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No One-Size-Fits-All: New Study Finds Multiple Paths to Acceptable Firearm Safety Conversations with Military Populations

Face the Fight®-supported research informs a new clinician toolkit and policy recommendations to advance suicide prevention efforts for veterans, service members and their families

STAMFORD, Conn., October 22, 2026 – Cohen Veterans Network (CVN), a global not-for-profit integrated network of mental health clinics for post-9/11 veterans, service members, and their families, released findings from a study on identifying the most acceptable ways to communicate with veterans and service members about lethal means safety (LMS), a suicide prevention strategy that promotes the secure storage of firearms and other lethal means during times of crisis. The study, supported by a grant from the veteran suicide prevention coalition Face the Fight, found that meaningful firearm safety communication is less about the specific messaging approach or rationale and more about delivering evidence-based messages in a respectful, credible, and client-centered manner.

"The results demonstrate that a range of evidence-informed approaches can support meaningful firearm safety conversations when grounded in respect, authenticity, and genuine concern for individual well-being," said Dr. David Linkh, Director of Cohen Veterans Network Institute for Quality (CVN-IQ), the network's research division. "By identifying the factors that influence engagement in these discussions, this research advances the field's understanding of how to better facilitate conversations that support firearm safety and suicide prevention."

Researchers tested six firearm safety messaging approaches with 244 Cohen Clinic clients, who viewed and evaluated two randomly assigned video messages. By combining quantitative ratings and qualitative feedback, the study examined how different communication approaches influenced participants' willingness to engage in firearm safety discussions. Drawing on the study's insights, CVN-IQ then developed *Ask Anyway: How to Have Conversations About Firearm Safety*, a new toolkit featuring adaptable, evidence-based strategies for clinicians and others to engage in culturally responsive lethal means safety conversations.

"The *Ask Anyway* toolkit translates research into practical guidance that clinicians can use to navigate firearm safety and secure storage conversations with confidence, cultural responsiveness, and respect for individual experiences," said Dr. Tracy Neal-Walden, Chief Clinical Officer of CVN. "We are grateful to Face the Fight for its support in helping make this resource available to the professionals who serve veterans, military members, and their families."

Firearms are the leading means of suicide among veterans, accounting for over 70% of veteran suicide deaths, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs. Studies have shown that secure firearm storage,

such as keeping firearms unloaded and locked, can reduce the risk of suicide up to fourfold. However, many veterans are hesitant to discuss firearm safety due to concerns over privacy, access restriction, and stigma.

To support broader adoption of evidence-based firearm safety practices the new research findings were incorporated into a focused policy brief for military, veteran-serving organizations, and government leaders, offering actionable recommendations to normalize firearm safety conversations, improve access to safe storage resources, and create environments that support the voluntary adoption of secure storage practices. The brief highlights how these efforts can strengthen suicide prevention, promote family safety, and support the health and well-being of military-connected communities.

"This work reflects the power of research to shape real-world solutions," said Dr. Katy Dondanville, Clinical Psychologist at UT Health San Antonio and Chief Scientific Advisor for Face the Fight. "From practical tools for clinicians to recommendations for organizational leaders, these resources help advance a shared goal of reducing suicide risk while supporting the health and well-being of veterans, service members, and their families."

To explore the research and related resources, visit cohenveteransnetwork.org/CVNIQ.

ABOUT COHEN VETERANS NETWORK

Cohen Veterans Network (CVN) is a 501(c)(3) global 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®

Face the Fight® is a life-saving initiative uniting more than 300 cross-sector partners to dramatically reduce veteran suicide by 2032. Founded by USAA, Reach Resilience, an Endeavors Foundation, and the Humana Foundation, the movement breaks stigma, expands access to proven solutions, and builds a culture where seeking help is a sign of strength, ensuring every veteran and their loved ones are supported and never left to fight alone. Learn more at WeFaceTheFight.org.