



Mental Health & Suicide Prevention

AMVETS strongly advocates for increased research to improve identification and treatment of mental health disorders that affect veterans, in addition to making every effort to reduce the stigma that veterans may feel when seek mental health care or treatment. In addition—ensuring full access to care is vital to not only improve the lives of veterans, but to prevent suicide.

Research for improved identification and treatment must also include the behavioral after-effects of mild traumatic brain injuries (mTBIs) which often mimic post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Progress has been made, but the repercussions of not tracking mTBI's for nearly a decade after the start of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan left all branches of military service unable to assess or properly treat various issues that arose.

AMVETS has heard many stories of these individuals who were subsequently given bad paper discharges instead of the treatment that they needed. Leaving the service with a bad paper discharge prevents a veteran from receiving the health care they would otherwise be entitled to and it has been shown that this may sink them into an abyss of unemployment, homelessness, drug or alcohol abuse, and at times, suicide. We've seen it 40 years ago, and we are still seeing it now. AMVETS advocates for reviews of those with bad paper discharges who had honorably served prior to exhibiting behaviors that could be related to post-deployment mental health issues.

Under this umbrella, AMVETS also advocates for increased acceptance and use of veteran treatment courts across the country. These courts aim to prevent needless incarceration of justice-involved war veterans, and instead treat post-deployment mental health issues, as well as behavioral issues stemming from mTBIs. On this issue, AMVETS supports the Veterans Court Improvement Act of 2017 which aims to hire at least 50 Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists (VJOS) within a year of enactment, each VJOS hired would serve, either exclusively or in addition to other duties, in a veterans treatment court. The Secretary must ensure that the newly hired VJOS supplement the number of existing Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists, not replace current staff.

The medical centers eligible for placement of the additional VJOS would comply with VA placement guidelines; work within a local criminal justice system with justice-involved veterans; maintain an affiliation with at least one veterans treatment court; and either routinely provides VJOS to veterans treatment courts or have a plan to provide VJOS to veterans treatment courts.

AMVETS supports passage of H.R. 411, the Veteran Suicide Prevention Act.