



Overview of DCoE and DoD Suicide Prevention Efforts

Background

The loss of even one life to suicide is unacceptable, and suicides in the military have raised concern across all levels of leadership within the Defense Department. The department actively collaborates with **Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (DCoE)**, Veterans Affairs and the services to coordinate suicide prevention efforts, reduce the stigma often associated with receiving psychological health care and garner government leadership support of its suicide prevention efforts. DCoE seeks to break down barriers to seeking treatment with messages aimed at service members, veterans and families, informing them that: they are not alone; reaching out is a sign of strength that benefits themselves, their families, their units and the services; and treatment works, with earlier interventions resulting in better results.

Initiatives

DCoE serves as the chair of the Suicide Prevention and Risk Reduction Committee (www.suicideoutreach.org), the primary venue for inter-service and inter-agency collaboration on suicide prevention activities. Consisting of members of U.S. armed forces components, this committee is the main forum for ensuring coordination and consistency in system-wide communications related to suicide, risk reduction policy initiatives and suicide surveillance metrics across the Defense Department.

DCoE maintains a **24/7 outreach center** staffed by transition/outreach consultants who provide psychological health and traumatic brain injury (TBI) resources for service members, veterans and their families. The center coordinates with the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**, 800-273-TALK, to offer service members, veterans and their families psychological health and crisis resources as needed. DCoE partnered with Veterans Affairs to coordinate information and resources specifically designed for the military community when calling the Lifeline.

DCoE recognizes that outreach is essential for combating stigma, encouraging help-seeking behaviors and promoting awareness of resources. DCoE sponsors the **Real Warriors Campaign**, a multimedia public education initiative designed to encourage help-seeking behavior among warriors and veterans with invisible wounds and inform them and their families about the resources available. The

campaign partners with more than 160 organizations throughout the country to increase visibility and outreach.

DCoE manages the **inTransition** program to ensure that service members who receive psychological health care do not “fall through the cracks” when moving from one duty station to another, deploying or transitioning from Defense Department to Veterans Affairs care. DCoE also oversees another online resource, **afterdeployment.org**, which focuses on psychological health challenges some service members face post-deployment, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), TBI, stigma, life stress and anxiety, reaching more than 5,000 unique visitors per month.

Programs

Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program provides suicide prevention information, services, referrals and proactive outreach programs to reserve component members and their families throughout all phases of deployment. Since the program’s inception, more than 2,000 events have been held for nearly 300,000 service members.

Re-engineering Systems of Primary Care Treatment in the Military enables health care providers to screen patients for post-traumatic stress disorder and depression in primary care clinics. Over the life of the project, more than 13,000 service members have been referred to and followed by RESPECT-Mil and more than 27,700 service members (nearly 11,450 in FY 2011) with previously unmet behavioral health needs were referred for care. To date more than 13,600, or 1 percent of screened visits (approximately 6,900 in the past year) involved suicidality and received mental health intervention.

Conclusion

The Defense Department and DCoE have made continued outreach to service members, veterans and families an essential part of overall suicide prevention strategy. Leadership at every level is fully committed to suicide prevention and taking every action possible to reduce suicidal behavior. While DCoE and the Defense Department have made progress in educating our service members, veterans and families on suicide prevention, until we eliminate suicides in the military, we will continue to search for best practices and ways to help those in need.