



Traumatic Brain Injury

AMVETS advocates for increased research to improve identification and treatment of mental health disorders that affect veterans being treated in the VA system of care. This research must also include the behavioral after-effects of mild traumatic brain injuries which often mimic post-traumatic stress disorder.

The repercussions of not tracking mild TBI's for many years after the start of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan left all branches of the military unable to assess or properly treat various issues that arose, and in the end, it was the person serving who suffered.

The term traumatic brain injury (TBI) involves a range of conditions and may be classified as focal or diffuse; open or closed; and mild, moderate, or severe.

The latest data show nearly 20 percent of veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan report experiencing a TBI during military service, with many reporting multiple head injuries. Having a TBI can lead to higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder, early-onset dementia, depression, back pain, and suicidal thoughts.

Signs of TBI include numbness, excessive drowsiness, severe headache, weakness in your arms and legs, dizziness or loss of vision, slurred speech, loss of consciousness or confusion, vomiting or nausea. There are functional signs that can occur after experiencing a TBI, including changes in: memory and reasoning; touch, taste and smell; communication, expression and the ability to understand; and depression, anxiety, personality changes, aggression, acting out, and social inappropriateness.

Many veterans who have PTSD also have a history of a mild TBI. Chronic pain and substance abuse can be common and may complicate recovery from any single diagnosis. It is especially important to reassure veterans that their symptoms can be time-limited and, with appropriate treatment and healthy behaviors, are likely to improve.

AMVETS encourages VA and DoD to coordinate their efforts to better address the consequences of mild-to-severe TBI and other concussive injuries, including improvements in: screening and treatment protocols; coordination of care; and support services for injured servicemembers.

It is of the utmost importance for VA to have all of the necessary policies, procedures and personnel in place to provide the care for all service members having sustained brain injuries and the corresponding effects that will either immediately, or over time, accompany them.