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## News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **VA Rolling Out Suicide Hotline Ads in DC** *Peake: First-of-Its-Kind Test for VA*

WASHINGTON – Veterans and other residents of metropolitan Washington, D.C., have begun seeing outreach information on buses and inside subway cars about the suicide prevention hotline of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

The red-white-and-blue displays, the centerpiece of a new three-month outreach campaign, will highlight VA's suicide prevention hotline -- 1-800-273-TALK. If the campaign is successful in raising awareness, VA officials plan to extend the promotional campaign to other parts of the country.

"It takes the courage and strength of a warrior to ask for help," said Dr. James B. Peake, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. "That's the message of this outreach."

In D.C., 80 buses, 220 subway cars and 10 subway stations will carry the displays until mid October. VA officials will measure the effectiveness of the outreach campaign by tracking any increase in calls to its suicide prevention hotline from telephone numbers in the metro D.C. area. VA's newest outreach to veterans and their families about suicide prevention includes soon-to-be-released public service ads featuring actor Gary Sinise.

The ads are the latest outreach tool in a suicide prevention program that includes creation of a toll-free, round-the-clock hotline, which began operation last summer; the expansion of hours at VA's 153 medical facilities to care for veterans with mental health problems; the hiring of suicide prevention counselors at each VA medical center; and special training programs for all VA employees in medical centers and clinics to alert them to warning signs in veterans for suicide and other emotional problems.

VA operates one of the largest mental health programs in the country, with about 9,000 mental health professionals, a yearly mental health budget of about \$3 billion and about 1 million patients who have a mental health diagnosis.

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