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****Fact Sheet on Strengthening Behavioral Health Services for Military Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families: The SBHA Role¹**

***This document includes sections from SAMHSA's Strategic Initiatives report*

There are an estimated 23.4 million veterans in the United States as well as approximately 2.2 million military service members (including National Guard and Reserve) and 3.1 million immediate family members. Since 2001, more than 2 million U.S. troops have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. A significant proportion of returning service men and women suffer from PTSD, depression, TBI, and substance abuse (particularly alcohol and prescription drug abuse); too many die from suicide. A growing body of research exists on the impact of deployment and trauma-related stress on military families, particularly wives and children.

Military service is likely to affect other family members as well, including parents of service members and others who may provide supports such as child care during deployments and other service-related disruptions. Although active duty troops and their families are eligible for care from the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), a significant number choose not to access those services due to fear of discrimination or the harm receiving treatment for behavioral health issues may have on their military career or that of their spouse. National Guard and Reserve troops who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan (approximately 40 percent of the total) are eligible for behavioral health care services from the VA, but many are unable or unwilling to access those services. National Guard, Reserve, veterans, and active duty service members as well as their families do seek care in communities across this country, particularly from State, Territorial, Tribal, local, and private behavioral health care systems, often with employer-sponsored coverage.

SBHAs have focused on improving the behavioral health of military service members, veterans, and their families, including relatives, caregivers, and significant others.

SBHAs have been providing support and leadership through a collaborative and comprehensive approaches to increase access to appropriate services, prevent suicide, promote emotional health, and reduce homelessness. SBHAs are facilitating innovative community-based solutions that foster access to evidence-based prevention, treatment, and recovery support services for military service members, veterans, and their families at risk for or experiencing mental and substance use disorders through the provision of state-of-the-art technical assistance, consultation, and training.

¹ SBHAs are state substance abuse and mental health authorities, and the term *behavioral health* refers to substance abuse and mental health.

Minority populations are heavily represented in the military and in the enlisted ranks of the military services. Meeting the behavioral health needs of these populations within the military will require service providers that are attuned not only to the culture of the military context but to the cultures of these individuals who have also dedicated service to the military and their country. This reality is complicated by the reality that minority populations have been historically underserved by the behavioral health field. Efforts to address the needs of returning veterans and their families from a variety of backgrounds will have to meet their unique needs, while contending with the existing workforce shortage.