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117TH CONGRESS
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H. R. 6411

[Report No. 117-382]

To amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements in the mental health care provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 18, 2022

Mr. TAKANO (for himself and Mr. BOST) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

JUNE 22, 2022

Additional sponsors: Mr. GALLEGO, Ms. SLOTKIN, Ms. UNDERWOOD, Mr. MRVAN, Mr. SABLAN, Ms. BROWNLEY, Ms. LOFGREN, Mr. SWALWELL, Mr. PAPPAS, Ms. TITUS, Mr. FITZPATRICK, Ms. KAPTUR, Mr. MOULTON, Mr. SCHIFF, Mr. TRONE, Ms. STANSBURY, Mr. ALLRED, Mr. LEVIN of California, Mr. RASKIN, Mr. LAMB, Mr. MALINOWSKI, Ms. DELBENE, Mr. KILMER, Ms. MANNING, Mr. COSTA, Ms. LOIS FRANKEL of Florida, Mr. ELLZEY, Mr. WELCH, Mr. SOTO, Mr. RYAN, Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN, Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS, Ms. WILLIAMS of Georgia, Mr. CASTEN, Mrs. CHERFILUS-MCCORMICK, Mr. RUIZ, Mr. ROUZER, Mr. PETERS, and Mrs. LURIA

JUNE 22, 2022

Reported from the Committee on Veterans' Affairs; committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed

A BILL

To amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements in the mental health care provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
 2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.**

4 (a) **SHORT TITLE.**—This Act may be cited as the
 5 “Support The Resiliency of Our Nation’s Great Veterans
 6 Act of 2022” or the “**STRONG** Veterans Act of 2022”.

7 (b) **TABLE OF CONTENTS.**—The table of contents for
 8 this Act is as follows:

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.

TITLE I—TRAINING TO SUPPORT VETERANS’ MENTAL HEALTH

Sec. 101. Mental health and suicide prevention outreach to minority veterans
 and American Indian and Alaska Native veterans.

Sec. 102. Expansion of Vet Center workforce.

Sec. 103. Expansion of mental health training for Department of Veterans Af-
 fairs.

Sec. 104. Expansion of scholarships and loan repayment programs for mental
 health providers.

TITLE II—VETERANS CRISIS LINE

Sec. 201. Veterans Crisis Line.

Subtitle A—Veterans Crisis Line Training and Quality Management

Sec. 211. Staff training.

Sec. 212. Quality review and management.

Sec. 213. Guidance for high-risk callers.

Sec. 214. Oversight of training of social service assistants and clarification of
 job responsibilities.

Subtitle B—Pilot Programs and Research on Veterans Crisis Line

Sec. 221. Pilot programs.

Sec. 222. Authorization of appropriations for research on effectiveness and op-
 portunities for improvement of Veterans Crisis Line.

Subtitle C—Transition of Crisis Line Number

Sec. 231. Feedback on transition of crisis line number.

TITLE III—OUTREACH TO VETERANS

Sec. 301. Solid Start program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 302. Designation of Buddy Check Week by Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 303. Improvements to Veterans Justice Outreach Program.

Sec. 304. Department of Veterans Affairs Governors Challenge Program.

TITLE IV—MENTAL HEALTH CARE DELIVERY

- Sec. 401. Expansion of peer specialist support program of Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 402. Expansion of Vet Center services.
- Sec. 403. Eligibility for mental health services.
- Sec. 404. Mental health consultations.

TITLE V—RESEARCH

- Sec. 501. Veterans integration to academic leadership program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 502. Improvement of sleep disorder care furnished by Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 503. Study on inpatient mental health and substance use care from Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 504. Study on treatment from Department of Veterans Affairs for co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders.
- Sec. 505. Study on workload of suicide prevention teams of Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 506. Expansion of suicide prevention and mental health research.
- Sec. 507. Study on mental health and suicide prevention support for military families.
- Sec. 508. Research on brain health.
- Sec. 509. Study on efficacy of clinical and at-home resources for post-traumatic stress disorder.

1 **TITLE I—TRAINING TO SUPPORT**
 2 **VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH**

3 **SEC. 101. MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION**
 4 **OUTREACH TO MINORITY VETERANS AND**
 5 **AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE VET-**
 6 **ERANS.**

7 (a) STAFFING REQUIREMENT.—Beginning not later
 8 than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act,
 9 the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall ensure that each
 10 medical center of the Department of Veterans Affairs has
 11 no fewer than one full-time employee whose responsibility
 12 is serving as a minority veteran coordinator.

1 (b) TRAINING.—Not later than 180 days after the
2 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary, in con-
3 sultation with the Indian Health Service and the Director
4 of the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention of
5 the Department of Veterans Affairs, shall ensure that all
6 minority veteran coordinators receive training in delivery
7 of culturally appropriate mental health and suicide preven-
8 tion services to American Indian and Alaska Native vet-
9 erans, especially with respect to the identified populations
10 and tribes within the coordinators' catchment areas.

11 (c) COORDINATION WITH SUICIDE PREVENTION CO-
12 ORDINATORS.—Not later than 180 days after the date of
13 the enactment of this Act, the Secretary, in consultation
14 with the Director of the Office of Mental Health and Sui-
15 cide Prevention, shall ensure that the suicide prevention
16 coordinator and minority veteran coordinator of each med-
17 ical center of the Department have developed and dissemi-
18 nated to the director of the medical center a written plan
19 for conducting mental health and suicide prevention out-
20 reach to all tribes and urban Indian health organizations
21 within the catchment area of the medical center. Each
22 such plan shall include for each tribe covered by the
23 plan—

1 (1) contact information for tribal leadership
2 and the tribal health facility or Indian Health Serv-
3 ice facility serving that tribe;

4 (2) a schedule for and list of outreach plans
5 (including addressing any barriers to accessing De-
6 partment mental health care);

7 (3) documentation of any conversation with
8 tribal leaders that may guide culturally appropriate
9 delivery of mental health care to American Indian or
10 Alaska Native veterans;

11 (4) documentation of any progress in incor-
12 porating traditional healing practices into mental
13 health and suicide prevention protocols and options
14 available for veterans who are members of such
15 tribe; and

16 (5) documentation of any coordination among
17 the Department, the Indian Health Service, urban
18 Indian health organizations, and the Substance
19 Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
20 for the purpose of improving suicide prevention ef-
21 forts tailored to veterans who are members of such
22 tribe and the provision of culturally competent men-
23 tal health care to such veterans.

24 (d) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the en-
25 actment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to the

1 Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the
2 Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Rep-
3 resentatives a report on outreach efforts to minority vet-
4 erans and American Indian and Alaska Native veterans.
5 Such report shall include each of the following:

6 (1) The number of minority veteran coordina-
7 tors within the Department.

8 (2) The number and percentage of minority vet-
9 eran coordinators who are women.

10 (3) The number and percentage of minority vet-
11 eran coordinators who are persons of color.

12 (4) The number and percentage of Department
13 medical centers with minority veteran coordinators.

14 (5) The number and percentage of Department
15 mental health providers who are enrolled members of
16 a federally recognized Indian tribe or self-identify as
17 Native American.

18 (6) The number and percentage of Department
19 mental health providers who speak a second lan-
20 guage.

21 (7) A review of the outreach plans developed
22 and submitted to all Department medical centers for
23 outreach to American Indian and Alaska Native vet-
24 erans.

1 (8) A review of mental health care provided an-
2 nually by the Department to American Indian and
3 Alaska Native veterans for the past three years, in-
4 cluding number of appointments, and an assessment
5 of any barriers to providing this care.

6 **SEC. 102. EXPANSION OF VET CENTER WORKFORCE.**

7 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the
8 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Vet-
9 erans Affairs shall hire an additional 100 full-time equiva-
10 lent employees for Vet Centers to bolster the workforce
11 of Vet Centers and to provide expanded mental health care
12 to veterans, members of the Armed Forces, and their fam-
13 ilies through outreach, community access points,
14 outstations, and Vet Centers.

15 (b) VET CENTER DEFINED.—In this section, the
16 term “Vet Center” has the meaning given that term in
17 section 1712A(h) of title 38, United States Code.

18 **SEC. 103. EXPANSION OF MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING FOR**

19 **DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

20 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than three years after
21 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of
22 Veterans Affairs, in collaboration with the Office of Men-
23 tal Health and Suicide Prevention and the Office of Aca-
24 demic Affiliations, shall add an additional 500 paid trainee

1 slots in covered mental health disciplines to the workforce
2 of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

3 (b) COVERED MENTAL HEALTH DISCIPLINES DE-
4 FINED.—In this section, the term “covered mental health
5 disciplines” means psychiatry, psychology, advanced prac-
6 tice nursing (with a focus on mental health or substance
7 use disorder), social work, licensed professional mental
8 health counseling, and marriage and family therapy.

9 **SEC. 104. EXPANSION OF SCHOLARSHIPS AND LOAN REPAY-**
10 **MENT PROGRAMS FOR MENTAL HEALTH PRO-**
11 **VIDERS.**

12 (a) EXPANSION OF HEALTH PROFESSIONAL SCHOL-
13 ARSHIP PROGRAM.—Beginning in academic year 2022,
14 the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall include not fewer
15 than an additional (as compared to academic year 2021)
16 50 awards per academic year under the Department of
17 Veterans Affairs Health Professional Scholarship Pro-
18 gram under subchapter II of chapter 76 of title 38, United
19 States Code, for applicants otherwise eligible for such pro-
20 gram who are pursuing degrees or training in mental
21 health disciplines, including advanced practice nursing
22 (with a focus on mental health or substance use disorder),
23 psychology, and social work.

24 (b) EXPANSION OF EDUCATION DEBT REDUCTION
25 PROGRAM.—

1 (1) IN GENERAL.—Beginning in fiscal year
2 2022, the Secretary shall provide not fewer than an
3 additional (as compared to fiscal year 2021) 200
4 debt reduction awards per year under the Depart-
5 ment of Veterans Affairs Education Debt Reduction
6 Program under subchapter VII of chapter 76 of title
7 38, United States Code, to be used to recruit mental
8 health professionals to the Department of Veterans
9 Affairs in disciplines that include psychiatry, psy-
10 chology, advanced practice nursing (with a focus on
11 mental health or substance use disorder), and social
12 work.

13 (2) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—
14 There is authorized to be appropriated to the Sec-
15 retary of Veterans Affairs \$8,000,000 per year to
16 carry out the additional awards under paragraph
17 (1).

18 (c) OUTREACH.—

19 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year
20 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
21 retary shall develop a public awareness campaign to
22 encourage veterans and mental health professionals
23 to choose the Department for their mental health ca-
24 reer.

1 (2) ELEMENTS.—The campaign required under
2 paragraph (1)—

3 (A) shall advertise the paid trainee, schol-
4 arship, and loan repayment opportunities of-
5 fered by the Department; and

6 (B) may highlight the new graduate med-
7 ical education residencies available at the De-
8 partment for medical students entering resi-
9 dency.

10 **TITLE II—VETERANS CRISIS**

11 **LINE**

12 **SEC. 201. VETERANS CRISIS LINE.**

13 In this title, the term “Veterans Crisis Line” means
14 the toll-free hotline for veterans established under section
15 1720F(h) of title 38, United States Code.

16 **Subtitle A—Veterans Crisis Line** 17 **Training and Quality Management**

18 **SEC. 211. STAFF TRAINING.**

19 (a) REVIEW OF TRAINING FOR VETERANS CRISIS
20 LINE CALL RESPONDERS.—

21 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans
22 Affairs shall enter into an agreement with an orga-
23 nization outside the Department of Veterans Affairs
24 to review the training for Veterans Crisis Line call
25 responders on assisting callers in crisis.

1 (2) COMPLETION OF REVIEW.—The review con-
2 ducted under paragraph (1) shall be completed not
3 later than one year after the date of the enactment
4 of this Act.

5 (3) ELEMENTS OF REVIEW.—The review con-
6 ducted under paragraph (1) shall consist of a review
7 of the training provided by the Department on sub-
8 jects including risk assessment, lethal means assess-
9 ment, substance use and overdose risk assessment,
10 safety planning, referrals to care, supervisory con-
11 sultation, and emergency dispatch.

12 (4) UPDATE OF TRAINING.—If any deficiencies
13 in the training for Veterans Crisis Line call respon-
14 ders are found pursuant to the review under para-
15 graph (1), the Secretary shall update such training
16 and associated standards of practice to correct those
17 deficiencies not later than one year after the comple-
18 tion of the review.

19 (b) RETRAINING GUIDELINES FOR VETERANS CRISIS
20 LINE CALL RESPONDERS.—

21 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year
22 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
23 retary shall develop guidelines on retraining and
24 quality management for when a Veterans Crisis Line
25 call responder has an adverse event or when a qual-

1 ity review check by a supervisor of such a call re-
2 sponder denotes that the call responder needs im-
3 provement.

4 (2) ELEMENTS OF GUIDELINES.—The guide-
5 lines developed under paragraph (1) shall specify the
6 subjects and quantity of retraining recommended
7 and how supervisors should implement increased use
8 of silent monitoring or other performance review
9 mechanisms.

10 **SEC. 212. QUALITY REVIEW AND MANAGEMENT.**

11 (a) MONITORING OF CALLS ON VETERANS CRISIS
12 LINE.—

13 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans
14 Affairs shall require that not fewer than two calls
15 per month for each Veterans Crisis Line call re-
16 sponder be subject to supervisory silent monitoring,
17 which is used to monitor the quality of conduct by
18 such call responder during the call.

19 (2) BENCHMARKS.—The Secretary shall estab-
20 lish benchmarks for requirements and performance
21 of Veterans Crisis Line call responders on super-
22 visory silent monitored calls.

23 (3) QUARTERLY REPORTS.—Not less frequently
24 than quarterly, the Secretary shall submit to the Of-
25 fice of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention of the

1 Department of Veterans Affairs a report on occur-
2 rence and outcomes of supervisory silent monitoring
3 of calls on the Veterans Crisis Line.

4 (b) QUALITY MANAGEMENT PROCESSES FOR VET-
5 ERANS CRISIS LINE.—Not later than one year after the
6 date of the enactment of this Act, the leadership for the
7 Veterans Crisis Line, in partnership with the Office of
8 Mental Health and Suicide Prevention of the Department
9 and the National Center for Patient Safety of the Depart-
10 ment, shall establish quality management processes and
11 expectations for staff of the Veterans Crisis Line, includ-
12 ing with respect to reporting of adverse events and close
13 calls.

14 (c) ANNUAL COMMON CAUSE ANALYSIS FOR CALL-
15 ERS TO VETERANS CRISIS LINE WHO DIE BY SUICIDE.—

16 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not less frequently than an-
17 nually, the Secretary shall perform a common cause
18 analysis for all identified callers to the Veterans Cri-
19 sis Line that died by suicide during the one-year pe-
20 riod preceding the conduct of the analysis before the
21 caller received contact with emergency services and
22 in which the Veterans Crisis Line was the last point
23 of contact.

24 (2) SUBMITTAL OF RESULTS.—The Secretary
25 shall submit to the Office of Mental Health and Sui-

1 cide Prevention of the Department the results of
2 each analysis conducted under paragraph (1).

3 (3) APPLICATION OF THEMES OR LESSONS.—

4 The Secretary shall apply any themes or lessons
5 learned under an analysis under paragraph (1) to
6 updating training and standards of practice for staff
7 of the Veterans Crisis Line.

8 **SEC. 213. GUIDANCE FOR HIGH-RISK CALLERS.**

9 (a) DEVELOPMENT OF ENHANCED GUIDANCE AND
10 PROCEDURES FOR RESPONSE TO CALLS RELATED TO
11 SUBSTANCE USE AND OVERDOSE RISK.—Not later than
12 one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the
13 Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in consultation with na-
14 tional experts within the Department of Veterans Affairs
15 on substance use disorder and overdose, shall—

16 (1) develop enhanced guidance and procedures
17 to respond to calls to the Veterans Crisis Line re-
18 lated to substance use and overdose risk;

19 (2) update training materials for staff of the
20 Veterans Crisis Line in response to such enhanced
21 guidance and procedures; and

22 (3) update criteria for monitoring compliance
23 with such enhanced guidance and procedures.

24 (b) REVIEW AND IMPROVEMENT OF STANDARDS FOR
25 EMERGENCY DISPATCH.—

1 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year
2 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
3 retary shall—

4 (A) review the current emergency dispatch
5 standard operating procedure of the Veterans
6 Crisis Line to identify any additions to such
7 procedure to strengthen communication regard-
8 ing—

9 (i) emergency dispatch for discon-
10 nected callers; and

11 (ii) the role of social service assistants
12 in requesting emergency dispatch and re-
13 cording such dispatches; and

14 (B) update such procedure to include the
15 additions identified under subparagraph (A).

16 (2) TRAINING.—The Secretary shall ensure
17 that all staff of the Veterans Crisis Line are trained
18 on all updates made under paragraph (1)(B) to the
19 emergency dispatch standard operating procedure of
20 the Veterans Crisis Line.

21 **SEC. 214. OVERSIGHT OF TRAINING OF SOCIAL SERVICE AS-**
22 **SISTANTS AND CLARIFICATION OF JOB RE-**
23 **SPONSIBILITIES.**

24 Not later than one year after the date of the enact-
25 ment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall—

1 (1) establish oversight mechanisms to ensure
2 that social service assistants and supervisory social
3 service assistants working with the Veterans Crisis
4 Line are appropriately trained and implementing
5 guidance of the Department regarding the Veterans
6 Crisis Line; and

7 (2) refine standard operating procedures to de-
8 lineate roles and responsibilities for all levels of su-
9 pervisory social service assistants working with the
10 Veterans Crisis Line.

11 **Subtitle B—Pilot Programs and** 12 **Research on Veterans Crisis Line**

13 **SEC. 221. PILOT PROGRAMS.**

14 (a) EXTENDED SAFETY PLANNING PILOT PROGRAM
15 FOR VETERANS CRISIS LINE.—

16 (1) IN GENERAL.—Commencing not later than
17 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act,
18 the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out a
19 pilot program to determine whether a lengthier,
20 templated safety plan used in clinical settings could
21 be applied in call centers for the Veterans Crisis
22 Line.

23 (2) BRIEFING.—Not later than two years after
24 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary
25 shall provide to Congress a briefing on the findings

1 of the Secretary under the pilot program conducted
2 under paragraph (1), which shall include any rec-
3 ommendations of the Secretary with respect to the
4 continuation or discontinuation of the pilot program.

5 (b) CRISIS LINE FACILITATION PILOT PROGRAM.—

6 (1) IN GENERAL.—Commencing not later than
7 one year after the date of the enactment of this Act,
8 the Secretary shall carry out a pilot program on the
9 use of crisis line facilitation to increase use of the
10 Veterans Crisis Line among high-risk veterans.

11 (2) BRIEFING.—Not later than two years after
12 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary
13 shall provide to Congress a briefing on the findings
14 of the Secretary under the pilot program under
15 paragraph (1), including any recommendations of
16 the Secretary with respect to the continuation or dis-
17 continuation of the pilot program.

18 (3) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

19 (A) The term “crisis line facilitation”, with
20 respect to a high-risk veteran, means the pres-
21 entation by a therapist of psychoeducational in-
22 formation about the Veterans Crisis Line and a
23 discussion of the perceived barriers and
24 facilitators to future use of the Veterans Crisis
25 Line for the veteran, which culminates in the

1 veteran calling the Veterans Crisis Line with
2 the therapist to provide firsthand experiences
3 that may counter negative impressions of the
4 Veterans Crisis Line.

5 (B) The term “high-risk veteran” means a
6 veteran receiving inpatient mental health care
7 following a suicidal crisis.

8 **SEC. 222. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS FOR RE-**
9 **SEARCH ON EFFECTIVENESS AND OPPORTU-**
10 **NITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT OF VETERANS**
11 **CRISIS LINE.**

12 There is authorized to be appropriated to the Sec-
13 retary of Veterans Affairs for fiscal years 2022 and 2023,
14 a total of \$5,000,000 for the Mental Illness Research,
15 Education, and Clinical Centers of the Department of Vet-
16 erans Affairs to conduct research on the effectiveness of
17 the Veterans Crisis Line and areas for improvement for
18 the Veterans Crisis Line. Amounts made available pursu-
19 ant to the authorization of appropriations under this sec-
20 tion shall remain available until September 30, 2024.

1 **Subtitle C—Transition of Crisis**
2 **Line Number**

3 **SEC. 231. FEEDBACK ON TRANSITION OF CRISIS LINE NUM-**
4 **BER.**

5 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs
6 shall solicit feedback from veterans service organizations
7 on how to conduct outreach to members of the Armed
8 Forces, veterans, their family members, and other mem-
9 bers of the military and veterans community on the move
10 to 988 as the new, national three-digit suicide and mental
11 health crisis hotline, which is expected to be implemented
12 by July 2022, to minimize confusion and ensure veterans
13 are aware of their options for reaching the Veterans Crisis
14 Line.

15 (b) NONAPPLICATION OF FACCA.—The Federal Advi-
16 sory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. App.) shall not apply to
17 any feedback solicited under subsection (a).

18 (c) VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATION DEFINED.—
19 In this section, the term “veterans service organization”
20 means an organization recognized by the Secretary for the
21 representation of veterans under section 5902 of title 38,
22 United States Code.

1 **TITLE III—OUTREACH TO**
2 **VETERANS**

3 **SEC. 301. SOLID START PROGRAM OF THE DEPARTMENT OF**
4 **VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

5 (a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 63 of title 38, United
6 States Code, is amended by adding at the end the fol-
7 lowing new subchapter:

8 “SUBCHAPTER II—OTHER OUTREACH
9 PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

10 **“§ 6320. Solid Start program**

11 “(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall carry out a
12 program, to be known as the ‘Solid Start program’, under
13 which the Secretary shall—

14 “(1) build the capacity of the Department to ef-
15 ficiently and effectively respond to the queries and
16 needs of veterans who have recently separated from
17 the Armed Forces; and

18 “(2) systemically integrate and coordinate ef-
19 forts to assist veterans, including efforts—

20 “(A) to proactively reach out to newly sep-
21 arated veterans to inform them of their eligi-
22 bility for programs of and benefits provided by
23 the Department; and

24 “(B) to connect veterans in crisis to re-
25 sources that address their immediate needs.

1 “(b) ACTIVITIES OF THE SOLID START PROGRAM.—

2 (1) The Secretary, in coordination with the Secretary of
3 Defense, shall carry out the Solid Start program of the
4 Department by—

5 “(A) collecting up-to-date contact information
6 during transition classes or separation counseling for
7 all members of the Armed Forces who are sepa-
8 rating from the Armed Forces, while explaining the
9 existence and purpose of the Solid Start program;

10 “(B) calling each veteran, regardless of separa-
11 tion type or characterization of service, three times
12 within the first year after separation of the veteran
13 from the Armed Forces;

14 “(C) providing information about the Solid
15 Start program on the website of the Department
16 and in materials of the Department, especially tran-
17 sition booklets and other resources;

18 “(D) ensuring calls are truly tailored to the
19 needs of each veteran’s unique situation by con-
20 ducting quality assurance tests;

21 “(E) prioritizing outreach to veterans who have
22 accessed mental health resources prior to separation
23 from the Armed Forces;

1 “(F) providing women veterans with informa-
2 tion that is tailored to their specific health care and
3 benefit needs;

4 “(G) as feasible, providing information on ac-
5 cess to State and local resources, including Vet Cen-
6 ters and veterans service organizations; and

7 “(H) gathering and analyzing data assessing
8 the effectiveness of the Solid Start program.

9 “(2) The Secretary, in coordination with the Sec-
10 retary of Defense, may carry out the Solid Start program
11 by—

12 “(A) encouraging members of the Armed
13 Forces who are transitioning to civilian life to au-
14 thorize alternate points of contact who can be
15 reached should the member be unavailable during
16 the first year following the separation of the member
17 from the Armed Forces;

18 “(B) following up missed phone calls with tai-
19 lored mailings to ensure the veteran still receives
20 similar information; and

21 “(C) striving to reach out to veterans who sepa-
22 rated prior to the initiation of the Solid Start pro-
23 gram to provide similar services to those veterans, as
24 feasible.

25 “(3) In this subsection:

1 “(A) The term ‘Vet Center’ has the meaning
2 given that term in section 1712A(h) of this title.

3 “(B) The term ‘veterans service organization’
4 means an organization recognized by the Secretary
5 for the representation of veterans under section
6 5902 of this title.

7 “(c) OBLIGATIONS OF AMOUNTS.—Subject to the
8 availability of appropriations, the Secretary may not, in
9 a fiscal year, obligate an amount to carry out the Solid
10 Start program that is less than the total amount obligated
11 in the previous fiscal year to carry out the program, unless
12 the Secretary determines that increased efficiencies of the
13 program warrant the obligation of a lesser amount.”.

14 (b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—Chapter 63 of
15 such title, as amended by subsection (a), is further amend-
16 ed—

17 (1) by inserting before section 6301 the fol-
18 lowing:

19 **“Subchapter I—Outreach Services Program”;**

20 and

21 (2) in sections 6301, 6303, 6304, 6305, 6306,
22 and 6307, by striking “this chapter” each place it
23 appears and inserting “this subchapter”.

24 (c) CLERICAL AMENDMENTS.—The table of sections
25 at the beginning of chapter 63 of such title is amended—

1 (1) by inserting before the item relating to sec-
2 tion 6301 the following new item:

“SUBCHAPTER I—OUTREACH SERVICES PROGRAM”;

3 and

4 (2) by adding at the end the following new
5 items:

“SUBCHAPTER II—OTHER OUTREACH PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

“6320. Solid Start program.”.

6 **SEC. 302. DESIGNATION OF BUDDY CHECK WEEK BY SEC-**
7 **RETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

8 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs
9 shall designate one week each year to organize outreach
10 events and educate veterans on how to conduct peer
11 wellness checks, which shall be known as “Buddy Check
12 Week”.

13 (b) EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES.—

14 (1) IN GENERAL.—During Buddy Check Week,
15 the Secretary, in consultation with organizations
16 that represent veterans, nonprofits that serve vet-
17 erans, mental health experts, members of the Armed
18 Forces, and such other entities and individuals as
19 the Secretary considers appropriate, shall collaborate
20 with organizations that represent veterans to provide
21 educational opportunities for veterans to learn how
22 to conduct peer wellness checks.

1 (2) TRAINING MATTERS.—As part of the edu-
2 cational opportunities provided under paragraph (1),
3 the Secretary shall provide the following:

4 (A) A script for veterans to use to conduct
5 peer wellness checks that includes information
6 on appropriate referrals to resources veterans
7 might need.

8 (B) Online and in-person training, as ap-
9 propriate, on how to conduct a peer wellness
10 check.

11 (C) Opportunities for members of organi-
12 zations that represent veterans to learn how to
13 train individuals to conduct peer wellness
14 checks.

15 (D) Training for veterans participating in
16 Buddy Check Week on how to transfer a phone
17 call directly to the Veterans Crisis Line.

18 (E) Resiliency training for veterans partici-
19 pating in Buddy Check Week on handling a vet-
20 eran in crisis.

21 (3) ONLINE MATERIALS.—All training materials
22 provided under the educational opportunities under
23 paragraph (1) shall be made publicly available on a
24 website of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

1 (c) OUTREACH.—The Secretary, in collaboration with
2 organizations that represent veterans, may conduct out-
3 reach regarding educational opportunities under sub-
4 section (b) at—

5 (1) public events where many veterans are ex-
6 pected to congregate;

7 (2) meetings of organizations that represent
8 veterans;

9 (3) facilities of the Department; and

10 (4) such other locations as the Secretary, in col-
11 laboration with organizations that represent vet-
12 erans, considers appropriate.

13 (d) VETERANS CRISIS LINE PLAN.—

14 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall ensure
15 that a plan exists for handling the potential increase
16 in the number of calls into the Veterans Crisis Line
17 that may occur during Buddy Check Week.

18 (2) SUBMITTAL OF PLAN.—The head of the
19 Veterans Crisis Line shall submit to the Secretary a
20 plan for how to handle excess calls during Buddy
21 Check Week, which may include the following:

22 (A) Additional hours for staff.

23 (B) The use of a backup call center.

24 (C) Any other plan to ensure that calls
25 from veterans in crisis are being answered in a

1 timely manner by an individual trained at the
2 same level as a Veterans Crisis Line responder.

3 (e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

4 (1) The term “organization that represents vet-
5 erans” means an organization recognized by the Sec-
6 retary for the representation of veterans under sec-
7 tion 5902 of title 38, United States Code.

8 (2) The term “veteran” has the meaning given
9 that term in section 101 of such title.

10 (3) The term “Veterans Crisis Line” means the
11 toll-free hotline for veterans provided by the Sec-
12 retary under section 1720F(h) of such title.

13 **SEC. 303. IMPROVEMENTS TO VETERANS JUSTICE OUT-**
14 **REACH PROGRAM.**

15 (a) OUTREACH REQUIREMENT.—The Secretary of
16 Veterans Affairs shall conduct outreach regarding the Vet-
17 erans Justice Outreach Program to justice-involved vet-
18 erans, military and veterans service organizations, and rel-
19 evant stakeholders in the criminal justice community, in-
20 cluding officials from local law enforcement, court, and jail
21 systems and others as determined appropriate by the Sec-
22 retary. Such outreach—

23 (1) shall be designed—

24 (A) to spread awareness and under-
25 standing of the Program;

1 (B) to spread awareness and under-
2 standing of veteran eligibility for the Program,
3 including the eligibility of veterans who were
4 discharged from service in the Armed Forces
5 under conditions other than honorable; and

6 (C) to improve the identification of justice-
7 involved veterans; and

8 (2) may be conducted in person, virtually, or
9 through other means, including by the dissemination
10 of informational materials and contact information.

11 (b) STRATEGIC PLAN.—The Secretary of Veterans
12 Affairs shall develop a strategic plan for the Veterans Jus-
13 tice Outreach Program. In developing such plan, the Sec-
14 retary shall conduct—

15 (1) an assessment of barriers to working with
16 justice-involved veterans in rural, remote, and under-
17 served areas, including potential steps to address
18 such barriers; and

19 (2) a workforce gap analysis for the Program.

20 (c) INCREASE IN NUMBER OF VJO SPECIALISTS.—

21 (1) INCREASE.—The Secretary of Veterans Af-
22 fairs shall increase the number of Veterans Justice
23 Outreach specialists responsible for supporting jus-
24 tice-involved veterans in rural, remote, or under-
25 served areas, including areas located far from De-

1 department of Veterans Affairs medical centers, as de-
2 termined by the Secretary, through—

3 (A) the hiring of additional Veterans Jus-
4 tice Outreach specialists;

5 (B) the reallocation of existing Veterans
6 Justice Outreach specialists; or

7 (C) such other means as may be deter-
8 mined appropriate by the Secretary.

9 (2) DETERMINATION.—The Secretary shall de-
10 termine the number of Veterans Justice Outreach
11 specialists required, and the locations of such spe-
12 cialists, under paragraph (1) by taking into ac-
13 count—

14 (A) such number and locations needed to
15 achieve the mission and strategic goals of the
16 Veterans Justice Outreach Program;

17 (B) any gaps in the workforce of the Pro-
18 gram, including such gaps identified pursuant
19 to subsection (b)(2); and

20 (C) strategies to address such gaps.

21 (3) USE OF TECHNOLOGY.—In carrying out
22 paragraph (1), the Secretary shall consider the use
23 of virtual technology.

24 (d) PERFORMANCE GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION
25 PLANS.—

1 (1) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary of Vet-
2 erans Affairs shall establish performance goals and
3 implementation plans for—

4 (A) the Veterans Justice Outreach Pro-
5 gram;

6 (B) Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists;
7 and

8 (C) providing support for research regard-
9 ing justice-involved veterans.

10 (2) CONSISTENCY WITH STRATEGIC PLAN.—
11 The Secretary shall ensure that the performance
12 goals and implementation plans under paragraph (1)
13 are consistent with the strategic plan under sub-
14 section (b) and include—

15 (A) qualitative and quantitative milestones,
16 measures, and metrics, and associated timelines
17 for completion of the plans under paragraph (1)
18 and barriers to such completion;

19 (B) an identification of relevant staff; and

20 (C) an estimate of resource needs and
21 sources.

22 (3) PERFORMANCE DATA.—The Secretary shall
23 establish a process to regularly collect and analyze
24 performance data to assess the efficiency and effec-

1 tiveness of implementing the plans under paragraph
2 (1).

3 (e) TRAINING REQUIREMENT.—The Secretary shall
4 ensure that all Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists re-
5 ceive training not less frequently than annually on—

6 (1) best practices for identifying and con-
7 ducting outreach to justice-involved veterans and rel-
8 evant stakeholders in the criminal justice commu-
9 nity; and

10 (2) veteran eligibility for the Veterans Justice
11 Outreach Program, including with respect to consist-
12 ently communicating changes regarding eligibility
13 (including through the use of a script or other ref-
14 erence materials).

15 (f) REPORTS ON IMPLEMENTATION.—

16 (1) FIRST REPORT.—Not later than one year
17 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
18 retary shall submit to Congress a report on the fol-
19 lowing:

20 (A) An assessment of implementing sub-
21 section (e), including—

22 (i) strategies to increase Veterans
23 Justice Outreach specialists responsible for
24 supporting justice-involved veterans in
25 rural, remote, or underserved areas; and

1 (ii) the progress of the Secretary in
2 addressing gaps in the workforce of the
3 Veterans Justice Outreach Program identi-
4 fied pursuant to paragraph (2) of such
5 subsection.

6 (B) The performance goals and implemen-
7 tation plans established under subsection
8 (d)(1).

9 (2) SUBSEQUENT REPORT.—Not later than
10 three years after the date on which the first report
11 is submitted under paragraph (1), the Secretary
12 shall submit to Congress a report on the progress of
13 the Secretary in meeting the performance goals and
14 carrying out activities under the implementation
15 plans established under subsection (d)(1).

16 (g) REPORT ON VETERANS TREATMENT COURTS.—
17 Not later than one year after the date of the enactment
18 of this Act, the Secretary, in consultation with the Attor-
19 ney General, shall submit to Congress a report on the en-
20 gagement of the Department of Veterans Affairs with vet-
21 erans treatment courts, including—

22 (1) the availability and efficacy of veterans
23 treatment courts in meeting the needs of justice-in-
24 volved veterans;

1 (2) best practices for Department of Veterans
2 Affairs staff and justice-involved veterans in working
3 with veterans treatment courts; and

4 (3) the ability of justice-involved veterans to ac-
5 cess veterans treatment courts, including any bar-
6 riers that exist to increasing such access.

7 (h) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

8 (1) The term “justice-involved veteran” means
9 a veteran with active, ongoing, or recent contact
10 with some component of a local criminal justice sys-
11 tem.

12 (2) The term “Veterans Justice Outreach Pro-
13 gram” means the program through which the De-
14 partment of Veterans Affairs identifies justice-in-
15 volved veterans and provides such veterans with ac-
16 cess to Department services.

17 (3) The term “Veterans Justice Outreach Spe-
18 cialist” means an employee of the Department of
19 Veterans Affairs who serves as a liaison between the
20 Department and the local criminal justice system on
21 behalf of a justice-involved veteran.

22 (4) The term “veterans treatment court” means
23 a State or local court that is participating in the vet-
24 erans treatment court program (as defined in section

1 2991(i)(1) of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe
2 Streets Act of 1968 (42 U.S.C. 3797aa(i)(1))).

3 **SEC. 304. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS GOV-**
4 **ERNORS CHALLENGE PROGRAM.**

5 The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may enter into
6 agreements with States, territories, and American Indian
7 and Alaska Native tribes for the development and imple-
8 mentation of veteran suicide prevention proposals through
9 the Governors Challenge Program.

10 **TITLE IV—MENTAL HEALTH**
11 **CARE DELIVERY**

12 **SEC. 401. EXPANSION OF PEER SPECIALIST SUPPORT PRO-**
13 **GRAM OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AF-**
14 **FAIRS.**

15 (a) EXPANSION.—Section 506 of the VA MISSION
16 Act of 2018 (Public Law 115–182; 38 U.S.C. 1701 note)
17 is amended—

18 (1) by redesignating subsections (d) through (f)
19 as subsections (e) through (g);

20 (2) in subsection (a), by adding at the end the
21 following new sentence: “Each such peer specialist
22 shall be a full-time employee whose primary function
23 is to serve as a peer specialist and shall be in addi-
24 tion to all other employees of such medical center.”;

1 (3) in the heading of subsection (b), by striking
2 “TIMEFRAME” and inserting “INITIAL TIME-
3 FRAME”;

4 (4) in subsection (c)—

5 (A) in the heading, by striking “SELEC-
6 TION” and inserting “INITIAL SELECTION”; and

7 (B) in paragraph (1), by striking “The
8 Secretary shall” and inserting “In establishing
9 the program at initial locations, the Secretary
10 shall”;

11 (5) by inserting after subsection (c) the fol-
12 lowing new subsection:

13 “(d) TIMEFRAME FOR EXPANSION OF PROGRAM; SE-
14 LECTION OF ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS.—

15 “(1) TIMEFRAME FOR EXPANSION.—The Sec-
16 retary shall make permanent and expand the pro-
17 gram to additional medical centers of the Depart-
18 ment as follows:

19 “(A) As of the date of the enactment of
20 the STRONG Veterans Act of 2021, the Sec-
21 retary shall make such program permanent at
22 each medical center participating in the pro-
23 gram on the day before such date of enactment.

24 “(B) During the seven-year period fol-
25 lowing such date of enactment, the Secretary

1 shall expand the program to an additional 25
2 medical centers per year until the program is
3 carried out at each medical center of the De-
4 partment.

5 “(2) SELECTION OF ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS.—

6 In selecting medical centers for the expansion of the
7 program under paragraph (1)(B), until such time as
8 each medical center of the Department is partici-
9 pating in the program by establishing not fewer than
10 two peer specialists at the medical center, the Sec-
11 retary shall prioritize medical centers in the fol-
12 lowing areas:

13 “(A) Rural areas and other areas that are
14 underserved by the Department.

15 “(B) Areas that are not in close proximity
16 to an active duty military installation.

17 “(C) Areas representing different geo-
18 graphic locations, such as census tracts estab-
19 lished by the Bureau of the Census.”;

20 (6) in subsection (e), as redesignated by para-
21 graph (1)—

22 (A) in the heading, by striking “GENDER-
23 SPECIFIC SERVICES” and inserting “CONSIDER-
24 ATIONS FOR HIRING PEER SPECIALISTS”;

1 (B) in the matter preceding paragraph (1),
2 by striking “location selected under subsection
3 (c)” and inserting “medical center”;

4 (C) in paragraph (1), by striking “and” at
5 the end; and

6 (D) by striking paragraph (2) and insert-
7 ing the following new paragraphs:

8 “(2) female peer specialists are hired and made
9 available to support female veterans who are treated
10 at each medical center; and

11 “(3) to the extent practical, peer specialists are
12 hired in demographic percentages that reflect the ra-
13 cial and ethnic demographic percentages of the over-
14 all veterans population.”; and

15 (7) by amending subsection (g), as redesignated
16 by paragraph (1), to read as follows:

17 “(g) REPORTS.—

18 “(1) PERIODIC REPORTS.—

19 “(A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one
20 year after the date of the enactment of the
21 STRONG Veterans Act of 2021, and annually
22 thereafter for five years, the Secretary shall
23 submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs
24 of the House of Representatives and the Senate

1 a report on the program, including the expansion of the program under subsection (d)(1).

3 “(B) ELEMENTS.—Each report under subparagraph (A) shall include, with respect to the one-year period preceding the submission of the report, the following:

7 “(i) The findings and conclusions of the Secretary with respect to the program.

9 “(ii) An assessment of the benefits of the program to veterans and family members of veterans.

12 “(iii) An assessment of the effectiveness of peer specialists in engaging under subsection (f) with health care providers in the community and veterans served by such providers.

17 “(iv) The name and location of each medical center where new peer specialists were hired.

20 “(v) The number of new peer specialists hired at each medical center pursuant to this section and the total number of peer specialists within the Department hired pursuant to this section.

1 “(vi) An assessment of any barriers
2 confronting the recruitment, training, or
3 retention of peer specialists.

4 “(2) FINAL REPORT.—Not later than one year
5 after the Secretary determines that the program is
6 being carried out at each medical center of the De-
7 partment, the Secretary shall submit to the Commit-
8 tees on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Represent-
9 atives and the Senate a report notifying such com-
10 mittees of such determination.”.

11 (b) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
12 authorized to be appropriated to the Department of Vet-
13 erans Affairs to implement section 506 of the VA MIS-
14 SION Act of 2018 (Public Law 115–182; 38 U.S.C. 1701
15 note), as amended by subsection (a), the following
16 amounts:

- 17 (1) \$3,600,000 for fiscal year 2022.
18 (2) \$7,200,000 for fiscal year 2023.
19 (3) \$10,800,000 for fiscal year 2024.
20 (4) \$14,400,000 for fiscal year 2025.
21 (5) \$18,000,000 for fiscal year 2026.
22 (6) \$21,600,000 for fiscal year 2027.
23 (7) \$25,000,000 for fiscal year 2028.

1 **SEC. 402. EXPANSION OF VET CENTER SERVICES.**

2 (a) VETERANS AND MEMBERS USING EDUCATIONAL
3 ASSISTANCE BENEFITS.—Section 1712A of title 38,
4 United States Code, is amended—

5 (1) by striking “clauses (i) through (vi)” both
6 places it appears and inserting “clauses (i) through
7 (vii)”;

8 (2) by striking “in clause (vii)” both places it
9 appears and inserting “in clause (viii)”;

10 (3) in subsection (a)(1)(C)—

11 (A) by redesignating clause (vii) as clause
12 (viii); and

13 (B) by inserting after clause (vi) the fol-
14 lowing new clause:

15 “(vii) Any veteran or member of the Armed
16 Forces pursuing a course of education using covered
17 educational assistance benefits.”; and

18 (4) in subsection (h), by adding at the end the
19 following new paragraph:

20 “(6) The term ‘covered educational assistance
21 benefits’ means educational assistance benefits pro-
22 vided pursuant to—

23 “(A) chapter 30, 31, 32, or 33 of this title;

24 “(B) chapter 1606 or 1607 of title 10;

1 “(C) section 116 of the Harry W. Colmery
2 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017
3 (Public Law 115–48; 38 U.S.C. 3001 note); or
4 “(D) section 8006 of the American Rescue
5 Plan Act of 2021 (Public Law 117–2; 38
6 U.S.C. 3001 note prec.).”.

7 (b) GAO REPORT.—Not later than one year after the
8 date of the enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General
9 of the United States shall submit to the Committees on
10 Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives and the
11 Senate a report assessing—

12 (1) the mental health needs of veterans pur-
13 suing a course of education using covered edu-
14 cational assistance benefits (as defined in section
15 1712A(h)(6) of title 38, United States Code, as
16 added by subsection (a)); and

17 (2) the efforts of the Department of Veterans
18 Affairs to address such mental health needs.

19 **SEC. 403. ELIGIBILITY FOR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.**

20 (a) IN GENERAL.—Section 1712A(a)(1) of title 38,
21 United States Code, as amended by section 402, is further
22 amended—

23 (1) in subparagraph (A)(ii)—

24 (A) in subclause (I), by striking “and”;

1 (B) in subclause (II), by striking the pe-
2 riod at the end and inserting “; and”; and

3 (C) by adding at the end the following:

4 “(III) in the case of a veteran or member
5 who died by suicide, to the degree that coun-
6 seling furnished to such individual is found to
7 aid in coping with the effects of such suicide.”;

8 (2) in subparagraph (B)(i)(II)—

9 (A) in item (aa), by striking “or”;

10 (B) in item (bb), by striking the period at
11 the end and inserting “; or”; and

12 (C) by adding at the end the following;

13 “(cc) coping with the effects of a sui-
14 cide described in subclause (III) of such
15 clause.”; and

16 (3) in subparagraph (C)(vii)—

17 (A) in subclause (I), by striking “or” at
18 the end;

19 (B) in subclause (II), by striking the pe-
20 riod at the end and inserting “; or”; and

21 (C) by adding at the end the following:

22 “(III) veteran or member of the Armed
23 Forces who died by suicide.”.

24 (b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by
25 subsection (a) shall apply with respect to family members

1 of a member or veteran who died by suicide before, on,
2 or after the date of the enactment of this Act.

3 **SEC. 404. MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATIONS.**

4 (a) MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATIONS FOR VET-
5 ERANS FILING FOR COMPENSATION.—

6 (1) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter VI of chapter 11
7 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by add-
8 ing at the end the following new section:

9 **“§ 1167. Mental health consultations**

10 “(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 30 days after the
11 date on which a veteran submits to the Secretary a claim
12 for compensation under this chapter for a service-con-
13 nected disability relating to a mental health diagnosis, the
14 Secretary shall offer the veteran a mental health consulta-
15 tion to assess the mental health needs of, and care options
16 for, the veteran.

17 “(b) AVAILABILITY.—The Secretary shall—

18 “(1) offer a veteran a consultation under sub-
19 section (a) without regard to any previous denial or
20 approval of a claim of that veteran for a service-con-
21 nected disability relating to a mental health diag-
22 nosis; and

23 “(2) ensure that a veteran offered a mental
24 health consultation under subsection (a) may elect to
25 receive such consultation during the one-year period

1 beginning on the date on which the consultation is
2 offered or during such longer period beginning on
3 such date as the Secretary considers appropriate.

4 “(c) **RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.**—A consultation pro-
5 vided to a veteran under this section shall not be construed
6 as a determination that any disability of such veteran is
7 service-connected for the purposes of any benefit under the
8 laws administered by the Secretary.”.

9 (2) **CLERICAL AMENDMENT.**—The table of sec-
10 tions at the beginning of chapter 11 of such title is
11 amended by adding at the end the following new
12 item:

“1167. Mental health consultations.”.

13 (b) **MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATIONS FOR VET-**
14 **ERANS ENTERING HOMELESS PROGRAMS OFFICE PRO-**
15 **GRAMS.**—

16 (1) **IN GENERAL.**—Subchapter VII of chapter
17 20 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by
18 adding at the end the following new section:

19 **“§ 2068. Mental health consultations**

20 “(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Not later than two weeks after
21 the date on which a veteran described in subsection (b)
22 enters into a program administered by the Homeless Pro-
23 grams Office of the Department, the Secretary shall offer
24 the veteran a mental health consultation to assess the
25 health needs of, and care options for, the veteran.

1 “(b) VETERAN DESCRIBED.—A veteran described in
 2 this subsection is a veteran to whom a mental health con-
 3 sultation is not offered or provided through the case man-
 4 agement services of the program of the Homeless Pro-
 5 grams Office into which the veteran enters.”.

6 (2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sec-
 7 tions at the beginning of chapter 20 of such title is
 8 amended by adding at the end the following new
 9 item:

“2068. Mental health consultations.”.

10 **TITLE V—RESEARCH**

11 **SEC. 501. VETERANS INTEGRATION TO ACADEMIC LEADER-** 12 **SHIP PROGRAM OF THE DEPARTMENT OF** 13 **VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

14 (a) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date
 15 of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans
 16 Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Af-
 17 fairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a
 18 report on the Veterans Integration to Academic Leader-
 19 ship program of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The
 20 report shall include the following:

21 (1) The number of medical centers of the De-
 22 partment, institutions of higher learning, non-college
 23 degree programs, and student veterans supported by
 24 the program, and relevant trends since the program
 25 began.

1 (2) The staff and resources allocated to the
2 program, and relevant trends since the program
3 began.

4 (3) An assessment of the outcomes and effec-
5 tiveness of the program in—

6 (A) supporting student veterans;

7 (B) connecting student veterans to needed
8 services of the Department or services provided
9 by non-Department entities;

10 (C) addressing the mental health needs of
11 student veterans;

12 (D) lowering the suicide risk of student
13 veterans; and

14 (E) helping student veterans achieve edu-
15 cational goals.

16 (4) An assessment of barriers to expanding the
17 program and how the Secretary intends to address
18 such barriers.

19 (5) An assessment of whether the program
20 should be expanded outside of the Office of Mental
21 Health and Suicide Prevention to support students
22 veterans with needs unrelated to mental health or
23 suicide.

24 (b) UNIFORM BEST PRACTICES, GOALS, AND MEAS-
25 URES.—The Secretary shall establish best practices, goals,

1 and measures for the Veterans Integration to Academic
2 Leadership program of the Department that are uniform
3 among the medical centers of the Department.

4 (c) OUTREACH.—The Secretary shall conduct out-
5 reach among the Armed Forces, veterans service organiza-
6 tions, institutions of higher learning, and non-college de-
7 gree programs with respect to the Veterans Integration
8 to Academic Leadership program of the Department.

9 (d) ASSESSMENT.—The Secretary shall assess the
10 feasibility and advisability of including the suicide rate for
11 student veterans in the National Veteran Suicide Preven-
12 tion Annual Report of the Office of Mental Health and
13 Suicide Prevention of the Department.

14 (e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

15 (1) The term “institution of higher learning”
16 has the meaning given that term in section 3452 of
17 title 38, United States Code.

18 (2) The term “student veteran” means the fol-
19 lowing:

20 (A) A veteran or member of the Armed
21 Forces using educational assistance under any
22 of the following provisions of law:

23 (i) Chapter 30, 31, 32, or 33 of title
24 38, United States Code, or chapter 1606
25 or 1607 of title 10, United States Code.

1 (ii) Section 116 of the Harry W.
2 Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance
3 Act of 2017 (Public Law 115–48; 38
4 U.S.C. 3001 note).

5 (iii) Section 8006 of the American
6 Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (Public Law
7 117–2; 38 U.S.C. 3001 note prec.).

8 (B) A veteran who is enrolled in an institu-
9 tion of higher learning or other training pro-
10 gram, without regard to whether the veteran is
11 using educational assistance specified in sub-
12 paragraph (A).

13 **SEC. 502. IMPROVEMENT OF SLEEP DISORDER CARE FUR-**
14 **NISHED BY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AF-**
15 **FAIRS.**

16 (a) IN GENERAL.—Pursuant to the analysis con-
17 ducted under subsection (b), the Secretary of Veterans Af-
18 fairs shall take such action as the Secretary considers ap-
19 propriate to improve the assessment and treatment of vet-
20 erans with sleep disorders, including by conducting in-
21 home sleep studies for veterans.

22 (b) ANALYSIS.—The Secretary shall conduct an anal-
23 ysis of the ability of the Department of Veterans Affairs
24 to treat sleep disorders among veterans, including—

1 (1) assessment and treatment options for such
2 disorders;

3 (2) barriers to care for such disorders, such as
4 wait time, travel time, and lack of staffing;

5 (3) the efficacy of the clinical practice guide-
6 lines of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the
7 Department of Defense for such disorders; and

8 (4) the availability of and efficacy of the use by
9 the Department of Veterans Affairs of cognitive be-
10 havioral therapy for insomnia.

11 (c) REPORT.—Not later than two years after the date
12 of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit
13 to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and
14 the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Rep-
15 resentatives a report on—

16 (1) the findings from the analysis conducted
17 under subsection (b); and

18 (2) any actions taken under subsection (a) to
19 improve the assessment and treatment of veterans
20 with sleep disorders.

21 (d) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS FOR IN-
22 HOME SLEEP STUDIES.—There is authorized to be appro-
23 priated to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs \$5,000,000
24 to be used to conduct in-home sleep studies for veterans,

1 as part of sleep disorder assessment and treatment con-
2 ducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

3 **SEC. 503. STUDY ON INPATIENT MENTAL HEALTH AND SUB-**
4 **STANCE USE CARE FROM DEPARTMENT OF**
5 **VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

6 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the
7 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Vet-
8 erans Affairs shall complete the conduct of a study on ac-
9 cess of veterans to care under the residential rehabilitation
10 treatment programs of the Department of Veterans Af-
11 fairs to determine—

12 (1) if there are sufficient geographic offerings
13 of inpatient mental health care, especially for vet-
14 erans in rural and remote communities;

15 (2) if there are sufficient bed spaces at each lo-
16 cation, based on demand and drive time from the
17 homes of veterans;

18 (3) if there are any workforce-related capacity
19 limitations at each location, including if beds are un-
20 able to be used because there are not enough pro-
21 viders to care for additional patients;

22 (4) if there are diagnosis-specific or sex-specific
23 barriers to accessing care under such programs; and

24 (5) the average wait time for a bed in such a
25 program, broken out by—

- 1 (A) Veterans Integrated Service Network;
- 2 (B) rural or urban area;
- 3 (C) sex; and
- 4 (D) specialty (general program, substance
5 use disorder program, military sexual trauma
6 program, etc.).

7 (b) RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MODIFICATIONS TO
8 TREATMENT PROGRAMS.—Using the results from the
9 study conducted under subsection (a), the Secretary shall
10 make recommendations for—

11 (1) new locations for opening facilities to par-
12 ticipate in the residential rehabilitation treatment
13 programs of the Department;

14 (2) facilities under such programs at which new
15 beds can be added; and

16 (3) any additional specialty tracks to be added
17 to such programs, such as substance use disorder or
18 military sexual trauma, in order to meet veteran
19 need and demand.

20 (c) REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after comple-
21 tion of the study under subsection (a), the Secretary shall
22 submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Sen-
23 ate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House
24 of Representatives a report on the findings of the study

1 conducted under subsection (a) and the recommendations
2 made by the Secretary under subsection (b).

3 **SEC. 504. STUDY ON TREATMENT FROM DEPARTMENT OF**
4 **VETERANS AFFAIRS FOR CO-OCCURRING**
5 **MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE DIS-**
6 **ORDERS.**

7 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the
8 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Vet-
9 erans Affairs shall conduct a study examining—

10 (1) the availability of treatment programs for
11 veterans with co-occurring mental health and sub-
12 stance use disorders (including both inpatient and
13 outpatient care);

14 (2) any geographic disparities in access to such
15 programs, such as for rural and remote veterans;
16 and

17 (3) the average wait times for care under such
18 programs.

19 (b) REPORT.—

20 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than two years
21 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
22 retary shall submit to the Committee on Veterans'
23 Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Vet-
24 erans' Affairs of the House of Representatives a re-

1 port on the findings of the study conducted under
2 subsection (a).

3 (2) ELEMENTS.—The report required by para-
4 graph (1) shall include—

5 (A) any recommendations resulting from
6 the study conducted under subsection (a) with
7 respect to improving timeliness and quality of
8 care and meeting treatment preferences for vet-
9 erans with co-occurring mental health and sub-
10 stance use disorders; and

11 (B) a description of any actions taken by
12 the Secretary to improve care for such veterans.

13 **SEC. 505. STUDY ON WORKLOAD OF SUICIDE PREVENTION**
14 **TEAMS OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AF-**
15 **FAIRS.**

16 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Af-
17 fairs, acting through the Under Secretary for Health and
18 the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, shall
19 conduct a study evaluating the workload of local suicide
20 prevention teams of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

21 (b) ELEMENTS.—The study conducted under sub-
22 section (a) shall—

23 (1) identify the effects of the growth of the sui-
24 cide prevention program of the Department on the
25 workload of suicide prevention teams;

1 (2) incorporate key practices for staffing model
2 design in determining suicide prevention staffing
3 needs; and

4 (3) determine which facilities of the Depart-
5 ment need increased suicide prevention coordinator
6 staffing to meet the needs of veterans, with an em-
7 phasis placed on facilities with high patient volume
8 and facilities located in States with high rates of vet-
9 eran suicide.

10 (c) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date
11 of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit
12 to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and
13 the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Rep-
14 resentatives a report—

15 (1) on the findings of the study conducted
16 under subsection (a); and

17 (2) indicating any changes made to the staffing
18 of suicide prevention teams of the Department re-
19 sulting from the determinations made under sub-
20 section (b)(3), including a list of facilities of the De-
21 partment where staffing was adjusted.

22 **SEC. 506. EXPANSION OF SUICIDE PREVENTION AND MEN-**
23 **TAL HEALTH RESEARCH.**

24 (a) RESEARCH ON MORAL INJURY.—The Secretary
25 of Veterans Affairs, acting through the Office of Research

1 and Development of the Department of Veterans Affairs,
2 shall conduct suicide prevention and mental health care
3 improvement research on how moral injury relates to the
4 mental health needs of veterans who served in the Armed
5 Forces after September 11, 2001, and best practices for
6 mental health treatment for such veterans.

7 (b) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
8 authorized to be appropriated to the Department of Vet-
9 erans Affairs an additional \$10,000,000 to be used by the
10 Center of Excellence for Suicide Prevention of the Depart-
11 ment and the Rocky Mountain Mental Illness Research
12 Education and Clinical Center for purposes of conducting
13 research on the factors impacting veteran suicide and best
14 practices for early intervention and support.

15 **SEC. 507. STUDY ON MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PRE-**
16 **VENTION SUPPORT FOR MILITARY FAMILIES.**

17 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Af-
18 fairs, in collaboration with the Secretary of Defense, shall
19 conduct a study on secondary post-traumatic stress dis-
20 order and depression and its impact on spouses, children,
21 and caregivers of members of the Armed Forces.

22 (b) REPORT.—

23 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than three years
24 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
25 retary of Veterans Affairs, in collaboration with the

1 Secretary of Defense, shall submit to Congress, vet-
2 erans service organizations, and military support or-
3 ganizations a report on the findings of the study
4 conducted under subsection (a).

5 (2) DEFINITIONS.—In this subsection:

6 (A) The term “military support organiza-
7 tion” has the meaning given that term by the
8 Secretary of Defense.

9 (B) The term “veterans service organiza-
10 tion” means an organization recognized by the
11 Secretary of Veterans Affairs for the represen-
12 tation of veterans under section 5902 of title
13 38, United States Code.

14 **SEC. 508. RESEARCH ON BRAIN HEALTH.**

15 There is authorized to be appropriated to the Depart-
16 ment of Veterans Affairs an additional \$5,000,000 for on-
17 going and future research at the Translational Research
18 Center of the Department of Veterans Affairs for trau-
19 matic brain injury and stress disorders to provide better
20 understanding of, and improved treatment options for,
21 veterans who served in the Armed Forces after September
22 11, 2001, and who have traumatic brain injury or post-
23 traumatic stress disorder.

1 **SEC. 509. STUDY ON EFFICACY OF CLINICAL AND AT-HOME**
2 **RESOURCES FOR POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS**
3 **DISORDER.**

4 Not later than two years after the date of the enact-
5 ment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, acting
6 through the Office of Research and Development of the
7 Department of Veterans Affairs, shall conduct a study
8 on—

9 (1) the efficacy of clinical and at-home re-
10 sources, such as mobile applications like COVID
11 Coach, for providers, veterans, caregivers, and fam-
12 ily members to use for dealing with stressors;

13 (2) the feasibility and advisability of developing
14 more such resources;

15 (3) strategies for improving mental health care
16 and outcomes for veterans with post-traumatic stress
17 disorder; and

18 (4) best practices for helping family members of
19 veterans deal with secondary post-traumatic stress
20 disorder or mental health concerns.

Union Calendar No. 292

117TH CONGRESS
2^D SESSION

H. R. 6411

[Report No. 117-382]

A BILL

To amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements in the mental health care provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

JUNE 22, 2022

Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed