



POLICY BRIEF  
Veterans' Health Care in Rural Virginia  
Supplement IV – Care Competence  
December, 2011

## Introduction

A 2008 study by RAND Corporation identified PTSD and TBI as the “invisible wounds of war”. When veterans return to their communities with PTSD and TBI they face an array of issues that affect their family, employment, and social functioning and often require medical and mental health interventions.<sup>1</sup> When these health needs cannot be met in the Veterans Administration system of care, the veteran and their family may seek care from community providers. The 2008 RAND study and the 2010 Virginia Wounded Warrior Program (VWWP) study both emphasize the critical need for community providers to have an understanding of military culture and issues of relevance to the veteran.<sup>2</sup> The Institute of Medicine (IOM) reports that the readjustment needs of veterans are significant and that the Veterans Administration (VA) and Department of Defense (DoD) do not have the significant capacity of mental health professionals to meet the growing needs of returning veterans.<sup>3</sup> This capacity issue for the VA and DoD points to the importance of community providers who can provide treatment to veterans and their families in a culturally sensitive manner. The VWWP substantiated that a number of veterans did not seek care from community providers as result of the providers not having an understanding of the military culture.<sup>4</sup>

## Programs

**Virginia Wounded Warrior Program (VWWP)** - Through a grant from the Commonwealth Neurotrauma Initiative, VWWP has worked with the Virginia Partnership for People with Disabilities at VCU to provide basic training to service providers across the Commonwealth on understanding military culture, including military ranks, terminology, and issues of deployment and combat stress. These trainings also cover the signs and symptoms of PTSD and TBI and emerging and promising treatment. Insight is provided by VA officials on how to access veterans' healthcare services and the Virginia Department of Veterans Services provides information on how to assist veterans to file disability compensation claims. Working with the Virginia Department of Health, VWWP also helped to facilitate the provision of 7 Suicide Prevention Summits, addressing the issue of suicide in the general population, but also focusing on the services provided by VWWP to support individual and family resilience and recovery from behavioral health disorders.

**Department of Defense (DoD)**- In 2007 the DoD Task Force on Mental Health outlined training requirements for mental health professionals who were working with service members with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and acute stress disorder (ASD) for both new military providers and

civilian providers. It is imperative that providers have sufficient training or experience in military culture and terminology to ensure that service members have their needs met. By request, the DoD will facilitate online and in-person training for civilian and new military providers on military culture through Center for Deployment Psychology (CDP) (<http://deploymentpsych.org>).<sup>5</sup> The CDP mission is to train behavioral health professionals to provide services to service members and their families. Currently, an online course titled Military Cultural Competence is available for health professionals at no cost if continuing education units are not required. The online course provides an overview of military culture and the similarities and differences between active and reserve components.<sup>6</sup>

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**- SAMHSA works with states to strengthen behavioral health care systems to support the provision of services to service members, veterans, and their families. One of the components of the technical assistance offered to states is community training for behavioral health providers in military culture and evidenced-based care. SAMHSA support must be accessed at the state governor level.<sup>7</sup>

**Operation Immersion** - SAMHSA, the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities (TDMHDD), the Tennessee National Guard, and the Tennessee Veterans Task Force hosted Operation Immersion training in an effort to reduce the stigma of mental illness and substance abuse in military populations. The curriculum focused on military culture and issues that were unique to a military population. Attendees stayed in barracks, participated in a modified physical training, completed chores and inspection, and ate a Meal Ready to Eat.

## References

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- <sup>1</sup> Tanielian, T. & Jaycox, L.H. (Eds.). (2008). *Invisible Wounds of War: Psychological and Cognitive Injuries, Their Consequences, and Services to Assist Recovery*. Center for Military Health Policy Research. RAND Santa Monica, CA.
- <sup>2</sup> Virginia Wounded Warrior Program, Assessing the Experiences, Supportive Service Needs and Service Gaps of Veterans in the Commonwealth of Virginia, August 2010
- <sup>3</sup> IOM (Institute of Medicine). 2010. *Returning Home from Iraq and Afghanistan: Preliminary Assessment of Readjustment Needs of Veterans, Service Members, and Their Families*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
- <sup>4</sup> Virginia Wounded Warrior Program, Assessing the Experiences, Supportive Service Needs and Service Gaps of Veterans in the Commonwealth of Virginia, August 2010.
- <sup>5</sup> Office of Secretary of Defense. Memorandum. *Guidance for Mental Health Provider Training for the Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Acute Stress Disorder*. Dec. 13, 2010. Retrieved November 14, 2011 from <http://www.dcoe.health.mil/Content/navigation/documents/signed%20guidance%20for%20mh%20training%20for%20ptsd%20and%20asd.pdf>.
- <sup>6</sup> Center for Deployment Psychology. Online Courses. Military Culture Competence. Retrieved on December 14, 2011 from <http://deploymentpsych.org/>.
- <sup>7</sup> SAMHSA. Military Families Fact Sheet. Retrieved on December 14, 2011 from <http://www.samhsa.gov/militaryFamilies/factSheet.aspx>.