

Mental Health Workgroup Notes – September 28, 2015

The following is the legislative update in reference to the *Health and Mental Health Section* of the Second TCCVS report. The workgroup decided to keep the three needs that were listed, but to revise and expand.

New needs were also discussed:

- More training is needed to build awareness and how best to handle mental health situations. Including perhaps peer to peer training in state agencies.
- Addressing agency culture in reference to mental health.
- A “State Veteran Packet” for HR Managers to give to new veteran hires.
- Expansion of faith based program expansion
- Removing the stigma from assistance programs for veterans. Finding ways to break down barriers and stigma
- Addressing lack of services for rural veterans.

Veteran Need 1

Veterans experiencing the effects of combat need access to health and mental health treatment resources prior to the onset of a crisis.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- Access to Veterans’ health and mental health resources needs to remain a funding priority for the Legislature.
- Continue to develop and implement evidence-based practices to address health and mental health issues faced by Veterans.

UPDATE: The Legislature increased appropriations to DSHS in order to expand the Military Veteran Peer Network. Additionally, the Legislature made appropriations to increase the number of mental health professionals at Texas Military Forces (from 1 FTE to 5 FTEs). SB 7 added Post Traumatic Stress to the list of conditions for which local mental health authorities may provide assessment services, crisis services, and intensive and comprehensive services, though with no additional specific funding.

Veteran Need 2

Veterans need and benefit from peer-to-peer support programs.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- The state should continue its commitment to the DSHS Military Veteran Peer Network which links together the state's most valued resources for Veterans – well-trained, knowledgeable, caring fellow Veterans.
- The state should provide funding for the creation of more VOSRCs. This commitment should include funding to document and report results from the operations and to build tools to empower the volunteers that assist Veterans and their families.

UPDATE: *HB 2392 codified the DSHS Military Veteran Peer.*

Veteran Need 3

Veterans' spouses, families, and caregivers need access to resources in order to prevent health and mental health crisis.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- The State of Texas should create resources for caregivers with needs not covered by TRICARE, the military health insurance program.
- Employment opportunities should be extended to the Veteran spouse/VA recognized caregiver as the tax exemption has been. Job opportunities are needed for caregivers which give them employment with flexibility and which provides the ability that they often need to work from the home. Training, partnerships and workforce initiatives to address some of these issues would be a huge asset to our state's current system.
- Texas' communities would benefit from programs with a broad focus and education about the role of caregivers and their needs and outreach to family members.

UPDATE: *No action taken*