

# Randomized Evaluation of a Caring Letters Suicide Prevention Campaign

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration  
Quality Enhancement Research Initiative

## Evaluating an innovative Caring Letters project for Veterans Crisis Line contacts

The Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) is expanding its critical crisis intervention work to provide support beyond the call by implementing a Caring Letters project for approximately **100,000 Veterans annually**. This randomized QUERI partnered evaluation will examine the impact of implementing Caring Letters among Veterans who contact the VCL and provide actionable guidance to enhance program sustainability.

## Veterans Crisis Line expanding support to Veterans

Caring Letters are brief, nondemanding messages that express caring concern, which have been found to reduce the rate of suicide, attempts, and ideation for individuals receiving them. The 2019 VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guidelines suggest sending Caring Letters in addition to usual care for some individuals with elevated risk.

Callers to the VCL may be at increased risk of death by suicide, with a suicide rate several times higher than the general Veteran population.

Veterans enrolled in the evaluation cohort of the Caring Letters project (June 2020 – June 2021) received 9 letters over the course of a year after their initial contact with the VCL. The VCL Caring Letters project currently sends newly enrolled Veterans 8 letters for one year after initial contact with VCL. In the Spring of 2023, the VCL Caring Letters project also concluded a 6-month re-enrollment of some Veterans who contacted VCL again after completing the initial intervention.

Fig 1. Sample Resource Card included with Caring Letters

The resource card is titled "Resources for Veterans" and features the VA logo. It lists five categories of resources:

- myVA**: Discover VA benefits and resources. PHONE: 1-800-MyVA411 (698-2411). WEBSITE: va.gov
- Veterans Crisis Line**: Crisis support for Veterans, their friends, and families. PHONE: Dial 988 then Press 1. CHAT: VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat. TEXT: 838255
- MAKE THE CONNECTION**: Stories of strength and recovery for Veterans and their families. WEBSITE: MakeTheConnection.net
- Vet Center**: Counseling, peer support, and other resources at community offices. PHONE: 1-877-WAR-VETS (927-8387). WEBSITE: www.vetcenter.va.gov
- Help for Homeless Veterans**: Help for Veterans and their families to find and keep safe, stable housing. PHONE: 1-877-4AID-VET (424-3838). WEBSITE: va.gov/homeless

The Veterans Crisis Line is continuing to enroll Veterans beyond the evaluation cohort, and as of **August 2023** over **2,150,000 Caring Letters** have been mailed to more than **285,000 unique Veterans**.



VA Quality Enhancement Research Initiative  
EVIDENCE INTO PRACTICE

# Optimizing VCL Caring Letters Project

Comprised of an interdisciplinary group of investigators embedded in medical centers across VA, the Randomized Evaluation of Caring Letters project team will evaluate the effectiveness of Caring Letters among Veterans who contact the VCL, assessing the impact of both peer and provider signatures.

## The program evaluation will examine:

Clinical outcomes and VA utilization rates by comparing the contact group with rates from a comparable historical cohort of Veterans who contacted the VCL.

Program implementation metrics using the RE-AIM framework.

Sustainability of implementing and maintaining the VCL Caring Letters project through budget impact analysis.

Fig 2. Sample Caring Letter provider card 5 of 9

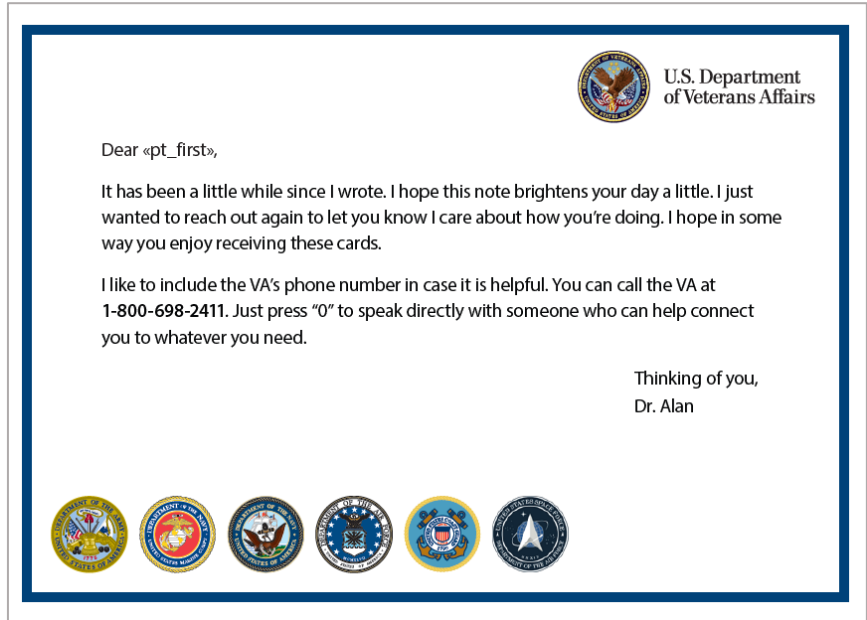
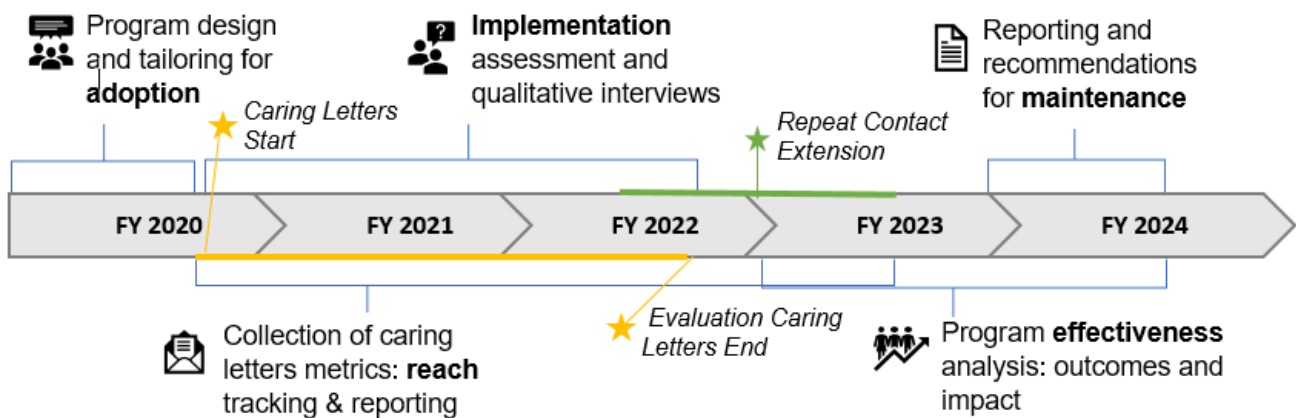


Fig 3. Evaluation Timeline: using the RE-AIM Framework



### For more information, check out:

- <https://vaww.mirecc.va.gov/caringcontacts/veterans-crisis-line-caring-letters.asp> (internal)

### If you would like to learn more, please contact:

vhavclcaringlettersprogram@va.gov

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