

## **Fact Sheet: The National Research Action Plan for Improving Access to Mental Health Services for Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families**

Since September 11, 2001, more than 2.5 million American service members have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, and many others have been posted in a number of other dangerous regions around the world. Military service—especially in these regions—exposes service members to a variety of stressors, including sustained risk of and exposure to injury and death and an array of family pressures. As a Nation, we have a moral obligation to protect the well-being of veterans, service members and their families.

To improve prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of mental health conditions affecting veterans, service members, and military families, the President issued an Executive Order in 2012 directing Federal agencies to develop a coordinated National Research Action Plan.

The Departments of Defense (DoD), Veterans Affairs (VA), Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education (ED) have responded to the President’s call with a wide-reaching plan to improve scientific understanding; provide effective treatment; and reduce occurrences of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), various co-occurring conditions, and suicide.

The plan builds on substantial work already underway in Federal agencies and provides a framework for improved coordination across government and with scientists from the academic and industrial sectors to share information, brainstorm innovations, and accelerate science.

The comprehensive plan takes action to:

### ***Within the next 6 months***

- **Establish two new Consortia.** The DoD and VA are establishing two joint research consortia, at a combined investment of \$107 million. The Consortium to Alleviate PTSD (CAP), a collaboration led by the University of Texas Health Science Center-San Antonio and other medical centers, seeks to discover and develop “biomarkers” that can be useful for diagnosis and for the development of therapies. The Chronic Effects of Neurotrauma Consortium (CENC), a collaboration led by Virginia Commonwealth University, will study the links between concussions, chronic mild TBI, neurodegeneration, and related conditions.
- **Continue collaboration with academia.** Recent collaborative achievements make clear how much can get accomplished when the public and private sectors join forces. Recently, for example, the DoD and the University of Pittsburgh used high definition fiber tracking (HDFT) to accurately diagnose TBI. A similar collaboration with the University of Wisconsin-Madison produced a non-invasive neurostimulation therapy for TBI patients.

### ***Within the next 12 months***

- **Build a framework.** Researchers will develop a more precise system for classifying TBI to enhance diagnostic accuracy and treatment.
- **Continue to standardize, integrate, and share data as appropriate.** Agencies will create a set of data identifiers, known as common data elements (CDEs), to be used across studies and across agencies. Specifically, they will expand upon the success of the Federal Interagency TBI Research Informatics System's CDE approach to advance PTSD and suicide research.
- **Build new tools and technologies.** Agencies intend to fund innovative research through the President's BRAIN (Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies) Initiative.
- **Maximize impact of existing research.** The NIH and DoD will build on their collaborative, comprehensive 100,000-service-member study, known as Army STARRS. They will assess how a longitudinal follow-up can define risk and resilience to inform suicide prevention efforts.
- **Focus on outcomes and prevention.** Scientists will perform ongoing, coordinated analyses of existing and emerging diagnostics, therapeutics, and outcome measures. Agencies will unite all facets of research, from basic science to follow-up care, towards a common goal.

*Within the next 2-4 years*

- **Explore genetic markers.** Agencies will study and disseminate findings exploring the association between genome sequences and elevated risk for mental health conditions.
- **Identify changes in brain circuitry.** Agencies will study and disseminate findings from studies identifying brain circuitry changes related to positive treatment response.
- **Confirm potential biomarkers.** Agencies will identify potential predictive or diagnostic biomarkers for PTSD and TBI using data from a number of genetic and clinical studies.
- **Establish data-sharing agreements.** Agencies will share data and foster collaboration across agencies, service branches, and scientists, as appropriate.