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Addressing Critical Gaps in Suicide Prevention for Military-Affiliated Women: New Report from Cohen Veterans Network

Supported by a grant from Face the Fight®, CVN research highlights key strategies to improve lethal means safety counseling for women veterans and service members

Stamford, CT., May 6, 2025 – Cohen Veterans Network (CVN), a national not-for-profit network of mental health clinics for post-9/11 veterans, service members and their families, today announced the release of a [new report](#) that critically assesses the current state of lethal means safety research and practice for military-affiliated women. The analysis, conducted by CVN's Institute for Quality (CVN-IQ) with support from [Face the Fight](#), provides actionable recommendations to enhance suicide prevention efforts for the nearly 2.5 million women who have served or are currently serving in the U.S. military.

The report, "[Identifying Gaps in Lethal Means Safety Counseling Research and Practice for Military-Affiliated Women](#)," highlights the increasing rate of suicide among women veterans and active duty service members, with firearms cited as the most commonly used method. Despite the alarming statistics, existing suicide prevention strategies have historically taken a gender-neutral approach, overlooking the unique needs, experiences, and risks faced by military-affiliated women.

Key highlights from the analysis, which draws on insights from subject matter experts with extensive experience in research, clinical training, and clinical practice, include:

- **Misconceptions on Risk Factors:** Enhanced training and clinical procedures can improve care for women by addressing gendered misconceptions of suicide risk and behaviors and ensuring that screening protocols assess firearm access rather than ownership.
- **Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and Military Sexual Trauma (MST):** Current lethal means safety counseling (LMSC) guidelines lack sufficient strategies to address the complexities introduced by IPV and MST, both of which heighten suicide risk in women.
- **Cultural Gaps in Firearm Familiarization:** A disconnect between clinicians' knowledge of firearm safety and military-affiliated women's firearm practices impacts the effectiveness of counseling.
- **Barriers to Care:** Many women face challenges accessing care due to systemic issues or fears regarding firearm access restrictions, limiting the reach of LMSC efforts. Public health approaches, such as targeted awareness campaigns, are instrumental in meeting military-affiliated women where they are.

"Women veterans and service members face unique challenges and risks that require tailored, thoughtful approaches to suicide prevention," said Dr. David Linkh, director of CVN-IQ. "This gap analysis equips clinicians, researchers, and policymakers with actionable insights to address the needs of military-affiliated women and advance the field toward more effective interventions."



The report additionally identifies opportunities to improve lethal means safety. It calls for the development of gender-informed LMSC practices that educate clinicians on the specific risks military-affiliated women face, including firearms stored by other household members, addressing firearm behaviors and beliefs shaped by IPV, MST, and military culture, and expanding efforts beyond VA systems to reach women who may not be engaged in traditional veteran care.

Building on the analysis, CVN is developing an evidence-informed suicide prevention and lethal means safety training module for clinicians treating military and veteran women, which will be available to the field at no cost. The network will also launch a public awareness campaign to inform and educate the military community on the issues of suicide prevention and secure storage of lethal means.

“We are grateful to collaborate with Cohen Veterans Network to address critical gaps in lethal means safety for military-affiliated women,” said Justin Schmitt, AVP of Corporate Responsibility at USAA, which established Face the Fight alongside founding members Reach Resilience and the Humana Foundation. “This analysis has uncovered key opportunities to strengthen suicide prevention efforts through targeted solutions for women who have served - ensuring their safety and mental health remain a top priority.”

Since 2016, CVN has provided care to 83,000 clients, including a substantial number of women veterans and service members. Women account for nearly 35% of the network’s veteran clients—more than double the national proportion of female veterans. The network treats a variety of mental health concerns including military transition challenges, depression, anxiety, PTSD, adjustment issues, anger, grief and loss, family issues, relationship problems, and children’s behavioral problems. Care is available through the network’s 22 [Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinics](#), serving 20 states in-person and via CVN Telehealth, face-to-face video therapy.

ABOUT COHEN VETERANS NETWORK

Cohen Veterans Network (CVN) is a 501(c)(3) national not-for-profit philanthropic organization for post-9/11 veterans, active duty service members and their families. CVN focuses on improving mental health outcomes, operating a network of outpatient mental health clinics in high-need communities, in which trained clinicians deliver holistic evidence-based care to treat mental health conditions. It was established in 2016 by philanthropist Steven A. Cohen with a commitment of \$275 million to build the network. Learn more about CVN at cohenveteransnetwork.org.

ABOUT FACE THE FIGHT

Launched in 2023 by founding partners USAA, Reach Resilience and the Humana Foundation, Face the Fight has made strides by bringing together a like-minded coalition of organizations to help reduce veteran suicide through a multi-pronged approach that includes charitable giving, public education and awareness. Face the Fight is committed to supporting every veteran, regardless of their unique needs and challenges, and aspires to dramatically reduce veteran suicide. wefacethefight.org.

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