

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4105

August 1, 2017

The Honorable David Shulkin, MD  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, Northwest  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shulkin,

Thank you for your continued commitment to serving America's veterans, with special attention to those who are most vulnerable and in need of immediate attention—veterans experiencing a crisis and contemplating taking their own lives. Combating veteran suicide, which unfortunately persists at an alarmingly high rate, is perhaps the most urgent of the VA's missions. The VA has rightfully focused considerable resources to reversing this epidemic. I write to propose a modest change in hopes that it might make those resources more readily identifiable to veterans who have decided to turn to help, when seconds count the most.

I suggest that information about the Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) be prominently and immediately displayed on the VA's website and mobile site. Should a veteran in crisis visit VA.gov, the first banner he or she will see reads "Access and Quality in VA Health Care." It is not until the second banner that a veteran will see information about the VCL and its phone number. A veteran, family member, or friend could select a tab to advance the scrolling banner, but this option is less noticeable than the contrasting red button for subscribing to VA updates. On a mobile device, one must scroll down to find information on the VCL.

A highly visible button linked to the VCL and anchored to the top of both the desktop and mobile sites could readily serve as a beacon to veterans in need who might otherwise be discouraged by the prospect of navigating a government website. This could also be achieved by displaying the VCL on the first banner. Either change would bring the user experience on par with calling a health care or police number and being immediately being met with an option to report an emergency.

The sustained rate of veteran suicide is just that, an emergency, and the VCL's commensurate prioritization on VA.gov would signal to veterans and their loved ones that the administration has made it a foremost concern. Although this is only a small change, I believe we must make every effort to connect vulnerable veterans with caregivers. Even an incremental gain in reducing the 20 daily veteran suicides should be worthy of the VA's consideration.

Thank you for your continued attention to the pressing matter of veteran suicide. I look forward to continuing to work with you and the department to ensure our veterans receive the care they have earned through service to our nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Thune". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "J" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

JOHN THUNE  
United States Senator