



## Editor's Letter

May is always a busy month: School is winding down and with that comes a thousand different things to do and places to be. Like the busy days of December and the holiday season, May can seem overwhelming, and by the time it's over, it can feel like we didn't even have a moment to stop and enjoy the ride. In addition, May is the month we celebrate Memorial Day where we honor all the service members who gave the ultimate sacrifice for their country and for our freedoms. Sometimes, by the end of the month when Memorial Day rolls around, we are so happy to have a day off, we forget at what cost that day off came. I encourage you, even if it's just for a moment, take the time to remember and send your gratitude to those who died while in service to our country, and if you get an extra moment, maybe find a current service member to express your gratitude to in person. Enjoy this month. It will go fast!

Megan

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## Special Feature

By DONNA BOYLE SCHWARTZ



# Sharing the Mission

Leading nonprofit group Stop Soldier Suicide enlists families, communities, clinical partners, volunteers and donors to address and prevent tragedy

Military suicide is not only a national crisis, but it is also a profound family and community tragedy. Stop Soldier Suicide, a leading national nonprofit organization, is working to change this reality by surrounding veterans and service members with the compassion, connection, and collective care they need and deserve.

"Our goal is simple: to reach every veteran or service member who needs support," says Caitlyn Scaggs, national director of marketing and communications for Stop Soldier Suicide. "One of the most important things to know is that suicide prevention is not limited to clinical settings—it is a shared responsibility that involves communities, families and individuals who want to make a difference."

The scope of the situation is stark: The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report shows that veteran suicide numbers have barely shifted, with 6,398 deaths in 2023 — only a slight decrease from the year before. The suicide rate climbed to 35.2 per 100,000 veterans, the highest since 2018, with increases among both men and women. Young veterans

ages 18–34 remain at especially high risk, often facing intertwined challenges such as health issues, homelessness, and chronic pain—pressures that strain families and destabilize communities.

In response, Stop Soldier Suicide has expanded its outreach, deepened partnerships, and strengthened its data driven approach to prevention — all with the goal of building a safety net that extends beyond the individual to the families and communities who stand beside them. These efforts include strengthening the reach and effectiveness of the group's ROGER Wellness Service, which provides suicide-specific care to veterans and service members in all 50 states. At the same time, the organization has advanced its groundbreaking research initiative, the Black Box Project, which allows families who have experienced suicide loss to participate in research designed to better understand suicide risk and heighten prevention efforts.

"Families frequently play a critical role in recognizing when a loved one may be struggling and encouraging them to seek help," Scaggs

explains. “At the same time, many families are navigating the emotional and practical challenges that can come with supporting someone experiencing suicidal ideation or coping with the aftermath of suicide loss. Over the past year, our mission has continued to evolve as we work to save lives today and build scalable solutions that protect veterans, their families, and their communities for generations to come.”

Since its founding, Stop Soldier Suicide has answered more than 26,400 requests for help, delivered more than 49,000 hours of care, and supported more than 12,600 individuals—including more than 6,400 veterans and service members who have received suicide specific clinical care. As FAMILY magazine reported in Sept. 15, 2025, Stop Soldier Suicide was founded in 2010 by U.S. Army veterans Brian Kinsella, Nick Black, and Craig Gridelli after each lost friends and fellow service members to suicide. United by grief and a shared commitment to protect their military family, they set out to build a lifeline for veterans struggling after service. Kinsella notes that preventing suicide requires identifying and addressing the root causes early – financial strain, post traumatic stress, mental health challenges, and the often difficult transition from military to civilian life – before those pressures overwhelm individuals, families, and communities.


Stop Soldier Suicide is funded by individual donors, corporate partners, and foundations and has a robust network of community support. “The financial support we receive from individuals, companies, and foundations is what allows us to provide free and confidential care to veterans and service members nationwide,” Scaggs notes. “One of our most impactful supporters is the Men’s Wearhouse ‘Threads of Valor’ campaign. They have stood alongside us for years, providing meaningful financial support while also helping amplify our life-saving mission to prevent suicide among veterans and service members. In addition to their generosity, their team consistently shows up—attending events, engaging with our work, and staying closely connected to our growth and impact. Their ongoing partnership reflects a deep commitment to standing with veterans and the broader military community.”

Another important initiative taking place this May is the “Pantry Palooza,” a global commissary promotion organized by S&K Sales Co. that brings together vendors and brands to offer discounted ‘stock-up’ deals on pantry staples, snacks, and household essentials. The initiative takes place in May to align with both Mental Health Awareness Month and Military Appreciation Month and is activated at all DeCA commissaries worldwide.

“What makes Pantry Palooza particularly meaningful is its direct impact,” Scaggs explains. “When commissary patrons purchase items marked as part of the promotion, S&K Sales and participating vendors donate a portion of those sales to Stop Soldier Suicide, helping support life-saving care for veterans and service members. Last year, the initiative raised approximately \$70,000, and organizers are aiming to expand that impact to \$100,000 this year. Pantry Palooza is a powerful example of how everyday actions – like buying household essentials – can translate into meaningful support for the military community and the fight to prevent suicide. “

Another important way people engage with the group’s mission is through Facebook Challenges, which are monthly virtual events that invite supporters from coast-to-coast to raise awareness and life-saving funds while completing a daily challenge. Participants share their progress and stories through social media, helping to create a community-led groundswell of support, not only for the organization, but for the broader mission of preventing suicide within the military community. At the same time, these challenges foster meaningful connections among people who are proud to support the military and committed to standing alongside veterans and service members.

“What we see through our Facebook Challenges is the power of community stepping in alongside our military community – people across the country taking action, sharing their stories, raising life-saving funds, and building connections that remind veterans and service members they are not alone in this fight,” explains participant Crystal Clark.

Scaggs points out that the organization and its leadership are hopeful about the future. “When you combine the resilience we see in the people we serve with the innovation driving new approaches to prevention, it gives us a great deal of optimism that more lives can be saved and more families can be spared the pain of suicide loss within the military community,” she states. “If you believe, as we do, that even one suicide is too many, we invite you to stand with us in this fight. Together, through compassion, innovation and collective action, we can end the military suicide crisis.” 

If you are a veteran or service member who may be struggling—  
or if you know someone who is—help is available. Visit [goroger.org/Get-Help](https://goroger.org/Get-Help)  
or call **833-MY-ROGER (833-697-6437)** to connect with the Stop Soldier Suicide team.

