

# USING DATA TO PREVENT VETERAN MORTALITY

A Guide to Accessing & Understanding Mortality Data  
in the VA Mortality Data Repository



## What is the VA Mortality Data Repository?

---

As part of national VA suicide surveillance, the VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (OMHSP) has developed, in coordination with the Department of Defense (DoD), the VA Mortality Data Repository (MDR), also known as the Suicide Data Repository. This is the most comprehensive resource regarding Veteran and former service member mortality, based on joint VA/DoD searches of the National Center for Health Statistics' National Death Index (NDI). The MDR is used for ongoing VA mortality surveillance and program evaluation. This unmatched resource provides information on vital status, date of death, and cause of death for the Veteran population. The MDR includes information from mortality reports submitted from vital statistics systems in all 50 U.S. states, Puerto Rico, and Washington, D.C. With the release of 2017 data, deaths in the U.S. territories are included.



## How Does VA Use Data?

---

Data are crucial for understanding Veteran mortality and enhancing Veteran prevention initiatives. The MDR data are used in both suicide- and non-suicide-related VA research studies. Through the MDR's Board of Governance (BoG), data from the MDR have been provided to VA researchers for more than 100 projects across the continuum of VA health services. Information about how VA uses the MDR for suicide surveillance is available at: [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/mentalhealth/suicide\\_prevention/data.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/mentalhealth/suicide_prevention/data.asp).



## What Types of Data Can I Request From the MDR?

---

The MDR provides all-cause mortality information for Veterans, service members, and Veterans Health Administration (VHA) users who died between January 1, 1979, and December 31, 2019<sup>1</sup> (based on the provided search file of individual identifiers).

Search results returned will include available fields from the MDR as obtained from NDI and VA administrative sources,<sup>2</sup> specifically:

- Date of death
- Cause of death
- State of death
- Date of Birth
- Sex of decedent

Data use is restricted to statistical purposes in medical and health research.



## How Can I Receive Access to Data from the MDR and Learn More?

---

Please contact [VHACANMDRDataRequests@va.gov](mailto:VHACANMDRDataRequests@va.gov) for more information. Staff will provide application materials and can assist with submissions. The VA/DoD BoG is responsible for the MDR and reviews all applications.

Upon BoG approval, requestors will be asked to submit search files and MDR match results are typically returned within one month. Through the MDR, mortality data are available for approved VA studies at no additional cost.

---

1 The current most comprehensive data are available through December 31, 2019.

2 NDI sources date of death, cause of death, and state of death. MDR Administration sources date of birth, and sex of decedent.



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs