



STRONGTIMES

A quarterly newsletter with life-changing impact.

VOL II, NO. 1 2020

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN/FOUNDER



Due to the importance of *SoldierStrong's StrongMind* program and the need that it serves, we are devoting the majority of this newsletter to providing information on the national crisis our country is experiencing with the loss of 20 veterans per day!

Since 2009, *SoldierStrong* has been addressing the needs of our veterans that are often overlooked or underfunded. ***Our efforts are focused on filling a gap that no other organization is currently doing, which makes our work even more critical.***

We hope you enjoy this edition of *StrongTimes* and will take the opportunity to learn more about StrongMind and how your support is making a huge difference!



INSIDE THIS ISSUE



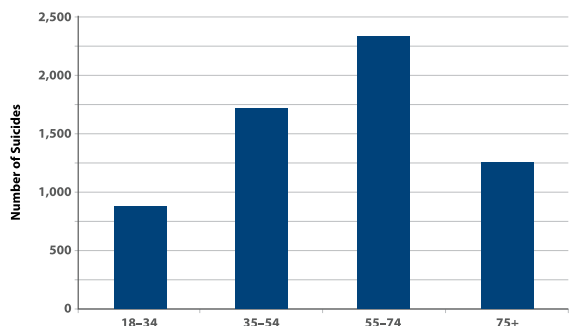
- Pg. 2 The Facts about Veteran Suicide
- Pg. 3 PREVENTS Presidential Task Force and SoldierStrong
- Pg. 4 The Impact of Virtual Reality Therapy
- Pg. 5 Update on StrongMind
- Pg. 6 Past and Upcoming Events
- Pg. 7 StrongTimes Highlight
- Pg. 8 SoldierStrong Partners



THE FACTS ABOUT VETERAN SUICIDE

We are losing 20 veterans per day to suicide!

We have a national crisis on our hands! The information provided below is obtained from the 2019 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report and provides helpful insight of the problem. To see the full report, please see footnote on the bottom of the page. ⁽¹⁾



Veteran Suicide Counts by Age Group, 2017

VETERAN SUICIDE RATES BY AGE GROUP

- The absolute number of suicides was highest among Veterans 55–74 years old. This group accounted for 38% of all Veteran deaths by suicide in 2017.

REACHING VETERANS NOT IN VHA CARE

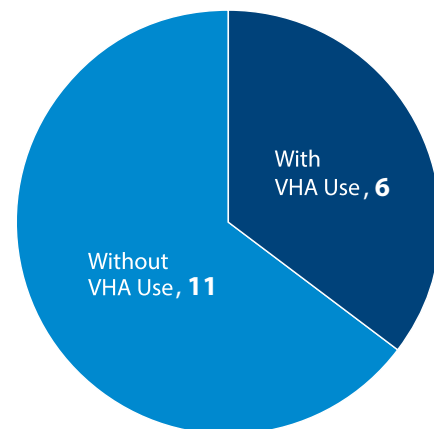
Unfortunately, the majority of Veterans do not use VHA services, and the majority of Veteran suicides occur among Veterans who have not recently received VHA services.

VHA has an unparalleled system of recovery-oriented integrated mental health care services, ranging from early preventive services in primary care to intensive residential and inpatient services. One recent study compared over 800,000 Veterans receiving medication treatment for mental health disorders in VHA with over 500,000 comparable individuals in the private sector. The authors found that VHA's performance was superior by greater than 30%.

As part of the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act (Public Law 114-2), VA mental health and suicide prevention programs were reviewed by independent third-party evaluators. Based on their analyses of the Veterans Outcome Assessment (VOA), these evaluators concluded that engagement in VHA mental services was associated with decreased rates of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts.

Yet we still are not reaching every Veteran who might benefit from these services.

Note: In 2017, among Veterans who died by suicide, 38% had a VHA encounter in 2016 or 2017 (6.3 suicide deaths per day), while 62% had not (10.5 per day). The chart presents this information as 6 vs. 11 per day to communicate the loss of each Veteran's life.



Veteran Suicide Deaths per Day in 2017

SOLDIERSTRONG IS COMMITTED TO COMBATING THIS PROBLEM.

WE ARE WORKING WITH THE VA AND PRESIDENT TRUMP'S PREVENTS TASK FORCE TO DO EVERYTHING WE CAN TO ADDRESS THIS DEVASTATING LOSS.

¹ 2019 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2019/2019_National_Veteran_Suicide_Prevention_Annual_Report_508.pdf

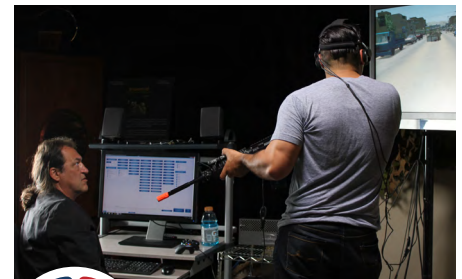


PREVENTS PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCE AND SOLDIERSTRONG

“Suicide prevention is a national priority and VA is dedicated to this mission. The most recent and notable manifestation of this comprehensive approach to Veteran suicide prevention is the President’s Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End the National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS), mandated by an executive order signed by the President in March 2019. A cabinet-level task force has been launched to develop a national roadmap for suicide prevention, which will include proposals and plans addressing integration and collaboration across sectors, a national research strategy, and a cohesive implementation strategy.”⁽¹⁾

StrongMind led to an invitation (through the White House Office of American Innovation) to participate in President Trump’s PREVENTS Task Force. This task force was formed following President Trump’s Executive Order to explore new ways to reduce veteran suicide.

SoldierStrong’s involvement in the PREVENTS Task Force has included offering technical and clinical experience and ideation, as well as helping make key introductions around the country to the Task Force leadership. As the Task Force closes in on making key recommendations to the President in March, one non-medical need has arisen:



- *The need to raise awareness among veterans and their friends, families, and colleagues about the signs and symptoms that may lead down a dangerous path and convey that many of these are very treatable. The effort would also advise people who recognize these symptoms how and where to seek help.*

Veteran suicide prevention is of the utmost importance to SoldierStrong. We will continue to raise awareness and encourage veterans suffering with PTS to seek immediate care at their local VA Medical Centers.



VA Secretary Wilkie - Feb 5, 2020 announces VA collaboration with SoldierStrong⁽²⁾

YOUR SUPPORT ENABLES SOLDIERSTRONG TO DONATE STRONGMIND TO OUR VA MEDICAL CENTERS SO THAT OUR NATION’S HEROES CAN RECEIVE THE HELP THEY URGENTLY NEED AND DESERVE.

¹ 2019 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2019/2019_National_Veteran_Suicide_Prevention_Annual_Report_508.pdf

² Watch the full video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owXEyIsoOaY&feature=youtu.be>



THE IMPACT OF VIRTUAL REALITY THERAPY ⁽¹⁾

Treating PTSD is a challenge. That's why new treatment techniques that integrate traditional exposure therapy with virtual reality technologies are so valuable.

Exposure therapy has long been a mainstay of PTSD treatment. With the help of a therapist, patients recount their trauma experience as if it were happening that very moment. In the safety of a clinical environment, repeated reliving of the experience enables patients to sort through the feelings and emotions triggered by the incident and de-condition themselves, a process known as habituation or extinction.

Virtual reality technology can enhance exposure therapy, bolstering its effectiveness for veterans with PTSD. The technology offers therapists the unique ability to control, document, and measure stimuli and patient response as veterans interact with the technology's multisensory and immersive environments. The technology can recreate 14 different environments, from remote rural areas to crowded city markets – complete with enemy attackers, innocent bystanders, and explosive devices.

Veterans talk to their therapists before and after the virtual reality experience, enhancing the exposure therapy's ability to help veterans process past traumatic experiences and address mental health symptoms that continue to plague them.



DOES VIRTUAL REALITY THERAPY WORK?

The effectiveness of using virtual reality to treat PTSD has been demonstrated in multiple clinical studies. One large-scale trial found that therapy incorporating virtual reality technology:

- Had a dropout rate of just two percent
- Resulted in two-thirds of patients no longer meeting diagnostic criteria for PTSD at the conclusion of treatment. ⁽²⁾

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF STRONGMIND FROM PEOPLE USING IT:

"You fought for everyone's Freedom to include our own, now fight to regain or maintain your own happiness and the American way of life".

- Chris Merkle

Christopher R. Merkle M.A. a Marine combat veteran who openly challenges the stigma of mental health by sharing his battle with Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) and the benefits gained through the use of technology like StrongMind and virtual reality to treat PTS.



"We have had incredible success using the software to help some intense cases. Even an extraordinary client who everyone assumed was having neurologically based seizures or possibly on some illicit substance we simply couldn't find in testing. This program's exposure therapy software helped her to condition her responses, so she went from homeless and unemployed to maintaining a residence and employment. She went from being a case that was deemed unimprovable to seeing continued success largely and primarily because of this program."

- Program Director's feedback

**THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING - WE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO DO SO MUCH MORE!
OUR EFFORTS WILL HELP SAVE LIVES OF MEN AND WOMEN
WHO HAVE BRAVELY SERVED OUR COUNTRY.
YOUR SUPPORT PLAYS A VITAL ROLE IN MAKING THIS HAPPEN!**

¹ SoldierStrong Access: "Virtual Reality and Veterans Mental Health," May 2019. Available from: <https://soldierstrongaccess.org/docs/VR-Veterans-Mental-Health.pdf>

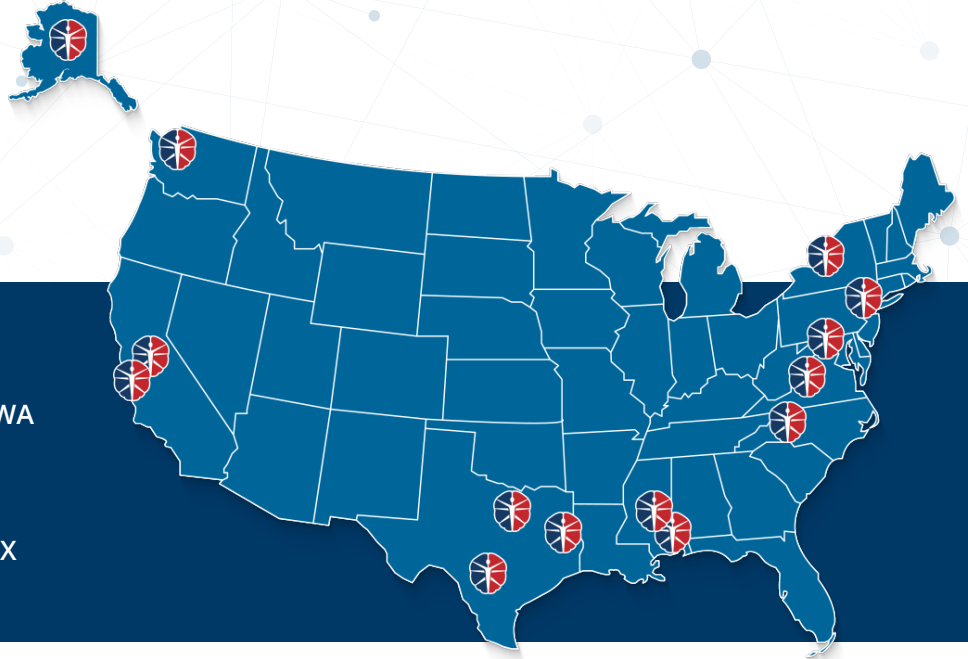
² Beidel, D. C., Frueh, B. C., Neer, S. M., & Lejuez, C. W. (2017). The efficacy of trauma management therapy: a controlled pilot investigation of a three-week intensive outpatient program for combat-related PTSD. *Journal of anxiety disorders*, 50, 23-32.





STRONGMIND UPDATE

Thanks to your generous support - we have 14 VA's with the StrongMind Program!



- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ashville, NC | New York, NY |
| Dallas, TX | Palo Alto, CA |
| Fairbanks, AK | Puget Sound, WA |
| Gulf Coast, MS | Reno, NV |
| Houston, TX | Richmond, VA |
| Jackson, MS | San Antonio, TX |
| Martinsburg, WV | Syracuse, NY |

DUE TO THE SUCCESS OF THIS PROGRAM WE HAVE 8 MORE VA'S THAT HAVE REQUESTED THIS PROGRAM:

- | | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Atlanta VA | 3. Fayetteville VA | 5. Manchester VA | 7. Washington DC VA |
| 2. Central Arkansas VA | 4. Madison VA | 6. Tampa VA | 8. White River JCT VA |

WE NEED YOUR HELP NOW! HELP US GET VIRTUAL REALITY IN EVERY VA THROUGH OUR 2020 PATRIOTS PROGRAM!

Saving the lives of these Veterans is a job we take on every day— we are responding to the skyrocketing suicide rate which, among Veterans, is 1.5 times that among non-veteran adults, according to the 2019 National Veteran Suicide Rate.

We depend on supporters like you to help reduce the suicide rate, homelessness and substance abuse, but we can only do this by getting *StrongMind* into VA hospitals across the country.

With your monthly donation of \$20.20 you will receive monthly updates on what your dollars are doing for our Veterans. As a Thank You for your donation, you will also receive a *SoldierStrong* fleece blanket as a reminder of the good work you are doing for our veterans. If you prefer, we can also donate the blanket to your local VA medical center on your behalf.



**KINDLY CONSIDER MAKING A MONTHLY DONATION OF \$20.20 TODAY.
THAT WORKS OUT TO ONLY 67 CENTS PER DAY.
FOR EVERY 42 PEOPLE THAT MAKE A MONTHLY GIFT,
WE CAN EQUIP A VA MEDICAL CENTER WITH THIS URGENTLY NEEDED THERAPY!**



PAST AND UPCOMING EVENTS

★★★★★ PAST EVENTS ★★★★★

OCTOBER 25, 2019 – ANNUAL SOLDIERSALUTE GALA



Chris Meek, *SoldierStrong's* Founder and Chairman with The Honorable Linda McMahon, accepting award on behalf of the Vince and Linda McMahon Family Foundation, recipients of **"Lucille and Gerald Francesco Spirit Award"** at the SoldierSalute Gala on October 24, 2019.

Every year, *SoldierStrong* presents this award to someone whose spirit of selfless generosity in support of our nation's wounded veterans serves as an inspiring example of exemplary moral character, patriotic benevolence, love of country, and devotion to the well-being of fellow Americans.

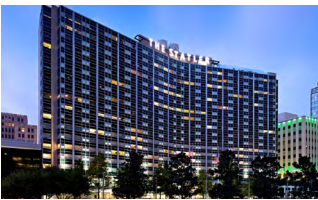
DECEMBER 19, 2019 – NEVER FORGET TRIBUTE



SoldierStrong has partnered with the 4th Annual Never Forget Tribute Classic on December 14th, with ticket proceeds going to support the men and women of the armed forces that sprung into action, protecting our freedom in the wake of 9/11. This neutral site, college basketball double-header brings some of the best teams to the Prudential Center each year. This year's tournament featured the Delaware Blue Hens vs Villanova Wildcats and the Mississippi State Bulldogs vs Kansas State Wildcats.

★★★★★ UPCOMING EVENTS ★★★★★

JUNE 10, 2020 – FUNDRAISING EVENT IN DALLAS, TX



More info coming soon

The Statler Dallas
1914 Commerce St,
Dallas, TX 75201

OCTOBER 22, 2020 – 6TH ANNUAL SOLDIERSALUTE GALA



More info coming soon

Union League of Philadelphia
140 South Broad Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102

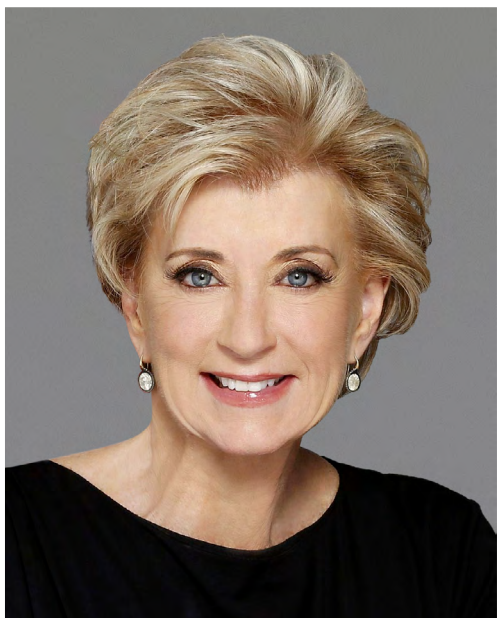
**EXCELLENT SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE NOW,
PLEASE CONTACT STEPHANIE TURZANSKI:**

Email: sturzanski@soldierstrong.org | Phone: 888.898.3235, ext. 703 | Mobile: 215.510.6587



STRONGTIMES HIGHLIGHT ★★★★★

LINDA MCMAHON



Ms. McMahon is a loyal and longtime friend of *SoldierStrong*! She was our very first advisory board member and served in that capacity for several years.

We are forever grateful for this friendship and for the generous support and genuine concern she has for our nation's heroes.

Linda, along with her husband Vince McMahon founded sports entertainment company Titan Sports, Inc. (what is now WWE) where she worked as the president and later CEO from 1980 to 2009. During this time, the company grew from a small regional business in the northeast to a large multinational corporation with over 800 employees in offices worldwide.

Most recently, Linda served as the 25th Administrator of the Small Business Administration from 2017 to 2019. Under her leadership at SBA, she re-imagined the organization, focusing on rural development and championing women entrepreneurs and military veterans. She oversaw natural disaster recovery efforts and helped improve the way the SBA connected small businesses to capital, counseling and government contracts.

Linda is an amazing woman and has been integral to helping expand *SoldierStrong*'s efforts over the years. We are honored to have her fighting beside us as we continue to focus our efforts on the needs of our veterans that are often overlooked or underfunded. *SoldierStrong* is filling a gap that no other organization is currently doing by supplying VA medical centers with much needed revolutionary rehabilitative equipment and therapy for our veterans.

The work we do is critical. From the very beginning, Linda has been committed to helping *SoldierStrong* improve and save the lives of those who have put their lives on the line and were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, so we may enjoy the freedom this nation was built on. We thank you Linda!



SOLDIERPARTNERS

As our mission evolves to meet the ever-changing needs of the community we serve, we recognize that we could not fully accomplish our mission without the help of our current partners below.



★ ★ ★ ★ ★ PATRIOTIC SHOES THAT SUPPORT STRONGMIND ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



SoldierStrong is excited to announce a partnership with Honor and Respect, a Veteran owned and operated apparel shop from Iowa. For every shoe sold, Honor and Respect will donate **\$20 per shoe** to SoldierStrong. Proceeds will fund *StrongMind*.

Step one: Go to website: <https://honor-respect.com>

Step two: Pick your shoe

Step three: Purchase your shoe and enter the code **"SoldierStrong"**

We need to get VR therapy in every VA across the country! **Wear your shoes with pride knowing YOU are helping to prevent veteran suicide!**



Honor and Respect
Blue Line Shoes

[Click to Order](#)

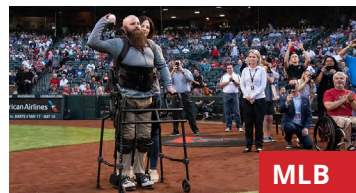
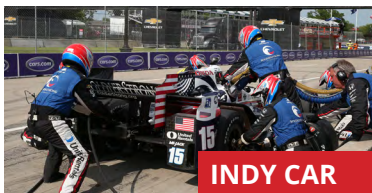


Honor and Respect
Red Line Shoes

[Click to Order](#)

MASS EXPOSURE

★
★
★
★
★
SOLDIERSTRONG HAS JOINED A VARIETY OF MAJOR NATIONAL SPORTING TEAMS AND EVENTS AS A CHARITABLE PARTNER, INCLUDING:



BECOME A PARTNER OR CORPORATE SPONSOR

In the past ten years we have accomplished much thanks to the support of our partners, corporate sponsors and thousands of Americans that believe our veterans deserve the best medical care there is to offer. SoldierStrong is committed to providing America's heroes with the equipment and therapy they desperately need and deserve. We are actively seeking new partnerships and would love to speak to you!



Learn More: SoldierStrong.org | **Call:** 888.898.3235 | **Email:** info@soldierstrong.org

