



A Comparative Study of Veteran Suicide Data from Multiple Sources

May 2026

Introduction & Data Sources

Suicide in the Veteran community is a pervasive problem. The rate of suicides (measured in number of deaths per 100,000 people) is consistently higher for Veteran populations than non-Veteran populations at all levels analyzed. However, accessing reliable data about deaths is difficult. Sources can be unreliable, and reliable data sources can often be years behind due to data validation. These data issues lead to limited numbers of studies being performed to show the true scale of this problem. This report reviews and compares the results of two entities performing analyses on Veteran suicide data:

- The Fire Watch
- The Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA)

The Fire Watch began in 2019 as a coalition between five Northeast Florida counties (Baker, Clay, Duval, Nassau, and St. Johns) to reduce the rate of suicide among Veterans throughout the community. The goal of the program is to end Veteran suicides by creating a network of Watch Standers – local civilians and Veterans trained to connect Veterans in crisis with the resources that can save their lives. The best areas to deploy boots on the ground to recruit and train Watch Standers and increase awareness are determined based on strategic data analysis. The Fire Watch uses data provided by the Florida Department of Health (DOH) to see, year by year, the frequency of Veteran suicides. Combining this data with data from the US Census Bureau's *American Community Survey* allowed The Fire Watch team to identify the Veteran suicide rate at certain granularities and measure relationships between Veteran suicide and socioeconomic factors. The granularities for the report are defined by the DOH data. Since 2022 and under the direction of the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs, The Fire Watch has now taken its Veterans suicide prevention programming statewide.

THE FIRE WATCH

- 2023 data made available April 2025
- *Source:* Florida DOH with cause of death named by Medical Examiner
- *Geography:* Florida by county and state
- *Span:* 12 years of historical data

VETERANS' AFFAIRS

- 2023 data made available December 2025
- *Source:* National Death Index from the CDC combined with the DoD Defense Manpower Data Center list of Veterans and service members
- *Geography:* Nationwide by State
- *Span:* 20 years of historical data



Key Findings of Each Report



There was a slight increase in the Veteran suicide rate and overall suicide numbers from 2022 to 2023; however, the overall suicide numbers stayed below the baseline of 2019. These results were consistently identified at a county and region level. When evaluating numbers for 2023, Veteran suicides were most frequently committed by white Veterans (93%) who make up 75% of the Veteran population. The proportion of minority Veteran suicides has a statistically significant increase over the evaluation period of 2022 to 2023. Male Veterans account for the majority of suicides, with 96% of suicides, males also represent 89% of the population. In 2023, there was a major increase in overall suicides for Veterans aged 35-54 getting to levels more typical of younger and older Veterans (18-34 and 75+).

The mechanism of suicide was primarily firearms, with 77% of former service member suicides being committed via firearm discharge. This number represents a statistically significant difference versus the civilian population (47%).

Current and Future Initiatives

Grow the Watch Stander Program to empower the community to identify and intervene for Veterans in crisis.

Compare Veteran Suicide rates with the number of calls to Veteran crisis lines to identify the impact of the availability of such support.

Estimate the reach of the Watch Stander program by measuring the proportion of Watch Standers who have encountered and aided a Veteran.

VA



**U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs**

The 2025 analysis for the VA, reporting on data for 2023, found that the rate of suicide had slightly increased. However, the total number of suicides for 2023 is slightly lower than 2022 and still less than the years 2008-2019. This trend is similar to the nationwide rates for non-Veteran populations as the rate and total for 2023 had decreased compared to 2022. Rates are highest for middle aged Veterans (35-54) and male Veterans. Firearms are overwhelmingly the mechanism of suicide for Veterans.

When subgroups were analyzed, higher rates were identified in VHA Veterans (those using VA medical facilities recently), those with diagnosed mental health and substance abuse disorders, and within 12 months of separation from active military service. However, there was a slight decrease in overall suicides, and rate for VHA Veterans from 2022 to 2023.

Current and Future Initiatives

Community Prevention (SP 2.0) incorporates state- and community-level programs that identify and screen service members and Veterans, promote connectedness, and increase lethal means safety and safety planning.

Clinical initiatives including the incorporation of telehealth in psychotherapy and Suicide Prevention in the Emergency Department (SPED) to develop post discharge safety plans for high-risk Veterans.

25.6%

Reduction in Veteran
suicides from 2019 in
Northeast Florida
The Fire Watch
2023

4.2%

Reduction in Veteran
suicides from 2019 in the
state of Florida
Veterans' Affairs
2023

Comparing Outcomes

To make the most reliable comparison, 2023 was analyzed as it offers the most recent complete dataset for a thorough analysis. The data provided by DOH is typically published 8 months prior to the release of the VA report. Based on our analysis, the DOH data functions as a proxy metric of the VA's data.

Rate of Suicide

When considering the pattern in suicides per year, the datasets had similar trends between groups, with the rate of Veterans dying by suicide increasing through 2023. Both The Fire Watch and the VA report declines from 2018 to 2020 with a rise in 2021 and 2022. Due to The Fire Watch and VA's data having a high correlation rate, The Fire Watch can be used as a proxy to predict for 2024 and 2025 to give expectations for VA's numbers over a year in advance.

Based on current data, we observed a spike with Veteran suicide rates and counts in 2024. However, there is an expected recovery to be seen in 2025 with the rate of suicides returning to 2023 numbers and the count to be the second lowest since 2019.

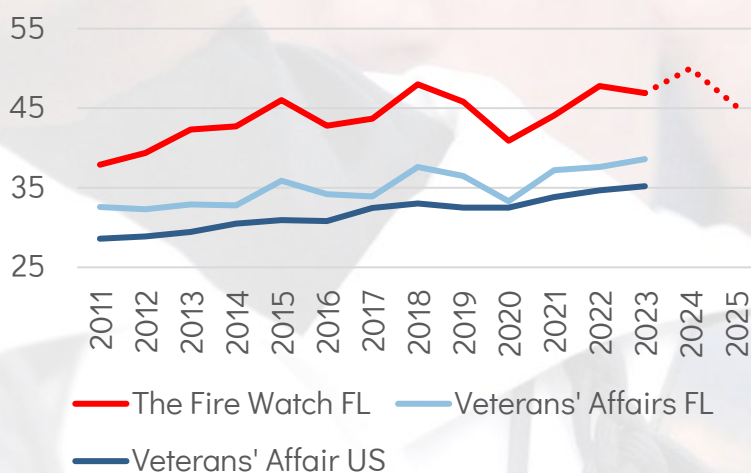
Mechanism of Suicide

When evaluating the mechanism of suicide, each study independently found that the majority of Veteran suicides are related to firearm discharge. Further, each analysis (throughout Northeast Florida, statewide, and nationwide), found that the use of firearms was significantly higher than in non-Veteran populations.

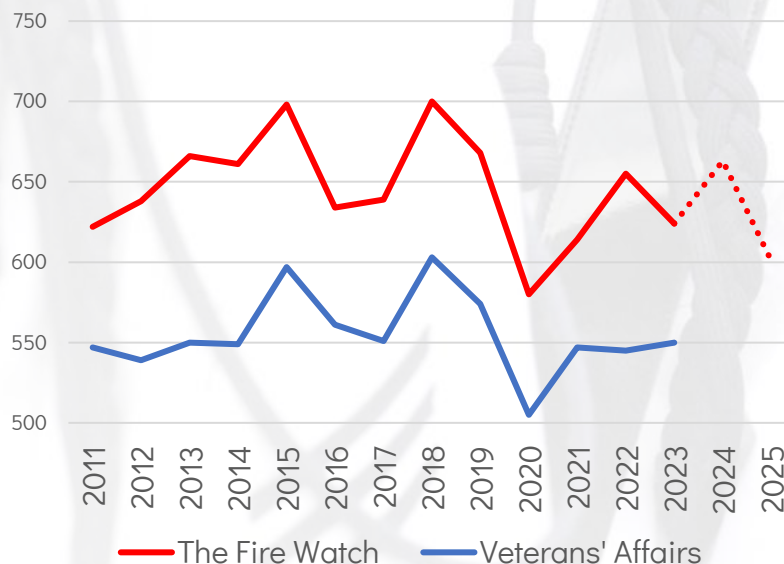
Veteran Demographics

Both studies found that male Veterans are significantly more likely to commit suicide than their female counterparts. Similarly, white, non-Hispanic Veterans are at a larger risk than other Veterans. Younger Veterans (18-34) have the highest overall suicide rate (67 suicides per 100k Veterans) with older Veterans (75+) having the second highest rate. These rates are especially significant because they are not reflected in the non-Veteran rates for these two groups

Latest Available Data for
Veteran Suicides per 100K



Comparing VA Florida Data to The
Fire Watch Data



Conclusions

Actionable Insights from The Fire Watch Data

The VA, in coordination with the Department of Defense Manpower Data Center, compiles a list of Veterans, which is then used to query the National Death Index (NDI). The NDI obtains its data from death certificates submitted by each state's health department, including the Florida Department of Health. As a result, both the VA and The Fire Watch rely on the same death certificates for Florida.

The DOH assigns Veteran status on death certificates for anyone who "ever served in the US Armed Forces." The VA uses more stringent criteria for determining Veteran status. They require that an individual must have served on federal active duty, other than for training, and is not currently serving. Since The Fire Watch uses the DOH data, it includes both active service and reservists who never activated. This accounts for the difference between The Fire Watch and the VA reported suicides.

Due to the VA's process for verifying Veteran suicides and the need to gather nationwide data, the DOH data is available on average 8 months prior to the VA's report. This means that the DOH data is available earlier and at a more granular level with a high correlation to the VA's data. There is a strong correlation between the VA data and the Florida DOH data.

$$R^2 = 76.9\% \quad P\text{-value} \leq .001$$

This means it explains 76.9% of the variability in the VA's Data allowing The Fire Watch to rapidly create action plans, including where and how to focus their efforts to increase Watch Stander presence.

Comprehensive Data Reporting

Data about Veteran suicides is difficult to collect and utilize. Each analysis herein noted some level of difficulty in acquiring and using data, with each dataset having unique benefits and challenges. Creating a comprehensive and standardized method for collecting and reporting Veteran suicides would improve accuracy of reporting with a higher degree of specificity.



Geographic
Granularity



Release
Timeliness



Release
Accuracy

Statistical Measures

R^2 is a statistical measure that indicates how well a regression model explains the variance in a dependent variable. An R^2 value greater than 0.7 generally means there is a strong correlation between two variables.

A p-value in statistics measures the probability of obtaining the observed results, assuming the null hypothesis is true. A p-value below 0.05 generally means that the observed effect is statistically significant.

Complex Solutions

Both organizations identified that potential solutions to the Veteran suicide crisis must be multifaceted. No individual approach will solve this crisis, but a combination of treatments could provide improved results.

Watch Stander Training

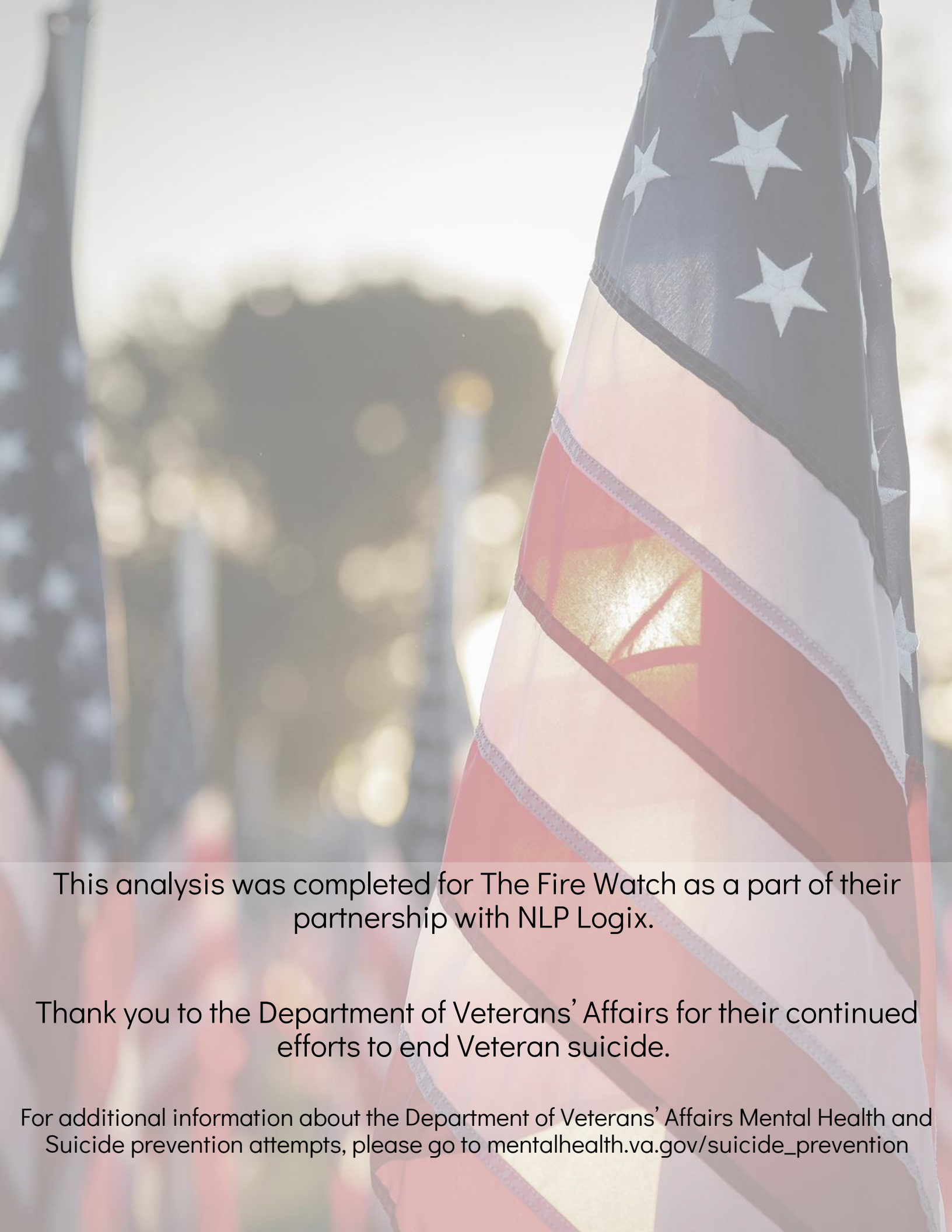


Community Involvement



Florida Veteran Overwatch Program



A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of an American flag, showing the stars and stripes. The flag is draped and appears to be outdoors, with soft, warm lighting. The stars are white on a dark blue field, and the stripes are red and white.

This analysis was completed for The Fire Watch as a part of their partnership with NLP Logix.

Thank you to the Department of Veterans' Affairs for their continued efforts to end Veteran suicide.

For additional information about the Department of Veterans' Affairs Mental Health and Suicide prevention attempts, please go to mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention