



# Community Covenant with Veterans and Military Families



FOR MANY THE WAR GOES ON

Military Outreach USA  
[www.militaryoutreachusa.org](http://www.militaryoutreachusa.org)

**Communities should welcome and support veterans and military families.**

The Department of Veterans Affairs reported that, “as the Armed Forces begin to draw down their combat-ready forces; the VA’s work is just beginning.”

Veterans are unique members of our community. They bring the highest professionalism and a passion for public service to their work every day.

Yet most service members don’t return to the support and infrastructure of a military base. Instead, they return to their communities, often miles from their fellow service members. Therefore it is even more important to ensure they are welcomed back to a community that supports them and responds to their needs.

The Community Covenant pulls together key partners to build awareness about their critical role in serving those who served us. This commitment is intended to continue after the war ends. This will be even more essential when reintegration funding from the federal and state government inevitably goes away.

Note: Statistics and figures used are current at time of publication.

## Executive Summary

Our challenge is to develop local partnerships that will improve the quality of life for service members, veterans, and their families.

This is a challenge that must be embraced. The number of military veterans needing assistance is expected to increase dramatically in the coming years. At the same time, there will be fewer federal and state resources to connect veterans and their families to the services they need. Now is the time to take on greater responsibility. The Community Covenant is both a road map and a catalyst to direct a community toward this goal.

Officials project that disability claims will increase dramatically as combat operations continue to wind down. It is anticipated that public attention and funding will decrease for reintegration services. In addition, almost half of the veteran population are 65 years or older and face increasing health care needs related to their service and age.

The Community Covenant is a community based solution to bridge the gap between the rising needs and an expected contraction of state and federal support for veterans following deployment.

This nation has four generations of veterans who have served during five major conflicts and in the years in between. We feel it is the community's responsibility to serve those who have served our country.

The action plans are issue-based and represent the priorities identified in the 2012 Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America Member Survey. They are also applicable to veterans with service during WW2, Korea, Vietnam and other conflicts.

Each action plan defines the issue, lists the action steps that each stakeholder group can use, and available resources to help attain that goal. In addition, the action plans identify barriers and issues for further analysis that will be incorporated into the work plan for your community.

These action plans are intended to serve as a road map for community members who sign the covenant and provide direction for them to fulfill their commitment to veterans and military families.

They can be modified to fit any need...but they need to be used!

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## Community Covenant with Veterans and Military Families

We, the members of (your church, organization or community), are committed to building strong communities.

### We recognize:

The commitment and sacrifice that service members make for our country every day– both during active duty and following their service.

When service members commit, it is the community's responsibility to serve them upon their return.

When a service member deploys, the entire family deploys.

Service members find strength in their family, and the family finds strength in its community.

A community's strength comes from the individuals who are a part of it, including employers, educators, civic and faith leaders, and its citizens.

All members of our community are able to make a difference.

### By signing this Community Covenant, we commit to:

Assist in the implementation of the (your church or organization) Community Covenant, and promote the action items to achieve its goals with other members of our community.

Build partnerships that support the strength, resilience, and readiness of service members and their families.

Continue to promote the principles of this covenant in the years ahead.

Remember our service men and women and the sacrifices they have made for our country.

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Signed

Date

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## **Action Plan for Accessing Benefits**

### **Vision**

We are committed to ensuring that Veterans and their families receive all state and federal benefits available to them. These earned benefits assist Veterans in being more productive and self-sufficient citizens and we are committed to assisting Veterans to navigate the claims process as quickly and smoothly as possible.

### **Indicators of Success**

1. All Veterans have access to information about benefits that they are eligible for through their service.
2. The outreach efforts of Veteran Service Officers effectively reach the diverse Veteran population, which spans four generations and five major wars.
3. With the representation of Veteran Service Officers (VSOs), Veterans, their dependents, and survivors receive appropriate representation from the beginning of the process. VSOs are trained professionals and can make certain that fully developed claims on the correct forms with proper documentation are completed and submitted, ensuring the process is streamlined. Additionally, VSOs effectively represent Veterans through the appeals process.

### **Key Obstacles and Issues for Further Analysis**

1. Veterans and their family members often do not understand all of the benefits for which they are eligible. The Department of Veterans' Affairs reports that only about one third of the Veterans receive one or more federal benefits. Furthermore, Veterans and their families often do not know that the services provided by Veteran Service Officers are free and available to them.
2. Our nation has a diverse Veteran population, with four generations of Veterans spread geographically throughout the county, who also bring a wide array of assets and needs to the community. Further analysis should review best practice models for outreach to this population.

3. Due to the VA backlog, Veterans often have to wait an extended period of time for their claim to be processed. The professional support and assistance provided by a Veteran Service Officer can streamline the claims process and gives the Veteran and/or their family representation during the appeals process.
4. Further analysis should explore how to get resources about accessing benefits, especially educational benefits, to Veterans through partnerships with the National Guard, recruiters, ROTC programs, and other components of local Veteran and active military groups.

<b>Action Steps to Achieve This Vision</b>	
<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>Veteran and family members</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact a Veteran Service Officer to find out what benefits you are eligible for. Utilize their expertise when filing a claim. Directory link provided on page 21.</li> </ul>
<b>Service providers &amp; community advocates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a protocol for identifying Veterans and their family members by asking if they have served in the military, and refer them to Veteran Service Officers as appropriate using contact info in the resource guide at the end of this document.</li> <li>• Determine what the Veteran and his or her family’s immediate needs are and refer them to the appropriate service.</li> <li>• Outreach to family members and the broader community using print media inserts in local newspapers, educational or training opportunities, participation in Stand Down events, and posted brochures or flyers at libraries, coffee shops, businesses, and employment offices.</li> </ul>

## Action Plan for Criminal Justice

### Vision

We are committed to developing a coordinated approach within the local criminal justice system for identifying military Veterans, recognizing and assessing their unique needs, and systematically referring them to other services in the community.

### Indicators of Success

1. Reduced future criminal behavior by Veterans.
2. Veterans in the criminal justice system are connected with services to address issues which may have led to their contact with law enforcement and the judicial system.

### Key Obstacles and Issues for Further Analysis

1. Many Veterans don't engage in mental health treatment or other self-care activities, often due to negative stigma in the military and our society as a whole, concerns about ridicule, or fear of a negative impact on their career. Consequently, these needs may only get addressed in the justice system.
2. Research indicates that behaviors that promote survival within a combat zone (such as hyper vigilance, aggressive driving, and carrying weapons at all times) may result in negative or potentially criminal behavior in civilian life.<sup>2</sup>
3. The traditional way that individuals interact with the justice system, such as law enforcement intervention and court-mandated treatment, may be at odds with military culture and how a Veteran may perceive a situation. Law enforcement agencies need to be aware of military culture as well as issues affecting the veteran population.

<sup>2</sup>CMHS National GAINS Center (2008). *Responding to the needs of justice-involved combat veterans with service-related trauma and mental health conditions: A consensus report of the CMHS National GAINS Center's Forum on Combat Veterans, Trauma, and the Justice System*. Delmar, NY: Author.

<b>Action Steps to Achieve This Vision</b>	
<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>Veteran in need of assistance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact a Veterans’ Service Office</li> <li>• Contact the VA Veterans Justice Outreach</li> <li>• Notify your attorney or parole/probation officer about your Veteran status.</li> <li>• Directory link provided on page 21.</li> </ul>
<b>Service providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In addition to your program’s area of focus, be prepared to also address or refer treatment for issues that may contribute to the Veteran’s criminal behavior, such as employment, housing, substance abuse, and physical health.</li> <li>• Identify partnership opportunities with other agencies that work with Veterans in the criminal justice system.</li> </ul>
<b>Law enforcement, probation &amp; parole, and corrections</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide training to officers and civilian staff to identify signs of combat trauma, military culture, and appropriate intervention strategies. If already part of training curriculum, continue this commitment and work to identify opportunities to share it with other jurisdictions.</li> </ul>
<b>Community advocates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Veteran’s criminal behavior is often influenced by multiple factors that are covered in this Community Covenant’s other action plans. Involvement in one of those activities identified for community members may limit a Veteran’s further involvement in the criminal justice system.</li> </ul>

## Action Plan for Education

### Vision

We are committed to supporting Veterans' access to education and workforce development. Our community will work to inform and advocate for full utilization of the various education benefits available to Veterans from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. In addition, we will strive to develop and maintain a sufficient infrastructure at colleges and universities to successfully recruit and accommodate Veteran students at their campuses.

### Indicators of Success

1. Eligible students are using their education benefits, measured by utilization rates of the traditional GI Bill and the Post-9/11 GI Bill.
2. Students who are Veterans have access to certified Veteran Service Officers, either through the school, County Veteran Service Officers, state service officers through or VSOs at the national level (Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Disabled American Veterans, AMVETS, Paralyzed Veterans of America).
3. Veterans are successful and stay in college or trade schools until completion of their program.

### Key Obstacles and Issues for Further Analysis

1. Further Analysis: Many Veterans are not interested in using education benefits, or wait several years before starting. Some suggested reasons may include:
  - a. Veterans are not "ready" for college or to enter a training program and have trouble transitioning from a military environment to a college environment;
  - b. They cannot afford college and want to work for a while until additional funding is secured.

- c. There is no perceived value in attending college;
  - d. They are unaware that they have benefits; or
  - e. They do not know how to get started.
2. For Veterans to be successful in school they may need to have non-educational needs met, with issues that may include family, housing, and medical care.
  3. The potential time period between when the student begins classes and when benefits are approved, and access to a certified Veteran Service Officer or other designee to help them navigate the benefits process.
  4. Fostering an environment where Veteran students can feel comfortable; building a sustainable model that can be applied at different campuses and education programs.
  5. Effective outreach to veterans and educational programs as new policies or funding opportunities arise, such as HB 2158 (2013) that directs public universities and community colleges to charge nonresident Veterans in-state tuition.

Action Steps to Achieve This Vision	
Stakeholder	Action
<b>Veteran</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn about what benefits are available by talking with a campus representative or County Veteran Service Officer.</li> <li>• Apply for benefits, either with a campus Veterans service representative list or through the VA website at: <a href="http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/apply.asp">http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/apply.asp</a></li> <li>• Directory link provided on page 21.</li> </ul>
<b>Schools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designate a space and resources for veteran’s services, and work to create a “one-stop” office for students.</li> </ul>
<b>Service providers &amp; community advocates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refer Veterans who are interested in school to the resources for learning about their benefits and enrolling in school, using the above link</li> </ul>

## **Action Plan for Employment**

### **Vision**

We are committed to ensuring that Veterans and their family members are able to access and retain living-wage jobs when re-entering the work force. We will support them in transitioning skills learned in the military to the civilian workforce and promote cultural competency within businesses and other organizations in order to decrease the unemployment rate for this population.

### **Indicators of Success**

1. An unemployment rate for Veterans in that is comparable to (or lower than) that of the general population.
2. Resources for accurately translating military skills and experience to civilian job requirements are accessible and utilized.
3. Eligible veterans utilize employment assistance services.

### **Key Obstacles and Issues for Further Analysis**

1. Underutilization of job search, resume writing, and other employment assistance resources for Veterans. Understanding and articulating how their military experience translates into civilian employment. Further analysis should seek to collect data and develop strategies for subgroups, including Veterans 18-24 years old, Veterans 50 and older and female Veterans.
2. Negative stigma attached to job candidates who are Veterans (e.g. traumatic experience, ability to adapt to pace/structure of civilian employment). Further Analysis: Opportunities to promote awareness about the positive benefits of service and success stories.
3. Further analysis: Streamlining the process of obtaining certifications and licenses to help Veterans apply skills learned in the military.
4. Impact of other issues on employment, especially housing and health.
5. Limited availability of family-wage employment, with benefits (health care, leave).

## Action Steps to Achieve This Vision

Stakeholder	Action
<b>Veterans looking for a job</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use available skill translators to complete resume and applications.</li> <li>• Understand the benefits of identifying as a Veteran on application materials for positions that offer Veteran preference.</li> <li>• Clearly identify how military experience relates to the open position, using comparable titles when appropriate. Highlight skills commonly developed in military service, such as discipline, punctuality and respect.</li> <li>• Connect with supported employment programs to get support.</li> <li>• Directory link provided on page 21.</li> </ul>
<b>Employers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster collaboration between employment support stakeholders</li> <li>• If your business has a Veterans HR coordinator, connect with other businesses to discuss the benefits of that role.</li> <li>• Identify and train a Veteran liaison for HR recruiters, as a resource for questions and to translate military experience.</li> <li>• Strategically utilize supplemental questions in applications when appropriate, and train managers to write them to get the desired information.</li> <li>• Explore alternative interview techniques when necessary (such as Skype for someone out of the country), and options to be flexible with start date or training for new employees who are transitioning from military service.</li> <li>• Create internships and apprenticeship opportunities for Veterans to develop needed experience.</li> </ul>
<b>Service providers &amp; community advocates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start or join a public education campaign for “Hire Vets.”</li> <li>• Share with others about the benefit of working with Veteran employees, using resources in the resource guide at the end of this document.</li> <li>• Educate others on Veteran and military culture, and recognize that there can be negative and positive impacts of stressful situations during military service.</li> <li>• Create a welcoming environment for Veterans and their families, through cultural competency training at your organization.</li> <li>• Find the local job referral resources for Veterans, and share them with others who seek to hire a Veteran.</li> <li>• Understand that Veteran advocacy is an ongoing priority, and requires resources, focus and coordination to keep at the forefront of attention for employers and policy makers.</li> </ul>

## Action Plan for Families

### Vision

We are committed to helping families get the support that they need, including a service member's spouse, children, and other loved ones. Families are essential to the reintegration of Veterans, yet they also experience - directly or indirectly - many of the same traumatic issues as the service member during deployment and upon return.

### Indicators of Success

1. Service members and their families will receive a full continuum of care in both peacetime and wartime, particularly when service members have been injured or experienced invisible wounds from combat.
2. Family members understand how to connect with services and are empowered to access support for themselves or the Veteran in their family. A Veteran usually copes with stress by talking to a friend or family member, and their spouse or family member is often the first to recognize when they need help.

### Key Obstacles and Issues for Further Analysis

1. Many military families do not seek support or resources until they are in crisis.
2. The information process is not currently as streamlined as it should be, and further analysis should focus on develop a process to ensure effective marketing of resources available to military families in the community.
3. Public perception may focus on the Veteran and not recognize the sacrifices shared by the entire family. Conversely, community members may focus only on the family's sacrifices - projecting a "hero status" - that serves to further isolate the Veteran and their family.
4. Multiple deployments strain marriages and other relationships, and service members express concern about finances and the effects of long-term separation during deployment on their relationship with their children.
5. Just over half of military members nationally are married, and without a spouse or dependents, eligibility and access to services may be limited or nonexistent for some Veterans' key relational supports (e.g. parents, grandparents, relatives, close friend). Further analysis should explore available resources and effective outreach to these members of a Veteran's support network.

## Action Steps to Achieve This Vision

Stakeholder	<u>Action</u>
<b>Veteran and family members</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact the appropriate services in the resource guide at the end of the document.</li> <li>• Share resources with your peer network.</li> <li>• Directory link provided on page 21.</li> </ul>
<b>Service providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask if a client has military experience to screen for Veteran status.</li> <li>• Implement military cultural competency into staff training curriculum.</li> </ul>
<b>Law enforcement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work to develop techniques in engaging high-risk Veterans and their families in potentially dangerous situations.</li> <li>• Collaborate with VA Veterans’ Justice Outreach Coordinators.</li> </ul>
<b>Veterans Task Force</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop the framework for “no wrong door” so that different entities know how to get someone to the correct resource. Elements include how to identify, what questions to ask, and where to refer.</li> <li>• Collaborate with state and federal Veterans Affairs partners to develop educational materials to assist teachers and school administrators in supporting children of deployed parents.</li> </ul>
<b>Community advocates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and launch a public awareness campaign to promote community awareness of resources and improved outreach to military families.</li> <li>• Volunteer or lead a donation drive to support an organization serving Veterans and military families.</li> <li>• Volunteer at a Compassion clinic, Stand Down, or other similar event for Veterans.</li> </ul>

## Action Plan for Health Care

### Vision

We are committed to making sure our Veterans and their families receive the best possible health care to meet their needs. Our nation has a diverse Veteran population that spans four generations and five major wars. Our nation has Veterans who are aging, as well as younger Veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan who commonly return with orthopedic neck, back and knee injuries or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), which is considered a signature injury of these recent wars. We will help Veterans meet their health care needs to promote their quality of life.

### Indicators of Success

1. Veterans and their families understand what resources are available and have access to appropriate health care services.
2. Health care through the VA and other local service providers meets the unique needs of different Veterans in our community. Some of the issues among Veterans of different eras include: WWII and Korean War Veterans who are aging and need more concentrated health care services; Vietnam Era Veterans who are getting older and have begun to seek health care related to Agent Orange exposure; issues specific to Women Veterans, especially related to Military Sexual Trauma and their changing role of female soldiers in the military; and Veterans from the most recent conflicts who are suffering from Traumatic Brain Injury, Post Traumatic Stress, suicidal ideation, amputations, and a variety of orthopedic conditions that impact their way of life.

### Key Obstacles and Issues for Further Analysis

1. In the next decade, Department of Veterans' Affairs anticipates filing nearly 60 percent more disability claims related to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan for issues such as Post Traumatic Stress, Traumatic Brain Injuries, and orthopedic and respiratory problems. The agency also expects a heavy increase in disability claims filing by Vietnam-era Veterans. An area of ongoing analysis will be identifying these Veterans and connecting them to services, as well as managing the system of care – both through the VA and local health care partners – with the increase in consumers seeking care.
2. The VA medical system provides quality care, but that accessing the care was often perceived as bureaucratic and difficult—especially for residents in rural areas. Further analysis should explore where gaps in Veteran Health Care exist and ways that local partners can partner with the VA to address them.

3. Some Veterans are found to be over-income and not allowed access to the VA health care system. Further analysis should explore the roles of the VA and other local partners to serve these Veterans and others who aren't eligible due to discharge status or other factors.
4. With an increasing aging population of Veterans, the VA Medical Center (VAMC) is focusing efforts to support Veterans with long-term service and support needs to remain at home and avoid unnecessary nursing facility institutionalization. (your church or organization) Aging & Disability Services in partnering with the VAMC, the Veterans, and their families to support these efforts. Further analysis should reassess these efforts and identify any process improvements that can enhance the Veterans' quality of care.

### Action Steps to Achieve This Vision

Stakeholder	Action
<b>Veterans and military families</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact a Veteran Service Officer to get enrolled in services, or go to <a href="http://VA.gov/healthbenefits">http://VA.gov/healthbenefits</a>, call 877-222-VETS, or a VA Medical Center to apply in person.</li> <li>• If you aren't eligible for health care through the VA, contact a health care navigator.</li> </ul>
<b>Service providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify Veterans and their family members by asking if they have served in the military, and refer them to a Veteran Service Officer as appropriate.</li> <li>• Implement staff training on identifying and responding to the needs of Veterans.</li> </ul>
<b>Community advocates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer at a Stand Down event or help set up a community health fair for Veterans.</li> </ul>

## Action Plan for Housing

### Vision

We are committed to preventing and diverting Veterans and military families from becoming homeless, re-housing those who have become homeless, and helping Veterans and their families purchase a home through home loan opportunities.

Veterans are over-represented among homeless populations, with data indicating that they are also homeless for a longer period of time than non-Veterans.<sup>3</sup> In November 2009, the VA launched a five-year plan to end Veteran homelessness. At the most recent count there were approximately 50,000 homeless Veterans on any given night across the country.

### Indicators of Success

1. Low-income Veterans are housed in safe neighborhoods with access to transportation for medical and other appointments.
2. High usage rates of HUD-VASH vouchers and chronically homeless Veterans have access to this program and other appropriate services.
3. Veterans and military families who are homeless or at-risk of losing their home are aware of and utilize Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) and other support services, including emergency shelter and transitional housing, deposit and move-in assistance, rental assistance, and additional tools to promote self-sufficiency.

### Key Obstacles and Issues for Further Analysis

1. Reluctance of landlords to rent to a homeless Veteran with issues traditionally screened out of the rental market, as well as rents low enough to be acceptable to the federal standards set by the federal program that pays the housing expenses.
2. Further Analysis: High homelessness among Veterans returning from deployment.
3. Further Analysis: Collect and analyze data of homeless Veterans in your area— when did they serve, where did they serve, what is their discharge status?
4. Further Analysis: Ways to keep Veterans in housing when they are at risk of becoming homeless, with particular focus on resources and partnerships to strategically provide financial support to Veterans for mortgage payments due to under- or unemployment in order to avoid foreclosure.
5. Services for Veterans who were not honorably discharged or served during peace time and are not eligible for income or other services through VA.

<sup>3</sup>U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: Veteran Benefits Administration Reports

<b>Action Steps to Achieve This Vision</b>	
<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>Veterans in need of stable housing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact the Community Referral and Resource Center:</li> </ul>
<b>Veterans ready to buy a home</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact your State Department of Veterans' Affairs Home Loan Program to find out more about the state and federal programs.</li> </ul>
<b>Public agencies and nonprofits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commit financial and in-kind resources to support programs to help veterans and military families who are homeless or at-risk of losing their housing.</li> </ul>
<b>Community members</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer to help with a Point-In-Time Count.</li> <li>• Volunteer with the VA through voluntary services.</li> <li>• Donate household goods to help veterans.</li> </ul>
<b>Landlords</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider applicants who are veterans. The VA provides supportive housing services, including staffing available to landlord to help residents stay stable in housing.</li> </ul>

## Action Plan for Mental Health and Addiction

### Vision

Many Veterans and their families need mental health services to help them recover from issues related to their military service. We are committed to partnering with local agencies and organizations serving Veterans to help ensure accessible and affordable care.

### Indicators of Success

1. Veterans and their families understand what resources are available and have access to the appropriate mental health and addiction services.
2. Mental health and addiction issues can greatly impact the lives of Veterans and their families. Veterans' mental health and substance abuse treatment needs will be better met if they're engaged in comprehensive services that also include services that help to ensure stable housing, employment, and health care.
3. Our community builds a culture of support for psychological health, including dispelling the stigma that all Veterans have mental health issues, and recognizing that there can be both positive and negative impacts from military combat experiences.

### Key Obstacles and Issues for Further Analysis

1. Not every Veteran is eligible for VA services.
2. Many National Guard and Reservists have been redeployed within their reintegration period and may not have received treatment for prior medical and mental health issues.
3. Mental health stigma in the military remains pervasive and often prevents service members and Veterans from seeking help or engaging in self-care. Many also fear negative career impacts. Hoge et al (2004) reported that only 40 percent of the soldiers in their study who met criteria for a mental disorder had received professional help in the past year.
4. People cope with trauma in various ways, making it difficult to anticipate how, when, and if the trauma symptoms may occur and impact behavior. Families and service providers need to be trained to recognize indicators of mental health issues and know about resources that are available to meet their needs. One study of health-related behavior among military personnel (Department of Defense, 2006) found that nearly three-quarters of Veterans coped with stress by first talking with a friend or family member. Also, spouses and loved ones are often the first to recognize when someone needs assistance.

## Action Steps to Achieve This Vision

Stakeholder	Action
<p><b>Service providers</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide families and their Veteran with support and education prior to deployment or soon after. If your program can only serve Veterans, identify referral options and educate family members who may be able to benefit.</li> <li>• Mental Health Crisis Lines and other front line support and referral programs could implement staff training on identifying and responding to the needs of Veterans.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Veterans and military families</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact a crisis line if you are in need of immediate help. They are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, or chat online by sending a text message to 838255</li> <li>o Lines for Life Military Helpline at 888-457-4838</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Be familiar with services that are available – using resources in the resource guide at the end of this document, the VA, and your insurance.</li> <li>• Take the initiative to accept services when offered and appropriate for your family.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Community advocates</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer at a Stand Down event or help set up a community fair for Veterans.</li> <li>• Volunteer with another nonprofit serving Veterans.</li> <li>• Volunteer with the local VA Medical Center</li> </ul>

## **Action Plan for Suicide Prevention**

### **Vision**

We are committed to developing resources and education for our employees and community partners to help decrease the high incidence of suicide among our Veterans and service members.

### **Indicators of Success**

1. Decreased suicide rate among Veterans.
2. Crisis lines and other mental health resources are utilized by those in need.
3. Veterans, their friends and family members, law enforcement, and local service providers understand what services are available for Veterans who may be suicidal and how to access them.

### **Key Obstacles and Issues for Further Analysis**

1. Many Veterans do not access VA services that they are eligible for, and research suggests that across the country only 40 percent of soldiers who met criteria for a mental disorder had received professional help in the past year. Further analysis should explore how to better overcome the negative stigma in the military about mental health, fear of public perception or career consequences for someone who does seek help and education about what services are available.
2. Identifying risk factors or indicators of suicidal ideation or behavior are often difficult with Veterans.
3. Many returning Veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan face significant stressors upon their return, such as: mental health issues related to Post Traumatic Stress, anxiety, depression, and other conditions; Traumatic Brain Injury, physical injuries or disabilities, unemployment, homelessness; and general readjustment issues when transitioning back with their family, to college, and into other civilian contexts.

<b>Action Steps to Achieve This Vision</b>	
<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b><u>Action</u></b>
<b>Veteran and family members</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact resources provided by the VA, Federal, State, County and private agencies.</li> <li>• Share resources with your peer network.</li> </ul>
<b>Service providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask if a client has military experience to screen for Veteran status.</li> <li>• Implement framework for working with Veterans experiencing suicidal ideation into staff training and agency protocol.</li> </ul>
<b>Law enforcement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work to develop techniques in engaging high-risk Veterans in potentially suicidal situations. Incorporate veteran awareness training other law enforcement agencies.</li> </ul>
<b>Community and family members</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer with a community fair, Stand Down, or other event to support Veterans.</li> <li>• Learn contact and referral information for local services to use in the event of a crisis.</li> </ul>
<b>Veterans Task Force</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop the framework for “no wrong door” so that different entities know how to get someone to the correct resource. Elements include how to identify, what questions to ask, and where to refer.</li> <li>• Develop and launch a public awareness campaign to complement the suicide prevention efforts of the VA and other agencies.</li> </ul>

## **Action Plan for Women's Services**

### **Vision**

We are committed to increasing understanding and awareness of issues impacting women in the military, both among women Veterans and in the provider community, to promote an increase of women using services to meet their needs and understanding of services that are available. Since women Veterans may experience different service-related and reintegration issues than their male counterparts, response to meeting these needs has been lagging the demand for service. Of particular importance are health care, mental health treatment, employment, and financial and housing stability.

### **Indicators of Success**

1. Women Veterans are identified and targeted for outreach to connect with services.
2. Increased health of women Veterans, with a growing percentage utilizing available services at the VA and other local providers.
3. Providers, within and outside the VA system, are adequately trained in women Veteran issues, including: general military culture and female-specific military culture, Military Sexual Trauma (MST), and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).
4. Decreased disruption among military families, including housing and financial security.

### **Key Obstacles and Issues for Further Analysis**

1. The role of women in the military continues to change, and services and outreach efforts should be adjusted to meet the changing experiences and needs of women Veterans. There were 7,500 women in country in Vietnam, and there have been more than 250,000 in country in Iraq and Afghanistan. Operations during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and Operation New Dawn (OND) are very different than prior classic wars, and everyone in country is exposed to insurgent threats.
2. Domestic violence and MST are epidemic among women Veterans, are under reported, under treated, and require a concerted systemic response.
3. Women Veterans have complex health care needs and will require increased resources to ensure equitable care.
4. Because of female service members' changing role in the military, a greater proportion of female Veterans are now returning with orthopedic issues.

5. Women Veterans often feel stigmatized and will not use VA services.
6. Women Veterans, especially older Veterans, are often not aware of their rights, benefits, and resources.

<b>Action Steps to Achieve This Vision</b>	
<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>Community advocates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access the expertise of organizations working with women Veterans (including the VA) and encourage them to present to community groups or other organizations.</li> <li>• Create a social networking and public awareness campaign on women Veterans’ health care to reach women veterans of all eras.</li> <li>• Understand available services within and outside the VA to refer female Veterans to – include the women’s clinic at the VA.</li> </ul>
<b>Service providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop protocol to ask if a client has military experience and screen for Veteran status.</li> <li>• Include training on military culture and symptoms of Military Sexual Trauma (MST) and Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS) among women Veterans.</li> </ul>
<b>Research</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research the prevalence of women Veterans with children in the child welfare system or other indicators of family disruption.</li> </ul>
<b>Female Veterans</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize appropriate resources including Veteran Service Officers, the VA Women’s Clinic, and other local providers.</li> </ul>

## Links to Help Develop Resources

[Military Outreach USA](#) This site provides a list of Military Caring Houses of Worship and Organizations and extensive links to a variety of resources

[National Guard State Web Sites](#) This site will allow you to identify what National Guard units are in your state. Contact them to identify units and chaplains.

[Army Reserve Locator](#) This site will allow you to identify what Army reserve units are in your state. Contact them to identify units and chaplains.

[Air Force Reserve Locator](#) This site will allow you to identify what Air Force reserve units are in your state. Contact them to identify units and chaplains.

[Navy Reserve Locator](#) This site will allow you to identify what Navy reserve units are in your state. Contact them to identify units and chaplains.

[Marine Corps Locator](#) This site will allow you to identify what Marine Corp reserve units are in your state. Contact them to identify units and chaplains.

[Veterans Administration](#) This is Department of Veterans Affairs web site.

[Student Veterans of America](#) This site links to colleges and universities that have Student Veteran Chapters.

[National Directory of County Veteran Service Officers](#) Use this site to contact the local Veteran Service Officer in your county.

[VA Chaplain Directory](#) This site provides a directory of all Veteran Administration Chaplains

[National Resource Directory](#) This site provides resources for families, veterans and dependents.