



VETERANS VOICE

Winnebago County Department of Veterans Services Newsletter

July 2023

VA Programs to Support Veterans Struggling with Loneliness

Everyone experiences loneliness. For many, especially our most vulnerable, this loneliness can become chronic. Your age, gender, race and socioeconomic background does not matter. Even those with strong social support networks can still experience loneliness.

Loneliness is subjective. It is not a character flaw. It's the gap between your current state of connection and your desired state. Many of our Veterans feel a loss of connection soon after discharge or during the latter stages of life when many of their family and friends have moved or passed away.

Loneliness has been identified by doctors, nurses and social workers for decades. Many Veterans do not receive regular visitors or phone calls. These Veterans are more likely to present at emergency departments. They are more likely to phone crisis lines. And they are more likely to develop clinical conditions such as depression, anxiety and suicidal ideations. Some develop substance abuse issues.

VA has recognized the issue of loneliness and offers an array of programs to
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“It takes nothing to join the crowd. It takes everything to stand alone.”

- Hans F. Hansen

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support Veterans who may be struggling with it. Programs include pet therapy, music therapy and group therapy. In some areas, Veterans with caregivers can request weekly visitation by a trained volunteer. This has the added benefit of providing regular respite for the caregiver.

Compassionate Contact Corps combats loneliness

Since the pandemic, a new virtual social prescribing program has resonated with Veterans and volunteers alike. It's called Compassionate Contact Corps. This program highlights the power of genuine human connection in combating loneliness and improving mental health outcomes.

Compassionate Contact Corps is a non-clinical program. A trained volunteer preferably from the community is matched with a Veteran that has been identified by their clinician as potentially benefiting from additional social connection.

The volunteer phones the Veteran weekly, usually for 15-60 minutes of meaningful conversation. It has become a signature program of American Red Cross and Soldier's Angels, and there is significant participation from other Veteran service organizations helping to combat this issue.

In March 2021, the VA surveyed Veterans about their experience with Compassionate Contact Corps. 83% said the visits help them feel less lonely, and 77% said it increased their overall well-being. 86% of Veterans said it makes them feel like the VA cares about their overall well-being. They also surveyed their volunteers. 82% said that serving in the Compassionate Contact Corps program has increased their own overall well-being.

For more information about the Compassionate Contact Corps please go to their [website](#). If you would like to help VA support some of our most vulnerable Veterans by volunteering for Compassionate Contact Corps or any of their amazing volunteer opportunities, please go to [VA's volunteer webpage](#) to learn more.



Fragile X Awareness Month

Fragile X syndrome or F.X.S. is a rare genetic disorder caused by changes to the F.M.R.1 gene, which is the gene responsible for the production of F.M.R.P. - a protein critical for brain development. People who have F.X.S. cannot make this protein.

Since testing for F.X.S. is rare, diagnosis often takes place only at a later stage. Regardless, parents can watch for several early warning symptoms to prevent the condition from worsening. One of the signs is a developmental delay - a child having trouble sitting, talking and walking like other kids the same age. Pay close attention to a child struggling to learn new skills or pay attention. F.X.S. symptoms can also manifest as social anxiety, acting without thinking, not making eye contact, or hand flapping. F.X.S. can increase the chances of intellectual disability or Autism Spectrum Disorder.

F.X.S. symptoms can look different for different people. The disease is more common in boys but can affect boys and girls. Symptoms can range from severe to mild for both.

F.X.S. still has no cure, which is why an early diagnosis is imperative. Fragile X Awareness Month aims to spread the word and advocate for research, support, and treatment to help patients live better-quality lives.

Appealing Your Health Care Decisions

As a Veteran, you deserve the best health care possible. But you may not always agree with decisions they make about your medical care or whether you are eligible for some types of care. If you disagree with a decision they make, you can appeal it. In VA health care, you can appeal two kinds of decisions: medical determinations and health benefits decisions.

A medical determination is a decision made by your care team about your healthy care, like whether to prescribe a certain medication, treatment or physical therapy. It can also mean a decision to refer you to a community provider for care.

A health benefits decision is about whether or not you are eligible for VA health benefits, such as VA health care, VA nursing home and domiciliary care, reimbursement for non-VA emergency care and certain medical devices.

How to appeal a medical determination

You can appeal a medical determination by filing a Clinical Appeal, which allows other medical professionals to review your medical needs and decide whether the determination was correct. To file a Clinical Appeal, contact the patient advocate at your VA medical facility and ask to initiate a Clinical Appeal.

How to appeal a health benefits decision

If you disagree with a health benefits decision you can request one of three types of review:

- High-Level Review
- Supplemental Claim
- Appeal to the Board of Veterans' Appeals

When and how to request a Higher-Level Review

If you believe the VA decision was wrong and you don't have new evidence, a Higher-Level Review may be your best option. A senior reviewer will look at your case again. This reviewer will evaluate the same evidence that was previously considered. You must file a request for a Higher-Level Review within one year of the date of your decision.

When and how to file a Supplemental Claim

If you believe the VA decision was wrong and you have new and relevant evidence that VA hasn't already considered, a Supplemental Claim may be your best choice. The VA can help you gather any new evidence you identify, such as medical records, to support your claim. A reviewer will decide if this new evidence changes the decision. You can generally file a Supplemental Claim at any time after the decision.

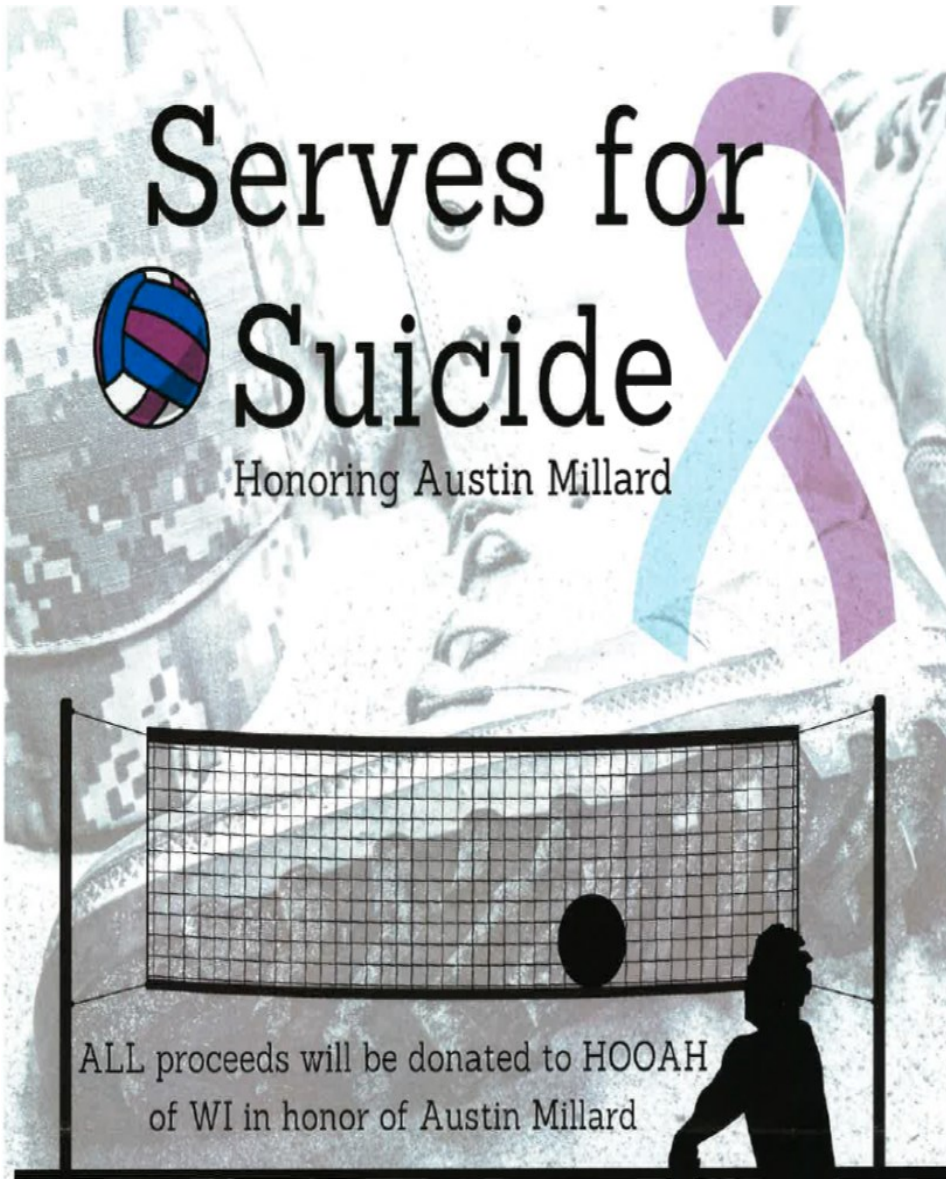
When and how to appeal to the Board

If you want a Veterans Law Judge at the Board of Veterans' Appeals (Board) to review your case, you may appeal the decision to the Board. You must file a Board appeal within one year of the date of your decision and you do not need to request Higher-Level Review or file a Supplemental Claim before appealing to the Board. There are three types of Board review:

- Direct Review: If you don't want to submit additional evidence or have a hearing.
- Evidence Submission: If you want to submit additional evidence without a hearing
- Hearing with a Veterans Law Judge: If you want to have a hearing with the option to submit new evidence.

If you need help filing a claim or appeal please feel free to contact our office for assistance. For more information please visit the [VHA appeals website](#).

Upcoming Event



Saturday August 19th, 2023

Location: Woodey's 700 W Main Street Winneconne, WI 54986

- \$75 Entry fee per team
- Teams of 6 (More females than males)

To sign up or donate go to:
servesforsuicide.com



CONTACT US

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Veterans Service Office**

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**Stay informed about benefits; join our e-mail list.
Send a request to:**

CVSO@winnebagoountywi.gov

Visit us on the web at:

**[www.winnebagoountywi.gov/
veterans](http://www.winnebagoountywi.gov/veterans)**



www.facebook.com/WinnebagoCVSO

**For a list of more events,
check out our [calendar](#) !**