



AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

American Psychological Association Background Information Mental Health of Military and Veteran Populations

Given the nation's ongoing involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan and the psychological nature of many injuries faced by returning military personnel and recent veterans, Members of Congress and their staff are keenly interested in the mental health of military and veteran populations right now. During your visits to Capitol Hill to talk about psychological science and health, it is possible that staff will ask for research, assessment, treatment and/or policy recommendations related to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), and/or other clinical issues. Many Capitol Hill staff assume that as psychologists, you have expertise in clinical disorders.

Although you should refrain from addressing questions that fall outside your expertise (and you can let the office know that APA staff will get back in touch with a response later), it is important to know as background that all four APA Directorates – Science, Practice, Education and Public Interest – and the Government Relations Offices attached to each, are active in promoting the roles of psychology and psychologists in addressing the special needs of military personnel, veterans, their families and communities. These are just a few of the recent activities in this area:

APA Presidential Task Force

- In 2006, then APA President Gerald Koocher established the *Presidential Task Force on the Psychological Needs of U.S. Military Service Members and Their Families*, which issued its final report in February of 2007. As recommended in this report, a subsequent APA task force was created to develop a long-range plan of action for the association with specific recommendations regarding the provision of psychological health services to military service members and their families. This work is still in process, with a final report expected this year.

Training for Military and Civilian Psychologists

- In collaboration with a team of military psychologists, APA created and obtained federal funding for the Center for Deployment Psychology at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, now a component center of the Defense Center of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury. The Center has trained over 400 military and civilian mental health professionals through a two-week course, another 500 through a one-week course, and countless more in short seminars nationwide. Training includes issues regarding the deployment cycle, trauma and resilience, behavioral health care for the severely injured, and the impact of deployment on families.
- APA is also working with Congress to substantially increase the number of clinical internships for psychologists at U.S. Army military treatment facilities.

Mental Health Services for Military Personnel and Their Families

- APA is examining ways to improve the operation of TRICARE, the health care program for the military that serves families, survivors, and retirees, as well as certain military personnel, National Guard, and Reservists. Due to concerted legislative advocacy by APA and others, the reimbursement rate for civilian psychologists who work with military personnel and their families is likely to increase with the recent passage of the *Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act* (P.L. 110-275). The rate of reimbursement under TRICARE is closely related to that of Medicare.
- APA advocacy efforts have focused on specific legislative proposals addressing such critical mental health issues as suicide prevention and the unique mental health needs of special and growing military populations, including National Guard and Reservists, female service members, service members of color, caregivers of the combat injured, and children and families of military personnel.
- APA has provided expert consultation to the Institute of Medicine for a study on posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as well as to the Government Accountability Office on two separate studies regarding the extent of nation-wide access to TRICARE services and concerns about a possible increase in the prevalence of administrative discharge of military personnel without health care benefits on the basis of a personality disorder diagnosis, respectively.
- APA has conducted numerous meetings on Capitol Hill, successfully recommended psychologists for congressional hearings, and sponsored congressional briefings to educate members of Congress and their staff about the mental health needs of military personnel and their families, including attention to the increasing incidence of PTSD and traumatic brain injury resulting from exposure to improvised explosive devices in the midst of the insurgency warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- APA has developed a resource guide highlighting some of the mental health and related resources for assisting service members, veterans, and their families. This resource guide has been distributed to APA members, relevant stakeholder organizations, and policy makers and is available on the APA website.
- APA has forged close working relationships with a variety of veterans service organizations, military and veterans advocacy groups, and other health-related organizations concerned about military and veterans health issues. APA engages in information sharing and collaborative advocacy with a variety of these groups on behalf of the mental health needs of service members, veterans, and their families.

Other Assistance and Opportunities for Military Personnel and Their Families

- APA successfully lobbied Congress for specific statutory authority for various special, bonus, and incentive pays for military clinical psychologists to enhance recruitment and retention efforts. APA has also urged the Department of Defense (DoD) to implement this new statutory authority as quickly and fully as possible.

- APA contributed to the creation of a memorandum of agreement between DoD and the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) to enable military psychologists leaving active duty and PHS psychologists to work in military treatment facilities (MTFs) with full benefits and without the risk of deployment to a war zone. It is hoped that this initiative will also lead to increased opportunities for internships for civilian psychologists to gain supervised clinical experience in MTFs, as well as add to the number of training psychologists in Army and Air Force internship programs.
- APA effectively raised concerns to the Secretary of Defense regarding the need to ensure that confidential communications between military personnel and mental health providers are clearly recognized as privileged communications in administrative separation proceedings based on homosexual conduct.
- APA is working with Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) to draft a piece of legislation to address the needs of dual military couples with dependents. Specifically, these efforts focus on providing these dual military couples with the option of staggering their deployments to overseas contingency operations so that one parent is allowed to remain at home as the primary caregiver. In addition, this proposal would provide for a 90-day reintegration period for these families following the deployment of one parent.

Support for Behavioral Research Initiatives:

- APA has successfully advocated for increases in behavioral research funding in DoD appropriations bills (which include support for university-based research in such areas as human factors and military families) and for programs in the DoD authorization bills to enhance the scientific infrastructure at DoD (including military laboratories and institutional review boards).
- APA has arranged for psychologists to testify at congressional hearings, held congressional briefings, and participated in congressional exhibits to showcase the contributions of psychological research to military personnel and their families.

For more information on APA's involvement in military and veterans issues, please contact Dr. Heather O'Beirne Kelly in the Science Government Relations Office at 202.336.5932.