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DECEMBER 2011



Mental Health Innovations

Updates from VA's Specialized Mental Health Centers

RESEARCH

Treatment Engagement

EDUCATION

Training for Community Providers

CLINICAL CARE

Problem-Solving Therapy

RESEARCH

Researchers at the National Center for PTSD and New England MIRECC found that age and the number of other mental health problems experienced by returning Veterans with PTSD limit their engagement in PTSD treatment



The research finding points to the urgent need to find ways to engage Veterans who are younger and more severely affected by mental health problems.

Researchers compared VA mental health service use of Afghanistan and Iraq Veterans with that of Vietnam-era Veterans. Using data from over 200,000 VA PTSD patients, they found that returning Veterans were more likely to leave mental health treatment for PTSD. Only 38% stayed in care compared with 46% of Vietnam-era Veterans. Likewise, returning Veterans had fewer PTSD mental health visits than did their Vietnam-era counterparts (8 versus 13). However, this was not the entire story. Being younger and having more mental health problems helped explain this higher drop-out rate. In fact, when age and other mental health problems were factored in, returning Veterans were actually less likely to leave PTSD treatment than were Vietnam-era Veterans. However, being older and having additional mental health conditions were related to receiving more PTSD mental health visits. It seems that their younger age and increased number of mental health conditions explained why returning Veterans are less engaged in care better than the fact that they served in Iraq or Afghanistan. These important findings point to the urgent need to find ways to engage Veterans with PTSD who are younger and more severely affected by mental health problems. For the complete story, see: Harpaz-Rotem, I. & Rosenheck, R.A. (2011). Serving those who served: Retention of newly returning Veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan in mental health treatment. *Psychiatric Services*, 62, 22-27.

EDUCATION

The Mid-Atlantic MIRECC is improving care for our nation's returning Veterans by creating trainings for community providers

An unprecedented number, 53%, of the 2.2 million returning Veterans have already sought care with the VA. However, this means that many returning Veterans have not yet chosen to register at the VA for care. If these returning Veterans seek care, they will likely do so from community providers. Returning Veterans may be more severely affected by mental health problems such as PTSD. They may have additional problems, especially traumatic brain injury (TBI). Community providers can be unfamiliar with these problems. The VA's Mid-Atlantic MIRECC collaborated with North Carolina's *Area Health Education Center* and *Citizen Soldier Support Program*. They created trainings for community providers, such as primary care



The online trainings teach providers how to best identify, assess, and treat mental health problems that may occur as a result of war experiences.

[Download the Mental Health Innovations Newsletter](#)

Learn More

Readjustment Issues - Brochures

www.mirecc.va.gov/visn6/

Make the Connection Campaign

maketheconnection.net/

InTransition

www.health.mil/inTransition

Guide to VA Mental Health Services

www.mirecc.va.gov/visn16/

doctors, case workers, and mental health providers. These trainings help community providers understand the culture of Veterans and their families. They also teach providers how to best identify, assess, and treat mental health problems that may occur as a result of war experiences. The trainings include the following workshops: *Treating the Invisible Wounds of War (English and Spanish Versions)*, *Treating the Invisible Wounds of War: A Primary Care Approach*, *Issues of Women Returning from Combat*, and *Recognizing the Signs of TBI During Routine Eye Examinations*. These workshops are available for free online (www.aheconnect.com/citizensoldier). Click on "Courses" to access the workshops.

CLINICAL

Recent Veterans face many challenges returning to the civilian world



Problem Solving Training targets Veterans who are struggling but are not yet in need of mental health treatment.

How they tackle these problems can determine how well they adjust in this transition. If difficulties are not successfully managed, more lasting problems may develop, including chronic mental health conditions. Recently, the MIRECCs and COEs joined forces to pilot a program to help Veterans successfully navigate this often rocky period. The program, *Moving Forward: A Problem Solving Approach to Achieving Life's Goals* teaches VA care providers to deliver Problem Solving Training or PST. PST targets Veterans who are struggling but are not yet in need of mental health treatment. Veterans attend a four-session class and learn a step-by-step process to address their problems. Program director Dr. Wendy Tenhula noted that the program is showing promise across a number of outcomes. Dr. Tenhula said that PST is a good fit with Veterans because their military training gave them very similar problem solving skills. It is often just a matter of using what they already know rather than training them from scratch. She also noted that PST was helpful to Veterans with and without mental health diagnoses. After completing PST, a number of Veterans with mental health diagnoses who had previously declined mental health care realized that they could benefit from professional help and agreed to give it a try. MIRECC and COE staffs are now involved in developing a web-based program and a mobile app for Veterans. They are also developing a web-based training to teach VA providers about PST for Veterans.

There are 15 VA specialized mental health centers of excellence which include 10 Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Centers (MIRECCs), 4 Mental Health Centers of Excellence, and the National Center for PTSD. The centers share a mission to improve the health and well being of Veterans through cutting-edge science, education, and clinical initiatives. Mental illnesses are often multiple complex conditions. Each center addresses a particular mental illness, problem, environmental situation or Veteran cohort. To learn more about these centers, go to www.mirecc.va.gov/

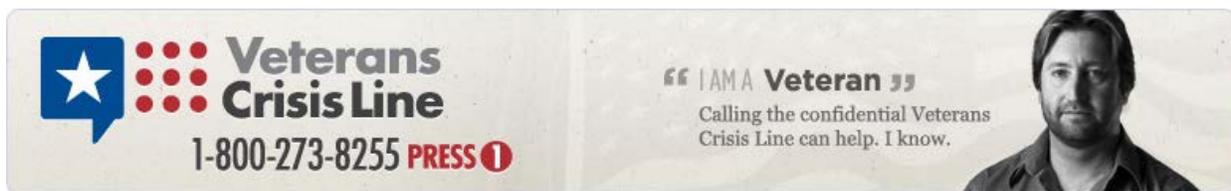


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This website is for educational purposes only. If you are looking for professional medical care, find your local VA healthcare center by using the [VA Facilities Locator & Directory](#).

The VA has founded the Veteran's Crisis Line to ensure Veterans in crisis have free, 24/7 access to trained counselors. Veterans can call the Crisis Line number, **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**, and press "1" to be routed to the Veterans Crisis Line; you can also [visit their website for more information](#).



Contact the National MIRECC Education Group at mireccinfo@va.gov with questions about the MIRECC program or educational products.

Contact joe.huggins@va.gov with technical problems and errors on this web site.

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs - 810 Vermont Avenue, NW - Washington, DC 20420

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