

Fact Sheet – Mental Health Care for Servicemembers, Veterans and Families

Marshalling efforts across government and partnering with communities to ensure Servicemembers, Veterans, and families get the mental health care they need and have earned.

Since day one of his Administration, the President has worked to ensure that the brave men and women who serve our country receive the care, services, and benefits they have earned and deserve. This includes caring not only for their physical health, but just as importantly, for their mental health. For Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families that experience mental health challenges, we must ensure that they are aware of and have the opportunity to utilize the resources and supports that are available to them. The Administration has made tremendous strides in this regard since the beginning of 2009, but more work is needed so that every Servicemember, Veteran, and family has the support they need.

Last fiscal year alone, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provided mental health treatment to more than 1.6 million veterans, with VA completing – on average – more than 500,000 mental health appointments every month. In that same period, the Department of Defense (DoD) provided mental health treatment to more than 670,000 Servicemembers and their families, averaging approximately 700,000 completed visits with a provider every month at Military Treatment and civilian medical facilities. And in order to ensure that urgent services are offered in a timely fashion, VA has announced the goal of providing Veterans with same-day evaluations and access to mental health care by the end of calendar year.

Addressing mental health issues is not only about the number of people treated and how quickly they are treated, but about ensuring that individuals facing mental health challenges and their families know that help is available and treatment is possible. For that reason, DoD, VA, and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) are working together to:

1. Strengthen mental health and suicide prevention services;
2. Work with community partners to foster a better understanding of mental illness and build networks to support Servicemembers and veterans in the community; and
3. Improve public awareness of mental health.

In 2012, the President signed an Executive Order (EO) directing greater coordination between Federal agencies on this issue, including through the creation of the Interagency Task Force on Military and Veterans Mental Health (ITF) and a subsequent Cross-Agency Priority Goal setting out ambitious targets and milestones for this work. To further support these efforts, in August 2014, the President also announced a series of 19 Executive Actions to further our work on supporting the mental health of Servicemembers and Veterans. In February 2015, he signed into law the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans (SAV) Act, designed to further reduce the tragedy of Veteran suicide and improve access to mental health care. And thanks to the Affordable Care Act, we seen an historic expansion of health coverage that has helped more people get treatment for substance use and mental health conditions.

While important progress has been made, this work is not done. Moving forward, and building on the lessons learned at the February 2016 summit, “Preventing Veterans Suicide – A Call to

Action,” the Administration will continue its work to ensure that Servicemembers and Veterans have access to the mental health care that they need and have earned. And we will continue to embed and institutionalize the arrangements among VA, DoD and HHS so that these agencies continue to work together to advance mental health policies and programs for the benefit of the brave men and women who serve our country.

Strengthening Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Services

The Administration continues to strengthen Federal mental health services and suicide prevention efforts for Servicemembers and Veterans by sharing resources and identifying new opportunities for early intervention.

- [The Veterans Crisis Line / Military Crisis Line](#) is a partnership in which responders are specially trained to help military Servicemembers and Veterans of all ages and circumstances. From its inception in 2007, the crisis line has received over 2.2 million calls and dispatched emergency responders to callers in crisis over 58,000 times. Since adding an anonymous online chat service in 2009, responders have engaged in more than 280,000 chats and after adding a text messaging service in November 2011, have responded to 51,000 texts. VA is also working to add capacity to the crisis line to keep up with demand, increasing staffing to 310 employees and adding new training for responders. As a result, the crisis line continues to have a strong record of success, demonstrating a 97% satisfaction rating from Veterans that call in.
- In response to the President’s 2012 Executive Order, VA hired additional personnel to provide mental health care, bringing onboard approximately 5,300 new clinical and non-clinical mental health staff since 2012, as well as 932 peer specialists.
- The “[Power of One](#)” is a VA-led public outreach campaign that conveys the power that one person, one conversation, or one small act can have towards preventing suicide. The recent “Power of One” television public service announcement ranked in the top 2 percent of PSAs nationally, achieving over 700 million media impressions.
- New connections are being made across DoD and VA to ensure more seamless support as individuals transition from military service to civilian life. For example:
 - Medical records are consistently shared across the DoD and VA health care systems through the Joint Legacy Viewer to ensure that health care providers have a seamless, comprehensive view of a patient’s mental health history.
 - In response to an Executive Action announced by the President in 2014, transitioning Servicemembers are now automatically enrolled into DoD’s *inTransition* program, which pairs behavioral health professionals with Servicemembers to provide a smooth and stable transition to VA or civilian behavioral health services.
 - Similarly, in response to the President’s Executive Actions, VA’s policy is now for mental health medications initiated by DoD authorized providers to be

continued when a patient moves to the VA, ensuring that Veterans are able maintain their mental health medications when they transition.

- To reduce the risk of overdose and suicide, we are facilitating the return of medications that are no longer necessary. VA offers take back options to Veterans at all VA facilities and to-date over 30,400 pounds of unwanted/unneeded medications have been returned and destroyed in an environmentally responsible manner. VA engages Veterans in these efforts through flyers at the facility level, as well as online resources which provide information on safe storage and medication safety in the home. In addition, DoD has published a new policy requiring a drug take-back program across all Military Treatment Facilities and accompanying operational procedures, to make these programs more effective and ensure beneficiaries receive consistent service across DoD.
- On February 2, VA in cooperation with DoD and other stakeholders hosted a summit, “Preventing Veterans Suicide – A Call to Action,” to bring together Veterans, families, Federal agencies, community providers, subject matter experts, and other key partners to enhance suicide prevention efforts. The summit generated a series of 9 key initiatives and goals that will guide our efforts moving forward, focused on individually-tailored care, new access standards, research and partnerships designed to engage and serve all 22 million of our nation’s Veterans.

Working with Community Partners

Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families often seek care and support in their communities. That is why we continue to look for opportunities to partner with community entities to ensure all who touch the lives of Veterans and Servicemembers will be more effective in their efforts.

- We have created the [Community Provider Toolkit](#), a one-stop web-based repository of DoD, VA and HHS tools, which provides community organizations and clinicians with access to information and resources to support their work with Veterans.
- The understanding of military culture is essential to providing patient-centered care and services. That is why DoD and VA have developed [military cultural training](#) for health care professionals interested in improving their understanding of Servicemember and Veteran experiences. This is an online course offering free continuing education to health care providers in the community as well as to those in Federal agencies.
- VA’s Community Mental Health Summits began in 2013 in response to the President’s call to action at the White House’s National Conference on Mental Health, and are held annually at all VA medical centers in partnership with local community and military organizations. These summits have improved community partners’ understanding of VA services and willingness to work with VA to improve care for Veterans and their families.
- As Peer Specialists increasingly play important roles on mental health care teams, DoD, VA and HHS have been working together to determine best practices for developing the skills of peers, peer services, and their role in supporting prevention, treatment and recovery. Peers

have a common understanding of the experience of Servicemembers and Veterans and have been recruited to implement programs that reach Servicemembers and Veterans who may otherwise not seek treatment.

- Building on a requirement in the Clay Hunt SAV Act, the VA is standing up a pilot program to use community outreach and peer support to engage Veterans in care.

Improving Public Awareness of Mental Health

We continue our shared efforts to improve our understanding of mental health and interventions that work.

- The [National Research Action Plan](#) (NRAP) fosters interagency collaboration on research related to the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI), and to improve suicide prevention efforts.
- In addition to coordinating interagency research goals, DoD, VA, and HHS are working to implement common clinical and treatment outcome measures in order to deliver services which are measurement-based.
- Negative attitudes, stereotypes, and prejudice against those with mental health conditions are barriers to care for those who may need help. Robust outreach to combat the negative perceptions associated with mental health services is essential for raising awareness and educating Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families about mental health and the resources that are available to them. VA's [Make the Connection](#), DoD's [Real Warriors campaign](#), and the HHS/Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) [Recovery Month campaign](#) are all examples of initiatives intended to address prejudice and discrimination against those with a mental disorder.
- VA is working to create a pilot program, in response to the Clay Hunt SAV Act, to repay education loans for medical training in psychiatry for individuals who serve in the VA and provide psychiatric care for Veterans.

Resources and Assistance Available

Servicemembers, Veterans, and families that are struggling with mental health issues, as well as community partners seeking to help, can look to the following resources to get care and assistance or reach out to their local DoD or VA health care facility:

Veterans Crisis Line / Military Crisis Line

<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>

1-800-273-8255

Text 838255

Suicide Prevention Lifeline

<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

1-800-273-8255

Military Cultural Competence for Health Care Professionals

<http://deploymentpsych.org/military-culture>

Make the Connection

<http://maketheconnection.net/>

Real Warriors

<http://www.realwarriors.net/>

Recovery Month

www.recoverymonth.gov

VA MedSafe

<http://www.pbm.va.gov/PBM/vacenterformedicationsafety/vacenterformedicationsafetyprescriptionsafety.asp>

Community Provider Toolkit Interagency Page

<http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/communityproviders/itf.asp>

Military OneSource

<http://www.militaryonesource.mil/>

1-800-342-9647