



**MILITARY, VETERANS, AND MILITARY FAMILIES:  
SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO SERVE**



**“WE ARE SEEING RECOVERY TAKE ROOT IN MANY MORE VETERANS’ LIVES – AND MY PARTICIPATION WITHIN THIS EFFORT IS CHERISHED AMONG MY GREATEST BLESSINGS AND PRIVILEGE.”**

– KYLE

### **THE ISSUE**

Veterans and active duty service members are often affected by unique behavioral health issues related to their service. When facing stressful situations at work or at home, it can be challenging for veterans and active duty service members to balance overarching values embedded in military culture – teamwork, selflessness, and working towards meeting shared goals – while feeling empowered to address their personal needs<sup>1</sup> and seek help, support, and treatment.

- Approximately 18.5 percent of service members returning from Iraq or Afghanistan have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or depression, and 19.5 percent report experiencing a traumatic brain injury (TBI) during deployment.<sup>2</sup>

- Veterans experience a significantly higher suicide risk when compared to the general American population, and are at greatest risk of committing suicide within three years after leaving military service.<sup>3</sup>

Many veterans and active duty service members also experience psychological distress as a result of combat, which can be further complicated by mental and/or substance use disorders.

- When veterans experienced a substance use disorder, their disorder lasted four years longer than non-veterans,<sup>4</sup> and they initiated recovery at an older age.<sup>5</sup>



**18.5%**  
PTSD

## APPROXIMATELY 18.5% OF SERVICE MEMBERS RETURNING FROM IRAQ OR AFGHANISTAN HAVE POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD) OR DEPRESSION.

Invisible Wounds: Mental Health and Cognitive Care Needs of America's Returning Veterans. RAND Corporation. Retrieved from [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB9336/index1.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9336/index1.html).

Military families often face deployment-related stressors, adjustments when veterans and active duty service members return home, the nuances of welcoming home a family member who returns with a combat injury or illness, or the ultimate tragedy of losing a family member.

- Cumulative length of deployments is associated with more emotional difficulties among military children and more mental health diagnoses among U.S. Army wives.<sup>6,7</sup>
- Children of deployed military personnel have more school-, family-, and peer-related emotional difficulties, compared with national samples.<sup>8</sup>
- For service members' families, the degree of hardship and negative consequences experienced at home rises with the service members' exposure to traumatic or life-altering experiences.<sup>9</sup>

### FINDING SUPPORT

Many veterans and active duty service members have served multiple tours, resulting in high rates of behavioral health issues. Although there are many resources for veterans and active duty service members and their families, there are barriers that can sometimes make it challenging for veterans and active duty service members and their families to seek treatment and receive the help they need.

- Practical barriers, perceptions of mental health problems, and attitudes towards treatment can sometimes prevent service members from seeking treatment.<sup>10</sup>
- Approximately 50 percent of returning service members who need treatment for mental health conditions seek it, but only slightly more than half who participate in treatment receive adequate care.<sup>11</sup>

Families are in a unique position to recognize the signs and symptoms of a mental and/or substance use disorder in a loved one. For more information, visit the following resources:

- **Signs an Adult Loved One or Friend Has a Problem with Drugs:** [www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/treatment/what-to-do-if-your-adult-friend-or-loved-one-has-problem-drugs](http://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/treatment/what-to-do-if-your-adult-friend-or-loved-one-has-problem-drugs)
- **Signs a Teen or Young Adult Has a Problem with Drugs:** [www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/treatment/what-to-do-if-your-teen-or-young-adult-has-problem-drugs](http://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/treatment/what-to-do-if-your-teen-or-young-adult-has-problem-drugs)
- **Symptoms of an Alcohol Use Disorder:** [rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/How-much-is-too-much/Whats-the-harm/What-Are-Symptoms-Of-An-Alcohol-Use-Disorder.aspx](http://rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/How-much-is-too-much/Whats-the-harm/What-Are-Symptoms-Of-An-Alcohol-Use-Disorder.aspx)
- **Signs of a Mental Health Disorder:** [www.mentalhealth.gov/what-to-look-for/index.html](http://www.mentalhealth.gov/what-to-look-for/index.html)

Families can play a major role in helping to prevent mental and/or substance use disorders, identifying when someone has a problem,<sup>12</sup> and connecting those in need with the treatment resources and services they need to begin and stay on their recovery journey.<sup>13</sup> Efforts to develop family resilience during military deployments and returning home are extremely important in helping with veterans' recovery and fostering healthy families.

Military service members, veterans, and families also benefit from knowing they are not alone. Visit **Recovery Month's** Personal Recovery Stories ([www.recoverymonth.gov/personal-stories](http://www.recoverymonth.gov/personal-stories)) to see personal stories of recovery, join the voices of recovery, and share your personal story with hundreds of thousands of **Recovery Month** supporters online today!

19.5%  
TBI



APPROXIMATELY, **19.5% OF SERVICE MEMBERS RETURNING FROM IRAQ OR AFGHANISTAN REPORT EXPERIENCING A TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY DURING DEPLOYMENT.**

Invisible Wounds: Mental Health and Cognitive Care Needs of America's Returning Veterans. RAND Corporation. Retrieved from [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB9336/index1.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9336/index1.html).

## PROMOTING RECOVERY

Service members and military families have unique behavioral health needs that are not always understood within the civilian community. There are organizations, services, and resources available to meet these unique needs and support the recovery journeys of veterans and active duty service members and those that love them.

Resources for service members include:

- **AfterDeployment.org** ([afterdeployment.dcoe.mil](http://afterdeployment.dcoe.mil)): Provides behavioral health resources that support service members, their families, and veterans with common post-deployment challenges (Defense Centers of Excellence resource).
- **BrainLineMilitary.org** ([www.brainlinemilitary.org](http://www.brainlinemilitary.org)): Provides military-specific information and resources (including videos, webcasts, and personal stories) about TBI to veterans, service members, and their families; visitors can learn more about brain injury symptoms and treatment, rehabilitation, and family issues associated with TBI care and recovery.
- **MakeTheConnection.net** ([maketheconnection.net](http://maketheconnection.net)): Encourages veterans and active duty service members and their families to “make the connection”—with information and resources, with the strength and resilience of veterans and active duty service members like themselves, with other people, and with available sources of support, including mental health treatments.
- **Military and Veteran Caregiver Peer Support Network** ([www.taps.org/MVCN](http://www.taps.org/MVCN)): Offers peer-based support and services to connect caregivers with others who are giving care to members of the military or veterans who are living with wounds, illness, or injury.
- **National Institute on Drug Abuse's Substance Abuse in Military Life** (<https://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/substance-abuse-in-military-life>): Offers resources and statistics on substance misuse in the military.
- **Operation Enduring Freedom / Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF)** ([www.oefoif.va.gov/index.asp](http://www.oefoif.va.gov/index.asp)): Serves as a direct link to the Veterans Health Administration benefits for service members returning home from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) missions.
- **RealWarriors.net** ([www.realwarriors.net/](http://www.realwarriors.net/)): Describes an initiative launched by the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury that promotes the processes of building resilience, facilitating recovery and supporting reintegration of returning service members, veterans and their families.
- **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Mental Health** ([www.mentalhealth.va.gov/index.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/index.asp)): Provides authoritative mental health information and resources for veterans and active duty service members and their families.
- **Veterans Center Readjustment Counseling Service** ([www.vetcenter.va.gov](http://www.vetcenter.va.gov)): Provides a continuum of quality care that adds value for the veterans and active duty service members, families, and communities.
- **Veterans Crisis Line** (<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net>): Provides support for veterans, service members, in crisis and their loved ones, 24/7/365, at 1-800-273-8255, press 1.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SAMHSA'S EFFORTS TO ENSURE THAT AMERICAN SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES CAN ACCESS BEHAVIORAL HEALTH TREATMENT AND SERVICES, VISIT [WWW.SAMHSA.GOV/VETERANS-MILITARY-FAMILIES](http://WWW.SAMHSA.GOV/VETERANS-MILITARY-FAMILIES)

## RESOURCES FOR MILITARY FAMILIES INCLUDE:

- **Military Families Knowledge Bank** (mfkb.nctsn.org/cwis/index.php): Online database of resources for and about members of the military, veterans, and their families. MFKB provides access to a wealth of web resources on family functioning and support, social and government services, PTSD and traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury, and other issues.
- **MilitaryKidsConnect.org** (militarykidsconnect.dcoe.mil): Provides kids, tweens, teens, teachers, and parents information on coping and connecting before, during, and after family deployments (Defense Centers of Excellence resource).
- **Sesame Street for Military Families** (www.sesamestreetformilitaryfamilies.org): Offers a free, bilingual (English and Spanish) website where families can find information and multimedia resources on the topics of military deployments, multiple deployments, homecomings, injuries, grief, and self-expression.
- **The FOCUS (Families OverComing Under Stress) Project** (www.focusproject.org): Provides resiliency training to military children and families. It teaches practical skills to help families overcome common challenges related to a parent's military service, to communicate and solve problems effectively, and to successfully set goals together and create a shared family story.

- **Traumatic Grief in Military Children** (www.nctsn.org/trauma-types/traumatic-grief/mental-health-professionals): Provides culturally competent materials for educating families, medical professionals, and school personnel about how to better serve military children who are experiencing traumatic grief following a death or loss; additional resources for families, educators, and service providers.
- **VA Caregiver Support** (www.caregiver.va.gov): Provides the VA's Caregiver Support Line (1-855-260-3274), licensed Caregiver Support Coordinators, and the Caregiver Peer Support Mentoring Program.

The challenges for military families are considerable and complex. However, they are not insurmountable, and with the help from the community, recovery for military families is possible.

For more information, including **Recovery Month** resources for families and the community, public service announcements, events across the country, and social media tools, visit the **Recovery Month** website at [www.recoverymonth.gov/](http://www.recoverymonth.gov/).

This list is not exhaustive of all available resources. Inclusion of websites and resources in this document and on the **Recovery Month** website does not constitute official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

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- <sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. VA Mental Health. Understanding the Military Experience. Retrieved from: [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/communityproviders/military\\_culture.asp#sthash.S8E7U87j.d9exXgkA.dpbs](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/communityproviders/military_culture.asp#sthash.S8E7U87j.d9exXgkA.dpbs).
- <sup>2</sup> Invisible Wounds: Mental Health and Cognitive Care Needs of America's Returning Veterans. RAND Corporation. Retrieved from [www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB9336/index1.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9336/index1.html).
- <sup>3</sup> Kang HK, Bullman TA, Smolenski DJ, Skopp NA, Gahm GA, Reger MA. (2014). Suicide risk among 1.3 million veterans who were on active duty during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. *Ann Epidemiol.* 2015 Feb;25(2): 96-100. Retrieved from: [www.publichealth.va.gov/epidemiology/studies/suicide-risk-death-risk-recent-veterans.asp](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/epidemiology/studies/suicide-risk-death-risk-recent-veterans.asp).
- <sup>4</sup> Laudet A and Timko C, Hill T. Comparing life experiences in active addiction and recovery between veterans and non-veterans: A national study. *J Addict Dis.* 2014; 33(2): 148-62.
- <sup>5</sup> Laudet A and Timko C, Hill T. Comparing life experiences in active addiction and recovery between veterans and non-veterans: A national study. *J Addict Dis.* 2014; 33(2): 148-62.
- <sup>6</sup> Lesser, P., Peterson, K., Reeves, J., et al. The long war and parental combat deployment: effects on military children and at home spouses. (2010). *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* (4), 310–320.
- <sup>7</sup> Mansfield, A. J., Kaufman, J. S., Marshall, S. W., et al. (2010). Deployment and the use of mental health services among U.S. Army wives. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 362,101–109.
- <sup>8</sup> Chandra, A., Lara-Cinisomo, S., Jaycox, L. H., et al. (2010). Children on the homefront: The experience of children from military families. *Pediatrics*, 125, 16–25.
- <sup>9</sup> Committee on the Assessment of Resiliency and Prevention Programs for Mental and Behavioral Health in Service Members and Their Families, Board on the Health of Select Populations, Institute of Medicine; Denning LA, Meisner M, Warner KE, editors. *Preventing Psychological Disorders in Service Members and Their Families: An Assessment of Programs.* Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2014 Feb 11.
- <sup>10</sup> Zinzow HM, Britt TW, McFadden AC, Burnette CM, and Gillispie S. Connecting active duty and returning veterans to mental health treatment: Interventions and treatment adaptations that may reduce barriers to care. *Clin Psychol Rev.* 2012 Dec; 32(8): 741-53.
- <sup>11</sup> Tanielian, T. L., RAND Corporation & Center for Military Health Policy Research. (2008). *Invisible wounds of war: Summary and recommendations for addressing psychological and cognitive injuries.* Santa Monica: RAND.
- <sup>12</sup> Velleman, R. D. B., Templeton, L. J. and Copello, A. G. (2005), *The role of the family in preventing and intervening with substance use and misuse: a comprehensive review of family interventions, with a focus on young people.* *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 24: 93–109. doi: 10.1080/09595230500167478.
- <sup>13</sup> Center for Substance Abuse Treatment. Substance Abuse Treatment and Family Therapy. Rockville (MD): Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US); 2004. (Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series, No. 39.) Chapter 1 Substance Abuse Treatment and Family Therapy. Available from: [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK64269/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK64269/).