

[Associated Press](#)

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WASHINGTON (AP) - The Veterans Affairs Department announced a new advertising campaign on Tuesday that targets veterans at risk for suicide.

The ads include the VA's suicide hot line number. "It takes the courage and strength of a warrior to ask for help," is the slogan in the ads, which will start running on Monday.

They will run in the metropolitan Washington area inside metro stations, on metro cars, and on buses for three months as part of a pilot project. The city was chosen, in part, because of its proximity to veterans hospitals and military bases.

On June 16, VA Secretary James Peake changed an agency policy to allow it to pay for advertising. The changes were praised by Rep. Harry Mitchell, D-Ariz., who has encouraged the VA to have more targeted outreach.

"We want to see a full fledged approach of reaching out to veterans instead of having veterans come to them," Mitchell, a member of the House Veterans Affairs committee, said Tuesday.

Lisette Mondello, a VA official, told lawmakers during a hearing Tuesday that if the program is successful, it will be expanded. She said the agency is also looking into using online social networking sites and podcasts to reach out to younger veterans.

Critics have charged that the VA is not doing enough to prevent suicide. Last year, the VA created the hot line and appointed suicide prevention coordinators at all medical centers.

Using numbers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the VA has estimated that

VA to advertise its suicide hot line program

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18 veterans a day - or 6,500 a year - take their own lives.

The toll-free Veterans Affairs Department suicide hot line number is 1-800-273-TALK (8255).