



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF STAFF
WASHINGTON, DC

18 MAR 1999

MEMORANDUM FOR ALMAJCOM/FOA/DRU

FROM: HQ USAF/CC
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1670

SUBJECT: Suicide Prevention

I am extremely proud of Air Force leaders at all levels who have met the challenge to reduce suicides among Air Force personnel. The benchmark work of the Air Force Suicide Prevention Integrated Product Team is receiving national attention, and in 1998 the Air Force had its lowest rate of suicide in 19 years of record keeping--the lowest rate in DoD. Our suicide rate has declined 40 percent since 1995!

As we look more closely at our suicide data, it appears our prevention initiatives have positively affected all groups except senior enlisted members. Unfortunately, the suicide rate among E7 to E9s remains essentially unchanged over the past four years. At this time, we can only speculate as to why the rates have not fallen in this group. However, it is clear that most individuals who receive help for their legal, relationship, mental health (including substance abuse), and financial problems can be prevented from making the disastrous choice of taking their lives. These four factors are involved in 75 percent of the suicides among airmen.

I need you to ensure that everyone in your command knows how much I appreciate their lifesaving work--increasing awareness, changing attitudes, and assisting people when they need help. Now, we all need to focus more attention on changing awareness and attitudes among our senior enlisted members, older persons, who when facing these kinds of problems, may feel like they're losing everything. They, too, must believe they work and live in a community that encourages and protects individuals who seek help.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael E. Ryan".

MICHAEL E. RYAN
General, USAF
Chief of Staff