Randomized Evaluation of Caring Letters

Evaluating an innovative Caring Letters program for Veterans Crisis Line callers

The Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) is expanding its critical crisis intervention work to provide support beyond the call by implementing a Caring Letters Program for **over 90,000 Veterans annually**. This randomized QUERI partnered evaluation will examine the impact of implementing Caring Letters among VCL callers 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.

VCL is expanding their critical crisis response work to include the Caring Letters Program, in which Veterans will receive letters over the course of a year after their call. It is anticipated that Caring Letters will become a permanent part of VCL care.

**Six months** from the evaluation launch, over **170,000 VCL Caring Letters** have been mailed to more than **47,000 Veterans**.
Optimizing VCL Caring Letters Program

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 VCL callers, assessing the impact of both peer and provider signatures.

The program evaluation will examine:

1. Clinical outcomes and VA utilization rates by comparing the contact group with rates from a comparable historical cohort of Veteran callers to the VCL.
2. Program implementation metrics using the RE-AIM framework.
3. Sustainability of implementing and maintaining the VCL Caring Letters project through budget impact analysis.

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

- **Program design and tailoring** for adoption
- **Implementation** assessment & qualitative interviews
- **Reporting & recommendations** for maintenance
- Collection of caring letters metrics - reach tracking & reporting
- **Program effectiveness** analysis: outcomes & impact

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:
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