

VA Struggles With Vets' Mental Health

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(CBS) There were calls in the Senate today for the Department of Veterans Affairs to take immediate action to deal with the hidden epidemic of suicides among veterans.

That's after our [CBS News investigation](#) revealed that, in 2005 alone, 120 of those who have served in the military took their own lives every week - more than double the suicide rate for those who haven't served.

Now the question is whether the VA is willing or able to deal with it, **CBS News chief investigative correspondent Armen Keteyian** reports.

The failure of the VA to track the alarming number of suicides nationwide among those who have served in the military appears to be part of a broader pattern - and a bigger problem.

Veterans' rights advocate Paul Sullivan was a data analyst for the VA from 2000 to 2006.

"I don't think they want to know. We call it the "don't look, don't find" policy," he said. "The VA doesn't collect data, then they don't have to do anything about it."

The mental health numbers the VA does report reveal an agency under siege: 100,000 vets now seeking help for mental health issues. That's 52,000 for post-traumatic stress disorder alone.

And now, in addition to these reports criticizing the VA's treatment and spending practices come two more blows: of nearly 90,000 Army vets who served in Iraq in 2005 and 2006, a study released yesterday found 28.3 percent experienced mental health problems, while the report - due out tomorrow - says while veterans are 11 percent of the general population, they now make up an estimated 25 percent of the homeless.

"When you raise your right hand and put on that uniform, you assume you're going to be taken care of," said Paul Reickhoff, founder of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America.

Reickhoff is an Iraq War veteran who says despite all of the good doctors and good intentions, "the VA system is not at all prepared. This country has not ramped up resources to meet this flood of people coming home."

 [Watch the first piece of the investigation.](#)

 [FYI: Suicide Warning Signs and Getting Help.](#)

 [The Data and Methodology behind this story.](#)

The VA recently responded to such criticism by opening a suicide prevention hotline, hiring thousands of new workers, including suicide-prevention coordinators at all its medical centers. But for those who have lost loved ones to suicide ...

"We are deeply sorry to hear about any death," Katz said. "This is one of the most important things ever for us."

"I can tell you honestly, Dr. Katz, a lot of the parents I have talked to harbor enormous anger at the VA," **Keteyian** said.

"One of the factors that led us to develop prevention programs that go beyond those available in any other health systems, is precisely those tragedies," Katz said.

"We remake the Army after every war. We bring in new equipment. We bring in new weapons. We need to do the same thing at the VA," Reickhoff said. "It doesn't matter where you stand on the war - we've got to take care of the warriors."

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