

September, 2012

**President Obama Issues *Executive Order* on Meeting Behavioral Health Needs of Veterans, Service Members and Families**

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President Obama has signed an *Executive Order* directing key federal departments to expand suicide prevention strategies and take steps to meet the current and future demand for behavioral health treatment services for veterans, service members, and their families.

**Key provisions of the *Executive Order* include specific items that direct the Veterans Administration (VA) to initiate the following actions:**

- Increase the VA veteran crisis-line capacity by 50 percent by the end of the 2012.
- Ensure that any veteran identifying him or herself as being in crisis connects with a behavioral health professional or trained behavioral health worker within 24 hours or less.
- Work with the Department of Defense (DoD) to develop and implement a national 12-month suicide prevention campaign focused on connecting veterans to behavioral health services.
- Hire 800 peer-to-peer support counselors to empower veterans to support other veterans and help ensure that their behavioral health care and overall service needs are met.
- Use its pay-setting authorities, loan repayment and scholarships, partnerships with health care workforce training programs, and collaborative arrangements with community-based providers to recruit, hire, and place 1600 behavioral health professionals by June 2013.
- Work with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Education (DoE) to develop a National Research Action Plan that will include strategies to improve early diagnosis and treatment effectiveness for TBI and PTSD.

The link to the President's *Executive Order* is highlighted below along with a fact sheet issued by the White House.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/08/31/executive-order-improving-access-mental-health-services-veterans-service>

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/08/31/fact-sheet-president-obama-signs-executive-order-improve-access-mental-h>

### **Implications for State Behavioral Health Agencies (SBHAs)**

According to new reports, approximately 18.5 percent of service members returning from Iraq or Afghanistan have post- traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or depression, and 20 percent report experiencing a traumatic brain injury during deployment. Nearly 50 percent of returning service members who need treatment for behavioral health conditions sought care, but only slightly more than one-half who receive treatment have received adequate care.

Based on the priorities embodied in the *Executive Order* including those items to ensure that veterans receive timely treatment, potential opportunities emerge for SBHAs and mental health advocates to work closely with local VA officials including:

- Provide support and leadership through a collaborative and comprehensive approach with local VA officials to increase access to appropriate services, prevent suicide, and promote emotional health for veterans;
- Conduct outreach to the National Guard and Reservists to identify short-term and long-term needs of service members and veterans;
- Facilitate peer consultation and support peer involvement in the treatment of veterans with behavioral health disorders;
- Promote the adoption of promising, best, and evidence-based practices in suicide prevention; mental health, and substance use treatment; veteran and family peer support; veteran jail diversion; homelessness prevention; workplace/employment; and tele-psychiatry; and
- Work with VA officials to help inform community behavioral health providers in military culture and evidence-based, trauma-informed care; and other critical issues related to the behavioral health needs of veterans.

If you have any questions on the *Executive Order*, please contact Roy Praschil, NASMHPD Director of Operations, at [roy.praschil@nasmhpd.org](mailto:roy.praschil@nasmhpd.org), or by phone at 703-682-5183, or Joel Miller, NASMHPD Senior Director of Policy and Healthcare Reform, at [joel.miller@nasmhpd.org](mailto:joel.miller@nasmhpd.org), or by phone at (703) 682-7552.