

# **Veteran Perspective on Access**

*Adrian Atizado, Veterans Advocate*

# Foundation of Veterans Benefits

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"With malice toward none with charity for all with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right let us strive on to finish the work we are in to bind up the nation's wounds, **to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan** ~ to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

— President Abraham Lincoln, March 4, 1865



# The Obligation

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“Few responsibilities of any agency or department of the Federal Government carry with them the moral obligation embodied in the health care, education, compensation, research and home loan programs administered by the VA to this Nation’s 28 million veterans and their dependents and their survivors.” ”

—Senator George J. Mitchell, December 9, 1987



# Obligation Made Real

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VA Health Care

vs.

Health Plans/Other Public Health Care Programs

- VA health care system is not a health plan
- Primarily delivers health services
- “Closed” system primarily for veterans
- VA medical benefits package
- Not premiums, coinsurance, deductibles
- There are copayments
- Not an “entitlement program”



# Benefit Earned

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**DAV:** [T]his nation's first duty to veterans is the rehabilitation and welfare of its wartime disabled... Guarantee access to a full continuum of care, from preventive through hospice services. . .”

**PVA:** “Veterans must have access to high quality, comprehensive, and veteran-centric health care as well as timely and accurate delivery of all earned benefits.”

**IAVA:** “[E]very year we hear from IAVA members that they want less paperwork, less bureaucracy and easier access to care”

**VFW:** “All we've ever asked of VA is they provide timely, easily accessible and high quality care for veterans.”

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# Specialized Health Care System

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- ▶ Military Culture
- ▶ Service Component Subcultures: Navy, Marine Corps, Army, Air Force, Coast Guard
- ▶ Combat: World War II, Korea, Vietnam War, Lebanon, Grenada, Panama, Persian Gulf War, War on Terror



# Accessing Mental Health Care

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VA Recovery Oriented System of Care:

“Keeping a focus on recovery from mental health challenges or substance use issues empowers Veterans to take charge of their treatment and live a full and meaningful life”



# Accessing Mental Health Care

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VA system coordinates care using a Whole Health approach.

OEF/OIF/OND Veterans:

2018 evaluation found high-quality MH care but also disparate experiences among Veterans trying to get into care.





# Accessing Mental Health Care

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9 million are 65 and older

- ▶ 325,000 World War II
  - ▶ 1.1 million Korean War
  - ▶ 6.3 million Vietnam War
- Higher lifetime MH prevalence
  - Less likely to seek MH care



# Accessing Mental Health Care

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## Barriers:

- Aging process
- Comorbidities (pain and depression)
- Stigma
- Money
- Transportation

## Preferences:

- Walk-in clinic
- Integrate mental health with disease management
- Longer appointments
- Extended clinic hours
- Frequent follow-ups



# Veterans Perspective on Access

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- ▶ VA healthcare is an “earned benefit”
- ▶ VA is responsible for one special population
- ▶ Access is integral to quality of care
- ▶ Care must reflect Veterans’ needs, preferences, and values

