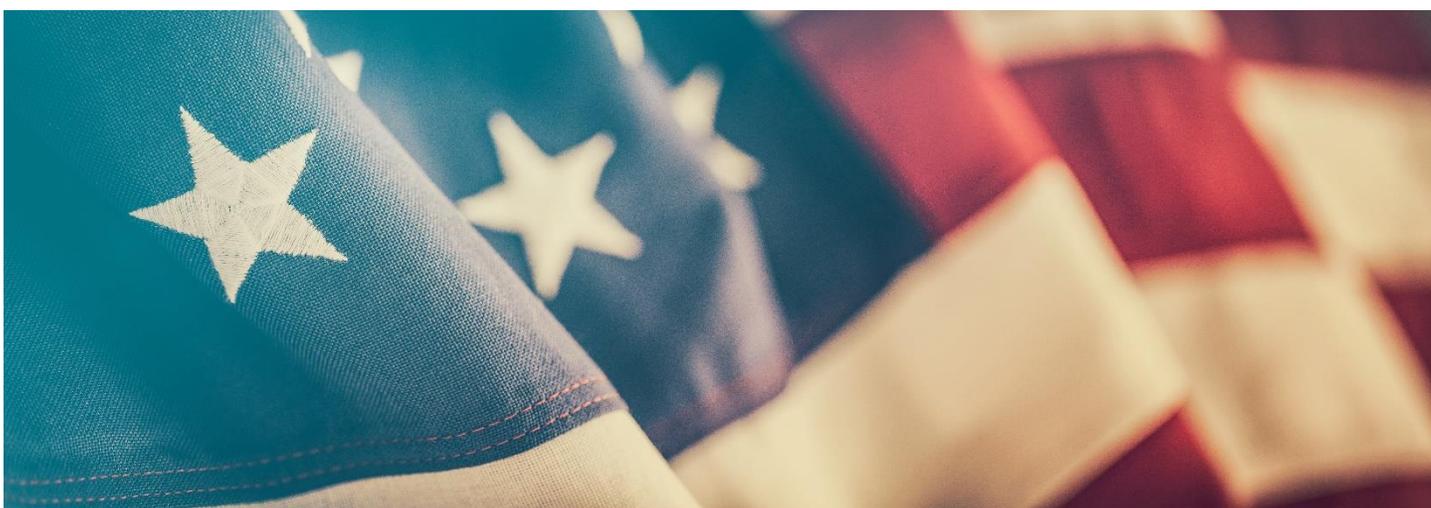
Good Life. Great Sacrifice.

VETERANS' AFFAIRS



UNIT 1: ASK THE QUESTION (ATQ)

The Nebraska Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Health and Human Services are partnering to “ask the question” of military service by individuals and family members. The goal is to increase awareness of state and federal benefits and services available to veterans in Nebraska. By doing so, more veterans will be able to connect with resources and services specific to their needs.



WHAT IS 'ASK THE QUESTION'?

The “Ask the Question” Campaign encourages all service providers to ask,

“Have you or a family member ever served in the military?”

This simple question can open the door to greater communication, and communication and understanding is at the heart of good care, services, and connections. Through this insight, it can help to create intentional strategies to better meet the healthcare and community resource needs of Service Members, Veterans, and their families.

Many of those who have served do not ask for help easily; military culture dictates self-sufficiency and sacrifice. Additionally, many do not ask for help because they want to save that help for a Veteran who “needs it more than I do”. The “Ask the Question” Campaign puts the responsibility on the service provider, on ALL OF US, to identify possible needs, thus removing barriers for the Service Members, Veterans, or their families.

HISTORY OF ASK THE QUESTION

LIEUTENANT COLONEL STEPHANIE RILEY'S STORY

Lt Col Stephanie Riley of the New Hampshire Air National Guard worked in the emergency room of a NH civilian hospital in 2013. She frequently witnessed individuals presenting with symptoms of headaches, dizziness and/or hearing loss. Many were irritable and depressed, struggling in their jobs and in their relationships. Based on their presenting symptoms, these patients were often diagnosed with migraines, provided short-term medications, and sent on their way. Lt Col Riley noticed, based on her own service experience, that many of these individuals might have served in the military, so she began to ask them. She discovered that many of the "migraine" patients were Veterans, possibly suffering from mild Traumatic Brain Injuries.

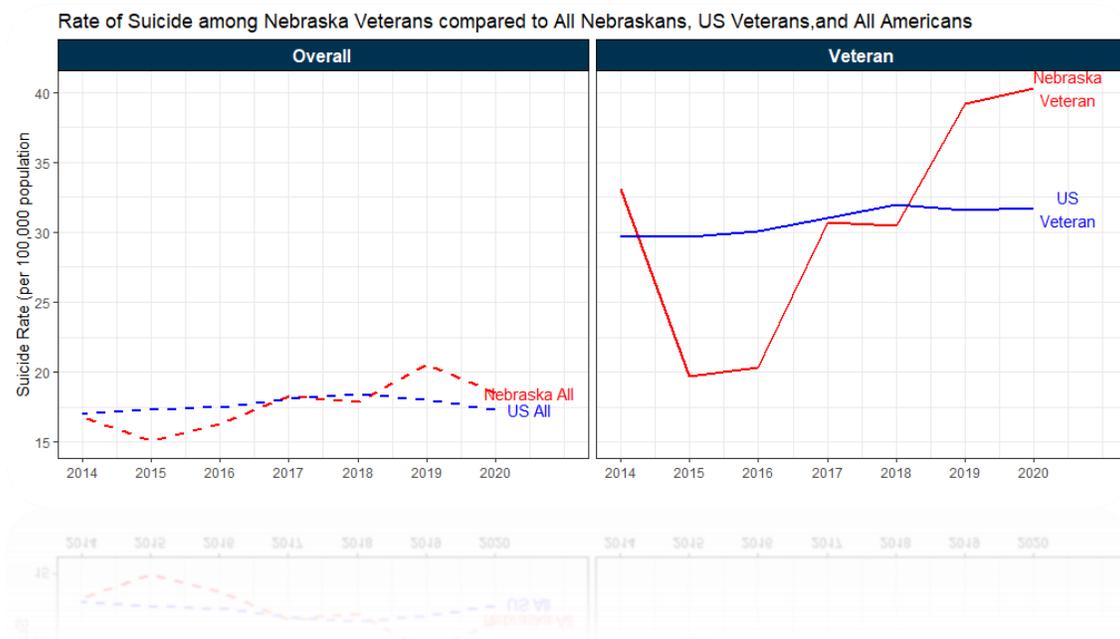
Later that same year, Lt Col Riley encountered a Veteran struggling with chronic head pain and other life difficulties. He had been to three different healthcare facilities in NH and not one asked if he had ever served in the military. By the time this Veteran encountered Lt Col Riley, it was too late; despite her efforts to help him get an accurate diagnosis and relevant treatment, the Veteran died by suicide.

Devastated, Lt Col Riley expressed her concern to many NH military and civilian leaders. She passionately advocated for the need to identify our Veterans and military family members as early as possible within the service delivery system. She recognized the critical role that community service providers play in providing service and care to Service Members, Veterans, and their families.

Across the country, over two-thirds of all Veterans choose to receive care and services in the community, rather than at their VA. And, while we know that most of our Veterans receive care in the community, we also know that many Veterans don't feel completely understood by health care professionals. The NH Legislative Commission on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) conducted a survey of NH Veterans asking about barriers in accessing care. Survey results indicated that the top barrier identified was stigma--discrimination, embarrassment, and shame. The 2nd highest barrier to accessing care was "I do not feel understood by the providers who serve me." This survey data mirrors veteran survey data from across the country.

Lt Col Stephanie Riley passed away from cancer in December of 2014. When she began her treatments, she went to her appointments in civilian clothes. She became frustrated with her providers' lack of interest in the fact that she had served and any role that exposures during her deployments may have played in her illness. So, one day she posted her story on the NH Commission on PTSD and TBI's Facebook page, and so began the NH Ask the Question Campaign with the support of the NH Department of Health and Human Services and guidance from the NH Commission on PTSD & TBI.

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO NEBRASKA



The suicide rate among Nebraska Veterans in 2020 was 40 deaths per 100,000 individuals, compared to 30 deaths among all US veterans.

Ask The Question helps to identify our Veterans and military family members as early as possible within the service delivery system. The critical role that community service providers play in providing service and care to Service Members, Veterans, and their families.

Across the country, over two-thirds of all Veterans choose to receive care and services in the community, rather than at their Veterans Affairs (VA) facility. And, while we know that most of our Veterans receive care in the community, we also know that many Veterans don't feel completely understood by health care professionals.



THE IMPACT OF ASKING

The goal of the "Ask the Question" (ATQ) Campaign, is to improve access to, and quality of, services for Service Members, Veterans, and their families by encouraging healthcare and social service providers to ask:

"Have you or a family member ever served in the military?"

The mission is to improve access to, and quality of, care for Veterans, Service Members, and military families by:

- Strengthening systems for identifying military members being served in community-based organizations.
- Enhancing military cultural competence through education and training of employees, providers, and staff; and
- Partnering with civilian-military organizations in the community

WHERE DO I COME IN?

The Nebraska Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Health and Human Services are encouraging service providers and local agencies across the state to "Ask the Question" (*Have you or a family member ever served in the military?*) on intake forms and interviews where appropriate. These include:

- Hospitals
- Mental Health Care Centers
- Senior Centers
- Employment Offices
- Courts
- Schools
- Law Enforcement



SUCCESS TOOLS: THE TOOLBOX

The goal of the Ask the Question (ATQ) Campaign is to improve access to, and quality of, services for Service Members, Veterans, and their families by encouraging providers to Ask the Question:

"Have you or a family member ever served in the military?"

WHAT IS THE ATQ CAMPAIGN?

The ATQ Campaign is an initiative aimed at recruiting ALL services, facilities, organizations, and providers to ask, "Have you or a family member ever served in the military?" so that any person who has ever served in the military (regardless of discharge status, era or age) and their family members can be identified.

WHY DO WE NEED TO ASK THE QUESTION IN THAT WAY?

Do not ask "Are you a Veteran?" It is paramount that the question be asked in a manner that allows all who have worn the uniform to feel included in the inquiry. Not everyone who has served identifies as a "Veteran" either because they do not feel comfortable with the term, their discharge status prohibits it, or because their service involved work with the National Guard or Reserves and they were never activated. This specifically worded question also allows family members to respond in the affirmative if their loved one is actively serving or if he/she falls into one of the above categories.

WHY DO WE NEED TO IDENTIFY EVERYONE WHO HAS EVER SERVED IN THE MILITARY AND THEIR FAMILIES?

Military service comes with many unique experiences and occupational exposures, most of which civilians will never have. Understanding the culture from which the individual may be operating, knowing about possible variables in their health, and in their family situation will allow the provider to deliver more effective, comprehensive, and culturally competent care or services. You might even connect them with benefits or services they did not know they were entitled to! Additionally, knowing about one's service allows us to show our appreciation for the sacrifices they have made.

WHO SHOULD WE ASK?

Everyone! Men, women, children, older adults, young adults, those with disabilities...everyone! Even if you have been serving or treating the person for a long time, it is never too late to ask. You may be surprised at how many people say "Yes!". Let them know that you have recently learned that this information can sometimes be important to the delivery of your care or service; therefore, you have made a commitment to ask.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: WHY ARE YOU ASKING ME FOR THIS INFORMATION?

A: While we have always treated Service Members, Veterans, and their families, we have since learned how important it is that any care, diagnosis, or treatment we provide to you considers all possible exposures or unique experiences had during military service including during peace time, foreign or domestic. In doing so, we can provide you the best and most informed care. For example, military service often comes with unique vaccinations, even if you never deployed, and other chemical exposures such as mustard gas or burn pit smoke. Depending on your health concerns, some of these possible exposures will be important for us to know about.

Q: DO I NEED TO HAVE BEEN DEPLOYED OR HONORABLY DISCHARGED FOR MY MILITARY SERVICE TO BE RELEVANT?

A: Absolutely not! Our practice appreciates all those who have served! We also recognize that there are unique exposures and medical conditions that are relevant to military service that may not be deployment-related, such as vaccinations, training-related injuries, and chemical exposures.

Q: WILL MY INFORMATION BE SHARED WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OR OTHER THIRD PARTY?

A: No. While we are very proud of the Veterans we serve, consistent with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability (HIPAA) Act of 1996, we will safeguard your service status and will not share this information with any third party without your written consent. We hold your privacy sacred.

Q: HOW WILL THIS INFORMATION BE USED?

A: Your history of military service will be captured in your medical record so that any provider in our system who can treat you will have access to all relevant information. Also, this information will be used to document the volume of Service Members, Veterans, and family members for whom we provide care (just as we document the number of children, people with disabilities or people over the age of 65, etc.) so we can consider our patient population when improvement efforts in our facility are made. Above all else, your health and well-being are our #1 priority. By knowing all there is to know about your health, we will be able to treat the “whole” you.

Q: WHAT IF I DON'T WANT TO PROVIDE THIS INFORMATION?

A: You are under no obligation to report your military service. We will always strive to provide you with the best possible care.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR PROVIDERS

- [VA/NC-PTSD Community Provider Toolkit](#) - resource for health care professionals working with veterans outside of the VA health care system with information and tools relevant to veterans' mental health and well-being curated especially for community providers.
- [Have You Ever Served?](#) - military health history pocket card for physicians, information for health professionals, and information for veterans.
- [VA Military Health History Pocket Card](#) - resource to help clinicians understand veterans' medical problems and complaints as well as establish rapport and working partnerships with their veteran patients.
- [Veterans' Health Administration TRAIN Courses for Providers](#) (requires account creation) - gateway into the TRAIN Learning Network, the most comprehensive catalog of public health training opportunities which provides quality training opportunities for professionals who protect and improve the public's health.

UNIT 2: IMPLEMENTATION- BUILDING A TEAM AND FOSTERING A CULTURE

Serving Veterans is about more than simply stating that your organization is "veteran/military friendly." To serve a population genuinely, it is imperative to know them (those you serve AND those you employ), welcome them, and most of all care about what makes them unique. A checklist "Ask, Link, Collaborate: Starting & Sustaining" is included in the Toolbox at the end of this unit for organizations to use as a guide to evaluate, plans for building a team, foster a culture, and operationalize Ask the Question within policies, practices and procedures.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY AND BOLSTER STAKEHOLDERS

While senior-level management ultimately has the responsibility for the culture of an organization, there are other interested and viable stakeholders throughout every level of the organization that should be actively engaged and that will help ensure success.

Obtaining commitment from the executive level and engaging Veterans in clinical and administrative management positions are important steps; it is equally important to involve colleagues, employees, and staff who are not Veterans themselves but are family members or dear friends with someone who has served; or simply individuals who express and demonstrate interest in serving Veterans. A multidisciplinary team such as this will bring the needed diversity and passion to your initiative.

INITIATE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TEAM

Send a system-wide email: include everyone working (and volunteering) for your organization, from senior executives, to physicians, to custodial and maintenance staff. Ask the Question in the email, invite everyone to self-identify as having served in the military or as being a part of a military family.

The email might say something like this:

Have you or anyone in your family ever served in the military? As [insert name of organization/facility] works to better serve those who have served in our nation's military, we recognize that many of our employees have served too; whether it be active duty, in the Guard or Reserves or as a proud family member on the home front.

Please reply to this email with an answer to the question: Have you or anyone in your family ever served in the military?

[Insert name of facility] would like to have the opportunity to show our appreciation for your service and for your contribution to [inset name of facility]'s mission. Please do not reply all- this information will not be shared without your expressed permission. As we develop our commitment to be more mindful of how we serve those who have served, we hope to engage our employees in the task of presenting a more welcoming and friendlier environment for those Service Members, Veterans and their families that choose our facility/organization for their care/services. Upon receiving a "yes" to this question, we may follow up with you for ideas, personal insights, and possible ways you can choose to contribute and be involved in these efforts. Involvement, just as answering this question, is completely voluntary. Additionally, if you answer "no" to this question but would be interested in being involved in this initiative, please let us know!

The response to this email will provide you with the beginnings of a team. Getting this initial team together for a first introduction and brain storming session will be critical to generating the enthusiasm necessary to see "veteran champions" rise and evolve into your leaders. Share your vision for the initiative, get their ideas, and encourage them to recruit others.

Ideally, your team should have a senior sponsor who can keep executives and other senior leaders apprised of the effort and assist in key decision making. In a perfect world, both an operational and clinical executive would co-lead your efforts. When the clinical benefits are operationalized, the culture will transition more seamlessly. When your employees feel that "this is just how we do things here" the initiative has been a success.

If this initial invitation fails to generate sufficient team members, consider providing continuing education or a luncheon educational meeting about serving Service Members, Veterans, and their families to help stimulate interest and enthusiasm. Busy employees sometimes need to be reminded why they want to take the time to participate in such an initiative. Have a point-person available in the room to catch those who show interest, resend the email that day as an immediate follow up to the activity, follow up again in 3 days. Consider including what the time commitment will be and whether that time will be allowed to be taken during the workday or outside. Make sure managers and clinical team leaders are promoting the initiative by talking about it and reminding employees to respond to the email.

DEVELOPING YOUR TEAM AND CULTURE

After the initial email to introduce the concept of self-identifying, begin to include the question "Have you or a family member ever served in the military?" in the orientation for new employees so that self-identifying becomes a part of your facility/organization's culture. Your human resources department should be able to help you with the facilitation of this information gathering. Including a member of HR on your team is ideal and will aid in culture change. It is important to make clear that identification and involvement is voluntary.

Consider allowing/encouraging those who choose to self-identify as having served to display their affiliation on their name badge/ID, lapel, or lanyard, etc. For example, a mother of a Marine might wear a yellow ribbon pin with the Marine logo on it, a physician who went to medical school with the Air Force might

wear an Air Force logo on his/her ID card. Employees and staff who didn't serve but want to be involved and show support might choose to wear an American flag pin. Encouraging displays of service, patriotism and support improves the morale of both employees and patients/clients who have served. *Refer to Appendix for How to Honor & Display the American Flag. Provide to staff/employees to avoid unintended improper use or display of the flag.*

Observing displays of military service often results in Service Members, Veterans and their families choosing to self-identify, and generates the beginnings of a comfort and trust that may allow for greater disclosure of possible military related conditions, symptoms or needs.

Your facility/organization may also choose to provide such symbols of service to further validate your appreciation for your military connected employees and staff. Examples might be:

- ID Tag holders
- lanyards,
- pins that indicate VETERAN status.

Wall of Honor is a popular way many facilities choose to highlight employees and staff who have served, or their family members who are actively deployed. If your facility would like to pursue this type of public display, here a few guidelines to consider:

- Permission MUST be granted by the individual who will be named or displayed on the Wall.
- DO NOT ask: Would you like to be displayed on our Wall of Honor?
- Inform the individual exactly where the Wall will be displayed.
- Inform them of exactly what you are requesting permission to display—name, photo, service information, etc.
- Allow them to decide exactly which photo, how their name is printed, what information about their service will be displayed, etc.
- Send them a proof of the whole display of themselves before it is mounted.
- Invite them to the unveiling of the Wall, make it an event, respect their choice to attend or not attend.

BOLSTER AND CREATE SUSTAINABILITY

Provide opportunities for veteran champions to inform and design the initiative. Their military experience and expertise can aid in the design of services, materials, and culturally appropriate marketing approaches.

Establish the needs of your facility and decide what sub-projects will be pursued. Identify Veterans and patriots with the skill sets and organizational insight to lead those sub-projects. Have them form teams to execute assigned goals. Sub-projects may evolve or dissolve as necessary to support the current direction of the project.

STEP 2: EDUCATE LEADERSHIP, EMPLOYEES, AND STAFF

It is essential that your facility, if aiming to become a more “veteran/military friendly” environment, familiarizes your employees and volunteers (from the greeter at the door, to the reception staff, to medical providers and administrators) in the culture of military service and the unique needs of those who have served and their family members.

The education and depth of cultural understanding required for your employees will vary depending on the expected professional engagement they have with your customers/patients/clients. For example, your main entry greeters do not necessarily need to be familiar with the possible exposures experienced by an Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) Veteran, but they do need to know how to confidently and respectfully thank a Veteran for his/her service and engage in appropriate and warm small talk regarding the military when opportunities arise (i.e. upon engaging with an individual wearing a hat denoting his/her service). It is important to note, as with any first impression of your organization, this first in-person contact might be the most important opportunity to set forth a validating and trusting environment where the Veteran will feel understood and embraced.

Align the program design to your organizational goals of patient-centered experience and delivery of high-quality care. In this way, the initiative will be fully integrated into the mission and vision of the organization. Consider using tools provided at the end of this unit and in the Appendix to educate staff and ensure consistent messaging.

MILITARY CULTURE TRAINING: THE BASICS

All employees, regardless of the level of patient/customer engagement, **MUST** be introduced to the basics of military culture and service. This first training is an opportunity to lay the foundation for the what and why of Ask the Question; as well as affirming the initiative to become a more veteran/military-friendly organization.

In-person trainings are ideal because questions and discussion of the topics supplement the information, enrich the learning experience, and allow individuals to connect with the material. Web based education is also widely available.

Ideally, such a training would become part of your new employee orientation and offered annually to all employees as a refresher. Again, lending to the “this is just how we do things here” culture of appreciating and serving military-connected individuals and families.

Other topics to consider educating staff about to achieve a more culturally competent care/service delivery system:

Stigma

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Re-integration Challenges

Depression

Survivor Guilt

Suicide Prevention

Caring for Caregivers

Substance Use/Abuse

Moral Injury

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Military Sexual Trauma (MST)

Chronic Pain

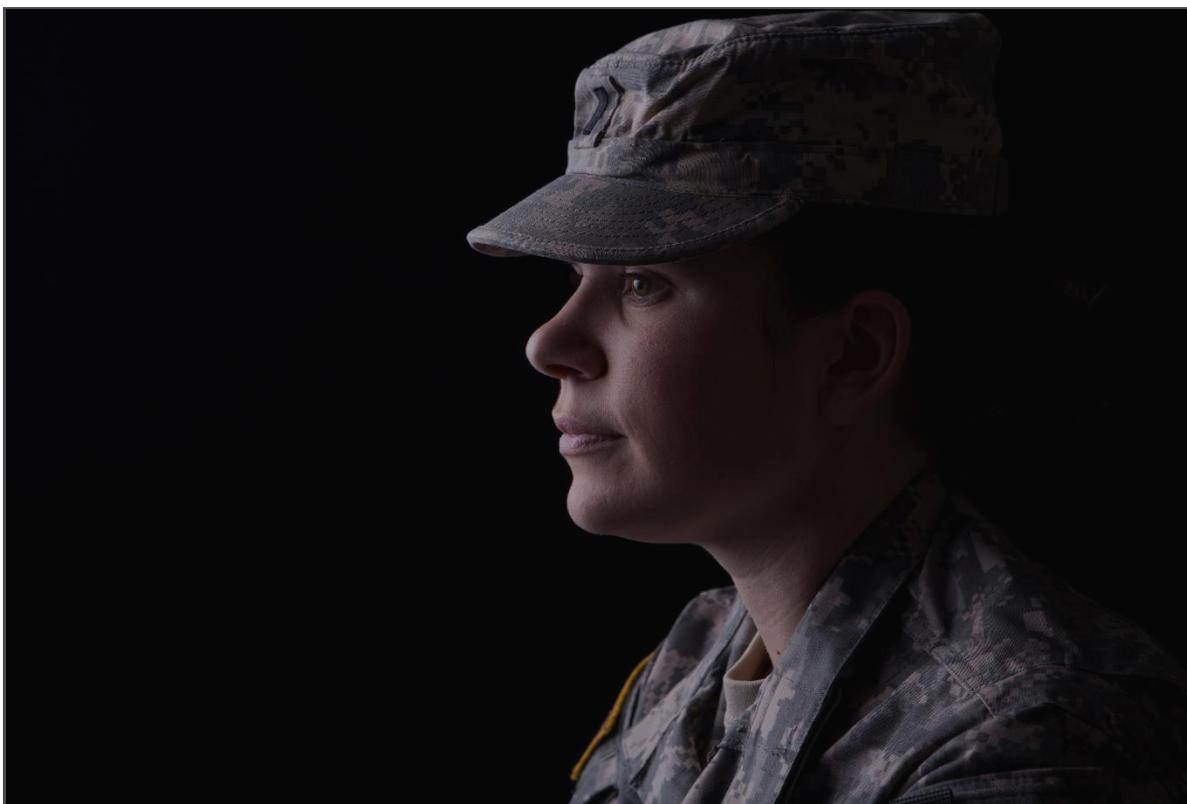
Marriage and Family Challenges

Use of Service Animals

Providing culturally informed care for Service Members, Veterans, and their families, will, undoubtedly, be closely aligned with your organization's mission, vision, and values because it facilitates more equitable care, thus increasing quality of care.

STEP 3: EDUCATE YOUR PATIENTS/CUSTOMERS/CLIENTS

Successful transformation into a more "Veteran/military friendly" organization and delivery system requires that the system is effectively utilized by those you intend to serve. Your staff may be educated and culturally aware, but if the Service Members, Veterans, and their family members that walk through your lobby, hallways, or sit in your waiting rooms are not made aware of your initiative or are not encouraged to disclose their military connections the opportunity to provide more equitable care will be lost.



Posters, flyers, table tents and other visuals are imperative to successful transformation. Creating these visuals may be the task of your team, or they can be created by local students, clubs or groups seeking to contribute their talents and time to a worthy cause. Slogans and catch phrases are also helpful and may contribute to the dissemination of a consistent message across your delivery system. At the very least, the message conveyed must communicate your desire as facility/organization to know if they or a family member has ever served in the military. Also, consider publicly advertising Veteran or military related events being held at, or sponsored by your organization/facility. Education for the public at large not only aids in the dissemination of your intent and messaging, but also generates goodwill and public awareness of the needs of Service Members, Veterans, and their families.

REMEMBER: RAPPORT BEGINS AT THE FRONT DOOR

Despite your best intentions, NEVER say anything like:

"I'm glad you made it home safe/okay/unharmed, etc."

or

"I hope you didn't have to kill anyone!"

Be sure to also ask those accompanying the individual displaying their service if they served too. For example, ask the elderly woman wheeling her elderly husband into your lobby **"Did you serve in the military as well?"** Remember that **women** serve too, *and they always have.*

Consider engaging children accompanied by a parent who is wearing a symbol of their service by making an exclamation such as, **"Wow, a Marine! You must be very proud of your Mom/Dad!"**

If you have a personal connection to the branch of service, do not be afraid to say so. Just keep it light and positive and be willing to accept gratitude in return if the individual chooses to thank YOU for your service or family connection.

Make sure the lobby has an American Flag or the facility has one flying outside (or both). Be sure the flag is displayed correctly. Please refer to "How to Honor and Display the American Flag" on DAV.org describing how to properly honor and display the American Flag. Lobby, elevator, and waiting rooms are good places to have posters/flyers/table tents informing your patients/clients/customers that you want to know about their military connection.

UNIT 3: WHEN THE ANSWER IS “YES”



MILITARY SERVICE HEALTH HISTORY

Please complete this brief health history if you have EVER served in the military.

Why are we asking for this information? Military service comes with some unique experiences and exposures, many that civilians would never have. Some of those experiences or exposures might affect your health, now or in the future. Knowing this can help us make sure we are aware of all possible factors when it comes to any health concerns you may have or diagnosis or treatments you may need.

BRANCH: _____ Dates of service: _____

Please circle YES or NO

1. **YES NO** - Do you have a service-connected condition or are you rated at the VA for any injuries or experiences?
 CHECK if you are interested in learning how to file a VA claim?

2. **YES NO** - Do you receive any of your healthcare at the VA?
 CHECK if you are interested in learning how to enroll in VA care.

3. **YES NO** - Did you have any illness or injuries while in the service? (i.e., wounds, fevers, stomach bugs, animal bites) Do you have any scars or nagging aches/pains?

4. **YES NO** - Is there any chance you were exposed to chemical or biological agents? Even during training?

5. **YES NO** - Have you had any exposure to the following: explosions, blasts, radiation, bullet wounds or fragments, excessive heat or cold, vehicle or aircraft crash, excessive noise, or vibration?

6. **YES NO** - Did you get any tattoos or were you exposed to any needles (medical treatment, blood transfusion, or drug use) in a foreign country? OR have you had contact with blood or bodily fluids of someone who did?
 CHECK if you would like to be screened for Hepatitis C or HIV

Thank you. We are very grateful for your service. We are honored to have been selected for your health care needs.

WHEN SPEAKING TO A VETERAN/SERVICE MEMBER



The following is a series of Steps to be taken when encountering an individual who self-identifies as having served in the military (Step 1 & 2 can be applied when encountering an individual wearing a service-related hat/shirt/pin, etc.). These steps and questions are to be adapted by each facility or organization based on the information needs for the services or care provided. Not all steps or questions will be relevant or appropriate for every program.

STEP 1

Show appreciation in whichever way you are most comfortable and whichever way seems appropriate for the given situation.

Say: "Awesome!", "Wonderful!", "Thank you for your service!", "Welcome home!", "You are much appreciated", "Very cool").

Eye contact is must, handshakes are optional.

STEP 2

Ask with curiosity and interest: "In which branch did you serve?", "When did you get out?", "Which years did you serve?" You might also ask: "What made you choose the [insert Branch served]?" "What was your job?"

If he or she **DECLINES** to answer your follow questions OR asks, "**WHY** are you asking me about this?"

Say: "I appreciate your service and am simply curious to know more about you."

These next steps are intended for care and service level inquiry only. These are not casual questions and should not be asked outside of a professional setting.

STEP 3

Ask: "Do you mind if I ask you a few health-related questions about your military service?"

If he or she DECLINES to answer questions OR asks, "WHY do you need to know about that?"

Say: "Military service comes with unique experiences and exposures, many that civilians would never have. Some of those experiences or exposures might affect your health, now or in the future. Knowing about those things can help me make sure I am aware of all possible factors when it comes to any health concerns you may have or diagnosis or treatments you may need."

Examples to give if needed:

- breathing problems and chemical or particulate exposures,
- nerve sensitivity concerns and extreme cold exposure,
- memory or concentration issues and exposure to blasts or explosions,
- hearing issues and firearms use or explosions,
- certain unique vaccinations or medical interventions,
- blood borne exposures, or if you received tattoos in a foreign country.

If he or she still DECLINES to answer military-related questions, show your appreciation for their service again and STOP the military health inquiry.

STEP 4

Ask the following series of questions:

- "Do you have a service-connected condition or are you rated for any injuries or experiences at the VA? Do you receive any of your healthcare at the VA?"
- "Did you have any exposure to explosions or blasts? Radiation? Bullet wounds or fragments? Excessive heat or cold exposures? Vehicle or Aircraft Accidents? Excessive noise or vibration?"
- "Did you experience any abuse or assaults, combat or otherwise, or any other traumas you want me to know about?"
 - YES: "Would you like to be screened for PTSD or Depression (at your appointment)?"
If YES, refer to PCL-5 or PHQ-9.
- "Would you be interested in any information on supports or services that may be available?"
 - YES, provide resources handout.

- “Did you get any tattoos or were you exposed to any needles (medical treatment, blood transfusion, or drug use) in a foreign country? Or have you had contact with blood or bodily fluids of someone who did?”
 - *YES*: “Have you ever been screened for Hepatitis C or HIV? Would you like to be?”
If *YES*, arrange for labs or make appropriate medical referral.

Note: If the individual answered YES to any of the above questions, remind him/her that they might qualify for compensation with the VA, offer more information on filing a claim for compensation or refer to a Veterans Services Officer who can assist with filing a claim.

- “Do you have any concerns about your housing?”
 - *YES*: “Would you like information on some supports that may be available?” If *YES*, provide resources handout.
- “Have you ever had thoughts of suicide or homicide?”
 - *YES*: “Are you feeling unsafe today? When was the last time you felt suicidal or homicidal?”
If *YES*, follow your facility/organizational procedure for suicidal or homicidal ideation.
- “Do you have any concerns about substance use?”
 - *YES*: “Would you like to be screened for a substance use disorder (at your appointment)?”
If *YES*, refer to the ASSIST or AUDIT.
 - “Would you be interested in any information on supports or services that may be available?”
If *YES*, provide resources handout.

*All YES responses and the relevant details should be recorded in the patient's **Problem List** in their medical record so that all medical encounters and associated providers will have the opportunity to consider the impact of the above exposures or needs on any presenting concern.*

STEP 5

Thank the individual again for his/her service and remind them that you are honored they chose your facility for their health care needs.

WHEN SPEAKING TO A FAMILY MEMBER OF A VETERAN/SERVICE MEMBER



The following is a series of steps to be taken when encountering an individual who self-identifies as having a family member who serves or has served in the military. These steps and questions are to be adapted by each facility or organization based on the information needs for the services or care provided. Not all steps or questions will be relevant or applicable.

- If the answer is *NO*: **“Would you like information on eligibility to enroll or filing for compensation?”**
Provide them with the handout: VA Enrollment, Compensation and Benefits.

- *YES*: **“Can you tell me more about that?”**

Examples of service-connected injury or experience prompts to gain more information:

- **“Did you have any illness or injuries while in the service (i.e., wounds, fevers, stomach bugs, animal bites)?”**
- **“Do you have any scars? Or nagging aches/pains?”**
- **“Is there any chance you were exposed to chemical or biological agents? Even during training?”**

STEP 1

Show appreciation in whichever way you are most comfortable and whichever way seems appropriate for the given situation (i.e., say “Thank you for your service! We know that the family serves, too”). Eye contact is a must, handshakes are optional.

STEP 2

Ask with curiosity and interest:

- “In which branch did he/she serve?”
- “When did he/she get out?”
- “Which years did he/she serve?”

Show similar signs of appreciation as in Step 1. Add: “Thank you for the sacrifices you and your family have made.”

If he or she DECLINES to answer your follow up questions or asks, “WHY are you asking me about this?”

Say: “I appreciate military service and am simply curious to know more about you and your family.”

These next steps are intended for Care and Service level inquiry only. These are not casual questions and should not be asked outside of a professional setting.

STEP 3

Ask with respect and a positive attitude how military life/service has been for them and their family. Let the individuals define for you what role (if any) the military plays in his/her family.

You might also ask, “Have you moved around a lot? Has your family been through any deployments? How are your children doing with that?”

STEP 4

“Does your Veteran need any caregiving?”

If NO: Skip to Step 5.

If YES: “Are you the primary caregiver for your Veteran?”

YES: “Do you mind if I ask you a few questions about your caregiving role and responsibilities?”

“Are you involved with Caregiver Supports at the VA?”

If not, “Are you interested in learning about some of the services that may be available?”
Provide a resources handout.

Ask the following questions to gain a better understanding of the caregiving situation:

- “How long have you been the caregiver for your son, daughter, spouse, etc.?”
- “Does he/she currently live with you?”
- “How often do you provide caregiver support?”
- “How much support do YOU get from others for your caregiver role?”
- “Do you provide (or try to provide) help with:
 - Eating, bathing, walking, etc.?
 - Hands-on care like wound care or physical therapy?
 - Household work, chores, meals, laundry, shopping?
 - Transportation to appointments?
 - Money management?
 - Coordinating his/her care?
 - Planning his/her social activities?
 - Emotional support?
 - Financial support (providing money for bills, etc.)?
 - Other tasks?”
- “Does your role as a caregiver make working, going to school, parenting, socializing, or managing your own home difficult or impossible?”
- “How are you:
 - handling your own commitments and responsibilities?
 - sleeping/taking time to rest?
 - spending time with family and friends?
 - taking a break when you need to?
 - having a positive attitude?
 - handling stressful events when they occur?
 - handling your own anger?
 - staying healthy, both physically and mentally?
 - feeling like you’re doing a good job as a caregiver?”

STEP 5

“Are there any particular difficulties you’re facing as a result of your family’s military service (i.e. financial, employment, educational or social difficulties, family member health concerns, self-care, childcare or elder care difficulties, etc.)?”

YES: "Are you interested in learning about some supports or opportunities that may be available?" If yes, provide a resources handout.

STEP 6

Thank the individual again for their family's service and sacrifice and remind them that you are honored they chose your facility for their health care needs.

RESOURCES

TO CONNECT A VETERAN/SERVICE MEMBER TO VHA HEALTH CARE

- starts with filling out a 1010 EZ form.
 - This can be completed online at www.1010ez.med.va.gov/sec/vha/1010ez.
 - Apply by calling (877)222-8387
 - Veterans that need assistance applying for service-connected disability can locate their County Veteran Service Officer at www.veterans.Nebraska.gov/cvso

VETERAN AND FAMILY RESOURCES

- Caregiver Support Program: (855)260-3274
- Women Veterans Program: (800)457-5796 ext. 4906
- Intimate Partner Violence Program: (402)995-4103
- LGBTQ Veteran Care Coordinator: (402)995-3166
- National Homeless Veterans Hotline: (877)424-3838
- Veteran Crisis Line: 988, (press 1 at the prompt)
- Postvention resources for Veterans and family members: www.taps.org

COMMUNITY PROVIDER RESOURCE

- The Suicide Risk Management Consultation Program is available for community providers and provides consultation on Veteran patients that are at risk for suicide. Their email is SRMconsult@va.gov .
- Military Culture Training, 15 Things Veterans want Healthcare Providers to Know, and other free Veteran related trainings from PsychArmor: [All Courses - PsychArmor](#)



NEBRASKA VA LOCATIONS

www.va.gov

NEBRASKA/WESTERN IOWA VAMC

4101 Woolworth Ave.
Omaha, NE 68105
(402)346-8800

BELLEVUE VA CLINIC

2206 Longo Drive Suite
Bellevue, NE 68005
(402)591-4500

HOLDREGE VA CLINIC

1118 Burlington Street
Holdrege, NE 68949
(308)995-3760

NORTH PLATTE VA CLINIC

300 E. 3rd Street, Suite 302
North Platte, Ne 69101
(308)532-6906

GRAND ISLAND VAMC

2201 N. Broadwell Ave.
Grand Island, NE 68803
(308)382-360

LINCOLN VA CLINIC

102600 S. 70th street
Lincoln, Ne 68510
(402)489-3802

NORFOLK VA CLINIC

3204 Raasch Drive
Norfolk, NE 68701
(402)370-4570

THANK YOU

SAMHSA

NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS

NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

NEW HAMPSHIRE 'ASK THE QUESTION'

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