



Healthy Men
MICHIGAN.org

Let's Talk Vets:
Veteran's Mental Fitness



MARCH 20TH
5PM MT/7PM ET

No one gets left behind

#VetsChat
@HealthyMenMI

With panelists featuring:

Dr. Jodi Jacobson Frey, Sgt. Tom Cruz, Wes O'Donnell, Dr. Michelle Cornette, and Dr. Paul Quinnett

“Welcome to Healthy Men Michigan’s [#VetsChat](#): No one gets left behind. Thank you for joining us and being part of the conversation! This conversation touches upon sensitive topics so if you need support at any time call 800-273-8255 [@800273TALK](#), visit [crisischat.org](#), or text Hello to 741741

It’s time to begin our chat! First, let’s introduce our fantastic set of panelists!”



Jodi Jacobson Frey @JodiJFrey - I am an associate prof at [@mdsocialwork @UMBaltimore](#) w/ focus on adult behavioral health & [#SuicidePrevention](#) Vets served our country & we in mental health field need to serve them in the community [#VetsChat @HealthyMenMI](#)



Tom Cruz @TCruz76- Hello all, MSG Tom Cruz 23yr Active Duty Army, stationed in Belgium. Attempted suicide in 2010, debunked military myths, huge advocate of helping Veterans find resources. Trained in many suicide prevention skills and storytelling. [#spsm #livedexperience](#)



Wes O'Donnell @WesODonnell01- Hi all! I am a speaker, writer & small business owner in West Michigan I served in both the US Army and the US Air Force for a total of 10 years active duty. Veteran addiction and veteran suicide are very personal subjects for me. It’s time to fight back



Michelle Cornette @CornettePhD- I'm currently Senior Research Scientist providing support to the Defense Suicide Prevention Office. I worked in the VA system for 10 years, where I was researcher, administrator, educator, and clinician. The majority of the aforementioned resource expansion was accomplished through work with DoD, to include the development of [USMilitaryMatters](#), a series of free trainings for SMS, their families, and the providers who care for them.



Paul Quinnett @QPR317- I’m a senior clinical psychologist now devoted entirely to suicide prevention. I’m also a veteran – US Army. My brothers, father and all adult males in our family have served in the military. Happy to help if I can



1. [@CornettePhD- #vetschat](#) It is often (incorrectly) assumed that suicide risk (and other mental health challenges) are a direct result of deployment, combat exposure, or PTSD, for all Vets

- While the aforementioned are certainly important risk factors for some Service members and Veterans, they are not the primary contributors (at a population level) to suicide risk.
- For example, we know that most of those Service Members who've died by suicide have never deployed
- PTSD does not necessarily equate to lack of employability- far from it. PTSD is also treatable, especially through evidence-based treatments now available. Many vets (and civilians) with PTSD are active members of our work force.
- A related myth is that when a Veteran is suffering a mental health challenge, it must be PTSD.
- [#VetsChat](#) One myth Among SMs and Vets is that seeking help is a sign of weakness. While DoD has made great strides in recent years in combating some of these myths (e.g. Real Warriors Campaign, etc.), some Service Members and Veterans continue to struggle with this.

2. [@TCruz76-](#) Myth: There is no connection between physical and mental health - fact: they are closely related, you can stop taking care of yourself which then affects sleep, eating, or exercising amongst others [#VetsChat](#)

- Myth: There is no connection between physical and mental health - fact: they are closely related, you can stop taking care of yourself which then affects sleep, eating, or exercising amongst others [#VetsChat](#)
 - o [@CornettePhD-](#) Absolutely, and poor sleep is such an important risk factor for other mental health issues, to include suicide risk.
- Myth: Everyone in the military will end up with a mental condition Fact: the rates are the same as the civilian population. A small percentage will actually end up with a mental health issue. [@HealthyMenMI](#)

3. [@WesODonnell01-](#) The biggest myth that I encounter, when I travel and speak to companies, is that ALL Post 9/11 veterans have PTSD and are unable to compete for meaningful employment in the civilian world. Certainly, PTSD is a very important issue facing our veterans, but not every veteran has PTSD. And those that do suffer from PTSD can still be incredible team members to any organization. [#VetsChat](#)

- o [@JodiJFrey-](#) Yes, I have heard from employers that #Vets are not employable - I think this is slowly changing [#MythBusting #VetsChat](#)
 - [@TCruz76-](#) Veterans have a part in this too, they must drop the entitlement of being a Veteran and go get the job they want just like they did when they were in. Treat the civilian world like the military and achieve your goal. [#VetsChat](#)
- o [@CornettePhD-](#) Yes, a critical issue. In my experience working with Vets clinically, helping them find meaningful (esp.) employment is so important.

- [@QPR317](#)- Give a vet an honorable job and his self-respect and dignity will be restored, and his “mental health issues” will shrink down to manageable size. Vets know how work and are loyal, dedicated to quality performance, and understand how to work in a team.
- [@JodiJFrey](#)- [Top five positive reasons to #HireVets](#)
- [@WesODonnell01](#)- Some HR departments admit to me that they have passed on hiring veterans because they are afraid of an incident. Also, the majority of managers don’t know what we did in the military, but they understand the college experience; so they hire what they know. [#VetsChat](#)
[@HealthyMenMI](#)
- [@WesODonnell01](#)- The other myth is the veteran suicide rate: People commonly use the number 22, as in 22 veterans commit suicide daily. The fact is that the number is likely much higher than 22, because of some reporting omissions by certain states. [#VetsChat](#)
 - In addition, the majority of those suicides are Vietnam-era veterans, not modern veterans.
 - In my experience, veterans are very direct, no-nonsense individuals. My greatest success is asking them directly: are you in danger? Are you going to hurt yourself? Especially the older generation [#VetsChat](#)

4. [@JodiJFrey](#)- People still believe that all or most Vets have or will have #PTSD [@HealthyMenMI](#) [#VetsChat](#)

5. [@QPR317](#)- Thanks to sensationalized press stories, some of the public believe that all veterans are suffering from some sort of mental health burden. Just the opposite is true. Majority of veterans are mentally healthy, perhaps more so than matching groups [#VetsChat](#)

QUESTION 2:

What are some of the obstacles
that veterans face due to myths?
What impact do these obstacles
have on health and
wellness? #VetsChat




1. **@WesODonnell01**- So, when we focus all our attention on modern veterans for suicide prevention, when Vietnam veterans are more at risk, our older generation of veterans may not be getting the support and outreach that they clearly need
 - **@JodiJFrey**- A2 So true - not all Veterans are the same
2. **@CornettePhD**- There is the danger that these misperceptions (suicide risk is always due to PTSD, combat, etc.) will drive allocation of resources in a way that is less helpful than it could be. For many years, suicide prevention-specific programming in VA and DoD was quite sparse. This has, of course, changed rather dramatically with the resources devoted to VA and DoD over the past decade, to include SP-specific offices stood up in both DoD (DSPO) & VA.
 - Another issue is the real-world challenge (for SMs) associated with the fact that the military is their employer. While the risk is sometimes overestimated by SMs, I think we also need to be honest with SMs about these risks. Less of an issue for Vets.
3. **@TCruz76**- They are perceived one way that the media tries to give Veterans which then makes the majority harder to be taken serious which then can harm more Veterans mentality [#VetsChat](#)
4. **@JodiJFrey**- #MentalHealth counselors need to understand military culture to effectively work with #serviceMembers & their families. See: [Social Workers' Observations of the Needs of the Total Military Community](#)
5. **@QPR317**- Men in general suffer from substantial health disparities and die younger than women, not just from suicide, but from all kinds of life-threatening illnesses and diseases. One reason for this is they wait too long to get care, they should not be blamed, but understood.



QUESTION 3:

Do you have any strategies or tips for engaging the veteran population with mental health?
Any language you tend to use?

#VetsChat



1. [@JodiJFrey](#)- Volunteers in #Michigan #BuddyToBuddy assist #ServiceMembers with #MentalHealth & so much more [Michigan Buddy To Buddy](#)
2. [@JodiJFrey](#)- #PeerToPeer programs like [MSPAN](#) & [Michigan Medicine's Depression Center](#) help reduce #Isolation & increase #SocialSupport & #HelpSeeking @HealthyMenMI #vetschat
 - [@CornettePhD](#)- Another great example of peer support is the military/ veterans peer support line, #BeThere
 - [@TCruz76](#)-States like Florida have the programs through the VA where you can certified. Awesome programs and recommend [#VetsChat](#)
3. [@TCruz76](#)- Go to them, do not wait for them to come to you. [#VetsChat](#), Use language that is familiar with Veterans, make it easy for them to understand not what is comfortable for the person putting out the information, and reach out to them where they are whether that be in person, on social media or virtually (gaming, Pornhub, interest, Discord, FB Live, periscope, etc.)
4. [@CornettePhD](#)- for those who have been more resistant, and given the more collectivistic nature of Veteran culture, it's at times been helpful to encourage seeking treatment for the sake of one's family, fellow Service Members, etc. Like anyone else, some Veterans are more open to seeking treatment for mental health challenges than others.
 - [@JodiJFrey](#)- Yes, reach out with a caring message - phone, text, stop by for a visit. #Connection reduces Social Isolation
5. [@WesODonnell01](#)- In my experience, veterans are very direct, no-nonsense individuals. My greatest success is asking them directly: are you in danger? Are you going to hurt yourself? Especially the older generation [#VetsChat](#)
6. [@QPR317](#)- It will be easier for male vets to grown a second thumb than to start asking for help from strangers, which is why the peer-to-peer model is so key to any success [#VetsChat](#). In the use of antidepressants, I use a brain-as-car-engine metaphor... "Would you agree that your brain is as powerful and complex as the engine in a 450 Mercedes?" All agree. Then ask, "Would you run that Mercedes engine 4 quarts low on oil?" "No" No problemo. [#VetsChat](#)

QUESTION 4:

Do you have personal
experience supporting a
veteran or receiving support
as a veteran? Tell us about that
experience. #VetsChat



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1. [@WesODonnell01](#)- Having served in two branches, the Army and the Air Force, I have double the network to check up on. I often speak with “my” veterans to make sure everyone is in a good place. Those that are not in a good place, I start the process of talking, confiding, sharing... and ultimately pointing them to some veteran-specific resources. I am not a healthcare professional. I’m more of the first line of defense for veterans suffering from mental health. Some vets may trust one of their own to start the conversation first
2. [@TCruz76](#)- I have both received support and supported a Veteran. I personally have been supported both with knowledge and training to help deal with my own mental health issues. I have supported Veterans by listening, providing support or resources necessary for the situation. [#VetsChat](#)
3. [@CornettePhD](#)Q4. Yes, quite a bit of personal experience (providing support to Veterans). Was a VA clinician for 10 years and have since served both Active Duty Service Members and Veterans.
4. [@JodiJFrey](#)- A4 Caring phone calls and texts might be a lifeline to someone suffering in pain alone. I learned firsthand from family members who served - you can't wait for them to reach out - need to go to them



QUESTION 5:

What are some veteran-specific community resources available to help vets in need? What can you suggest for veteran self-care ? #VetsChat



1. **@WesODonnell01**- In the past, I'm on the record as being very critical of Veterans Affairs. I will admit that they have made huge improvements in recent years; especially with veterans' mental health. [Make the Connection](#), a website launched by the VA, is loaded with great info [#VetsChat](#)
2. **@TCruz76- T.A.P.S** has some great resources for one that have lost a Veteran. National Veterans Foundation provides a list of resources. [#VetsChat](#)
 - American Association of Suicidology website has so many resources for the community and research information on their site. [#VetsChat](#)
 - I would also suggest contacting your local Crisis Center or VSO's for more resources in a specific location, when all else fails word of mouth from other Veterans or Google which has become my best friend. [#VetsChat](#)
 - Self-care in my view is anything that you enjoy doing that brings calmness to you mentally/physically. So for me it is photography, traveling and family. For others it can be the gym, endurance events, working on cars, or hanging with other Veterans. It depends [#VetsChat](#)
3. **@CornettePhD**- Military Crisis Line/ Veterans Crisis Line. I think this is an especially valuable resource as it bridges the critical transition period from Service Member to Veteran. We know this transition period to be an especially vulnerable period for suicide risk. I've also developed evidence-based trainings for clinicians serving SMs/Vets, military families, and SMs themselves. Would also strongly recommend Peer Support resources, esp. important as so many Service Members/ Vets are so reluctant to seek formal mental health treatment. Check out [DoD's BeThere Peer Support Line](#) [#BeThere](#)
 - Not sure how widely this has been disseminated, but another is called DryHooch. Modern-day (dry) equivalent to the VFW. The goal is socialization, good coffee, poetry reading, music, etc. Veteran-bonding. Not every vet needs MH txmt. Some need peer support.
4. **@QPR317**- We are beta testing an e-learning maze that engages users in a game-like learning environment accessible through any web connection. Includes self-administered screens for suicidal ideation, loneliness, ACEs, and includes a DYI warrior brain repair tool kit. [#VetsChat](#)

QUESTION 6:

Have you heard about the Healthy Men Michigan campaign? How do you think that WE can work to support veteran mental health? What can YOU, as an individual, do to support veterans' mental health? #VetsChat



1. [@TCruz76](#)- I have heard of the campaign. Very active social media presence on platforms like FB and Twitter. As the community programs reach out then Veterans need to reach out just as far to get programs they need. Also, feedback to what is working and not - so the community can help provide resources the Veterans in the area actually need. We can stop the stigmas and myths. Watch out for your buddy even more so then when you were in the service and get them the help or persuade them to get help earlier than later. [#VetsChat](#)
2. [@WesODonnell01](#)- Some studies show a link between veteran addiction or substance abuse and veteran suicide. I believe that it is an extremely complex problem with many interconnected pieces. Perhaps it is best to start small and have an honest dialog with high-risk veterans one on one [#VetsChat](#)
3. [@JodiJFrey](#)- With about 10% men taking the @HealthyMenMI screening identifying as #Vets – we can do better! Encourage MI #VetMen to do screening at <http://www.HealthyMenMichigan.org> [#VetsChat](#)

PARTICIPANT HIGHLIGHTS:

Sally Spencer-Thomas- @sspencerthomas

A3: Powerful stories of hope and recovery and peer support can be helpful in providing #hope. Meet Logan:
https://youtu.be/MI69AnB4_1E #VetsChat

Also Chad: youtu.be/-YWQ_51U6Pc They attribute peer support from Phoenix Multisport for saving their lives.
<https://thephoenix.org/>

One of the under-told stories that drives despair among MALE veterans is military sexual trauma. My graduate student and I wrote this piece on the topic: [Suicide Prevention among Men Who Experience Military Sexual Trauma \(MST\)](#)

Mission: "[Team Rubicon](#) unites the skills and experiences of military veterans with first responders to rapidly deploy emergency response teams." Gives veterans a sense of purpose. This is #suicideprevention ##VetsChat

I'm also a fan of [@GiveAnHour](#) -- helps reduce some barriers to therapy. <https://giveanhour.org/> #VetsChat

Vet Counsel Vets- @VETSCOUNSELVETS

- [#VetsChat](#) veteran suicide is a national problem with the local solution you need to engage boots on the ground
 - o [@TCruz76](#)- Get out of the office and engage the Veterans in the community where they are at. Do not be afraid to seek them out and provide services on the fly. [#VetsChat](#)
- [#VetsChat](#) understanding military culture is key. Is like dancing and knowing how each other move
 - o [@JodiJFrey](#)- Agreed! Vets & Active service members don't want to spend their first counseling session educating the therapist! As mental health professionals, we need to take some dance lessons! [#VetsChat](#)