

June 2012

VA Mental Health Care Accomplishments

1. Overall Mental Health Care

- The Uniform Mental Health Services Handbook provides a comprehensive, forward-looking overview of the full range of mental health services that VA Medical Centers and Community Based Outpatient Clinics must provide. Most Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) have implemented about 90% of the handbook requirements.
- In FY2011, 1,338,482 Veterans received specialized mental health treatment from VA for a mental health problem; this number has risen each year, for example from 927,052 in FY2006.
- One major reason for this increase is proactive screening to identify Veterans who may have symptoms of depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), problem use of alcohol or who have experienced military sexual trauma (MST), and who need further evaluation and treatment planning if a diagnosis is made.
- Mental health staff levels have increased, from 13,802 in FY2006 to more than 20,500 currently.
- Expanded access is available, with longer clinic hours, telemental health capability to deliver services, and standards that mandate rapid access to mental health services.
- State-of-the-art treatment, both psychotherapies and biomedical treatments, are available for the full range of mental health problems, including PTSD.
- VA offers high quality care, based on a recovery-oriented model that offers rehabilitation as well as symptomatic treatment.
- In November 2011, VA launched an award-winning, national public awareness campaign aimed at reducing the stigma associated with seeking mental health care and informing Veterans, their families and friends, and members of their communities about VA resources (www.maketheconnection.net).
- Mental health staff members are integrated into primary care Patient Aligned Care Teams throughout the VA system; they assist with patient education, medication management, follow-up for full mental health evaluations and many other important functions designed to provide comprehensive mental health care.
- VA has worked with the Department of Defense (DoD) to develop the VA/DoD Integrated Mental Health Strategy (IMHS); implementation for all 28 actions of the IMHS is now underway.
- VA has programs for Veterans whose mental health problems result in interactions with the Justice system.

- All of the above programs are available to Veterans who are homeless or at risk for homelessness, given the high rates of mental health problems and substance use disorders among homeless Veterans.
- The National Call Center for Homeless Veterans (1-877-4AID VET) was fully implemented March 1, 2010. The Call Center ensures that homeless Veterans or Veterans at-risk for homelessness have free, 24/7 access to trained counselors.

2. Suicide Prevention

- August 6, 2011, marked four years since the establishment of VA's Veterans Crisis Line (1-800-273-TALK (8255), press 1), which has expanded to include a Chat Service and texting option for contacting the Crisis Line. The program continues to save lives and link Veterans with effective ongoing mental health services on a daily basis.
- Some details as of the end of April, 2012:
 - Over 600,000 calls and over 54,000 chat connections
 - Over 22,000 rescues of those in immediate suicidal crisis
 - Over 93,000 callers provided referral to a VA Suicide Prevention Coordinator
- The Veterans Crisis Line operates in conjunction with the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans (1-877-4AID VET) and Homeless Veterans Chat; this is proving to be a very effective collaboration.

3. PTSD Treatment

- In fiscal year 2011, 476,515 enrolled Veterans with a confirmed PTSD diagnosis received treatment in VA medical centers and clinics; this number has risen each year, for example from 271,976 in FY2006.
- State-of-the-art treatments are available for Veterans with PTSD:
 - As of May 2012, over 4,400 VA mental health professionals have been trained in the most effective known therapies for PTSD, Prolonged Exposure and Cognitive Processing Therapy.
 - Medication treatments also are offered and may be especially helpful for specific symptoms of PTSD.
 - The National Center for PTSD guides a national PTSD Mentoring program, which works with every specialty PTSD program across the country to improve care.

4. Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Treatment

- In FY 2011, 160,223 Veterans received specialized treatment for substance use disorders; this represents a 43% increase from 112,217 in FY 2006.
- VA has developed and received approval for VHA's five year plan to support the 2011 National Strategy of the Office of National Drug Control Policy; received evaluation of Substance Use Disorder programs by General Accounting Office with no recommendations offered for improvement.

- VA has developed and disseminated clinical guidance to newly hired SUD-PTSD specialists at 139 facilities who are promoting integrated care for these co-occurring conditions.

5. Military Sexual Trauma-Related Mental Health Treatment

- Specialized care is available for Veterans who experienced military sexual trauma. All MST-related care is provided free of charge, and Veterans may be able to receive this care even if not eligible for other VA care. In FY 2011, every VHA facility provided MST-related outpatient care to both women and men.
- Overall in FY 2011, 640,550 outpatient MST-related mental health encounters were provided to Veterans with a positive MST screen. This is a 13.8% increase from the previous year (FY 2010), where 562,986 outpatient MST-related mental health encounters were provided.