



MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OF VETERANS, RETURNING SOLDIERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

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ISSUE: The Walter Reed Army Institute estimates that 15-17% of returning military from the Global War on Terror will have significant mental health and substance use disorder problems. (Col. Charles Hoge, M.D., January, 2007, *The American Journal of Psychiatry*)ⁱ. There have been unique challenges posed by the Iraq and Afghan combat theaters and the stressors inherent in multiple deployments. These challenges are in part to the changing face of the military, needs of active military, reservists, National Guardsmen and civilian roles as well as changes in gender demographics.

BACKGROUND: The needs of returning soldiers and their families are substantial. While the knowledge base on the impact of combat exposure on military personnel is emerging, much remains to be learned, particularly regarding deployed women soldiers and family members -- especially children. It is essential that efforts be made to expand our knowledge and that medical and mental health support services are put in place to respond to the needs of both service personnel and their families.

APA POSITION:

The APA is grateful for Congress' bipartisan attention and support already given to the needs of deployed and returning military, reservists and National Guard. As Congress moves forward with funding and oversight of Veterans Administration and Department of Defense's health and medical research programs in 2009, we ask that Congress:

- Improve access to a continuum of mental health and substance use disorder services for returning soldiers and their families and dedicate funding to support professional positions to the VA workforce required to meet the needs of our veterans;
- Reduce the stigma of seeking mental health and substance use disorder services;
- Require continual oversight of the VA and DoD's implementation of suicide prevention and awareness programs as well as efforts to improve access to mental health and substance use disorder services;
- Increase funding of research on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI) and their long-term effects on health;
- Increase funding for research on evidence-based treatment of PTSD and co-occurring substance use disorders;
- Increase funding for the Medical and Prosthetics Research Program to \$575 million;
- Improve access to psychiatric and other counseling services for families of deployed and returning soldiers;
- Support specialized mental health services for military women separated from their families and exposed to combat or sexual trauma;
- Improve access to in-patient services for returning military needing treatment for both substance use disorders and issues related to PTSD; and
- Ensure that our service personnel receive the highest quality care provided by appropriately-trained health professionals.

ⁱ [Tanielian, T., & Jaycox, L.H. (2008). *Invisible Wounds of War: Psychological and Cognitive Injuries, Their Consequences, and Surveys to Assist Recovery*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved from <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG720/>]
