

116TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# S. 785

To improve mental health care provided by the Department of Veterans  
Affairs, and for other purposes.

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## IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 13, 2019

Mr. TESTER (for himself, Mr. MORAN, Ms. BALDWIN, Ms. STABENOW, Mr. KAINE, Mr. MARKEY, Ms. SINEMA, Ms. HIRONO, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. CASEY, Ms. HARRIS, Mr. UDALL, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. MURPHY, Mr. WARNER, Mrs. MURRAY, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mr. MENENDEZ, Mr. BOOKER, Ms. SMITH, Mr. MANCHIN, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, Mr. SANDERS, and Ms. DUCKWORTH) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

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## A BILL

To improve 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 “Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health  
6 Care Improvement Act of 2019”.

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—IMPROVEMENT OF TRANSITION OF INDIVIDUALS TO SERVICES FROM DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

- Sec. 101. Expansion of health care coverage for veterans.
- Sec. 102. Grants for provision of transition assistance to former members of the Armed Forces transitioning to civilian life.
- Sec. 103. Study of community-based transition assistance programs for former members of the Armed Forces.
- Sec. 104. Modification of eligibility for care from Department of Veterans Affairs for former members of the Armed Forces with other than honorable discharges and report on such care.

#### TITLE II—SUICIDE PREVENTION

- Sec. 201. Grants for organizations providing mental health wellness services to veterans.
- Sec. 202. Designation of buddy check week by Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 203. Post-traumatic growth partnerships.
- Sec. 204. Progress of Department of Veterans Affairs in meeting goals and objectives of National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide.
- Sec. 205. Study on feasibility and advisability of providing certain complementary and integrative health services.
- Sec. 206. Program to provide veterans access to complementary and integrative health services through animal therapy, agri-therapy, and outdoor sports therapy.
- Sec. 207. Comptroller General report on management by Department of Veterans Affairs of veterans at high risk for suicide.

#### TITLE III—PROGRAMS, STUDIES, AND GUIDELINES ON MENTAL HEALTH

- Sec. 301. Program to provide veterans access to computerized cognitive behavioral therapy.
- Sec. 302. Study on connection between living at high altitude and suicide risk factors among veterans.
- Sec. 303. Establishment by Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense of clinical practice guidelines for comorbid mental health conditions.
- Sec. 304. Update of clinical practice guidelines for assessment and management of patients at risk for suicide.
- Sec. 305. Precision medicine initiative of Department of Veterans Affairs to identify and validate brain and mental health biomarkers.
- Sec. 306. Preventative and complex data analysis by Department of Veterans Affairs.

#### TITLE IV—OVERSIGHT OF MENTAL HEALTH CARE AND RELATED SERVICES

- Sec. 401. Study on effectiveness of suicide prevention and mental health outreach programs of Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 402. Oversight of mental health and suicide prevention media outreach conducted by Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 403. Annual report on progress of Department of Veterans Affairs in meeting goals and objectives of Executive Order 13822.

- Sec. 404. Comptroller General management review of mental health and suicide prevention services of Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 405. Comptroller General report on efforts of Department of Veterans Affairs to integrate mental health care into primary care clinics.
- Sec. 406. Joint mental health programs by Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense.

#### TITLE V—MEDICAL WORKFORCE

##### Subtitle A—Improvement of Mental Health Medical Workforce

- Sec. 501. Treatment of psychologists.
- Sec. 502. Staffing improvement plan for psychiatrists and psychologists of Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 503. Occupational series and staffing improvement plan for licensed professional mental health counselors and marriage and family therapists of Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 504. Staffing improvement plan for peer specialists of Department of Veterans Affairs who are women.
- Sec. 505. Establishment of Department of Veterans Affairs Readjustment Counseling Service Scholarship Program.
- Sec. 506. Comptroller General report on Readjustment Counseling Service of Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 507. Expansion of reporting requirements on Readjustment Counseling Service of Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 508. Studies on alternative work schedules for employees of Veterans Health Administration.
- Sec. 509. Suicide prevention coordinators.

##### Subtitle B—Direct Hiring Authorities for Certain Health Care Positions

- Sec. 521. Direct hiring authorities for certain health care positions.

#### TITLE VI—IMPROVEMENT OF TELEHEALTH SERVICES

- Sec. 601. Expanded telehealth from Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 602. Implementation of national protocol for telehealth security and interfacing instructions.

## 1 **TITLE I—IMPROVEMENT OF** 2 **TRANSITION OF INDIVIDUALS** 3 **TO SERVICES FROM DEPART-** 4 **MENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

### 5 **SEC. 101. EXPANSION OF HEALTH CARE COVERAGE FOR** 6 **VETERANS.**

7 (a) IN GENERAL.—Section 1710(a)(1) of title 38,  
8 United States Code, is amended—

1           (1) in subparagraph (A), by striking “and” at  
2     the end;

3           (2) by redesignating subparagraph (B) as sub-  
4     paragraph (C); and

5           (3) by inserting after subparagraph (A) the fol-  
6     lowing new subparagraph (B):

7           “(B) to any veteran during the one-year period  
8     following the discharge or release of the veteran  
9     from active military, naval, or air service; and”.

10       (b) PATIENT ENROLLMENT SYSTEM.—Section  
11 1705(c) of such title is amended by adding at the end the  
12 following new paragraph:

13       “(3) Nothing in this section shall be construed to pre-  
14 vent the Secretary from providing hospital care and med-  
15 ical services to a veteran under section 1710(a)(1)(B) of  
16 this title during the period specified in such section not-  
17 withstanding the failure of the veteran to enroll in the sys-  
18 tem of patient enrollment established by the Secretary  
19 under subsection (a).”.

20       (c) PROMOTION OF EXPANDED ELIGIBILITY.—

21           (1) TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.—

22           (A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of  
23 Labor, in consultation with the Secretary of  
24 Defense and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs,  
25 shall promote to members of the Armed Forces

1 transitioning from service in the Armed Forces  
2 to civilian life through the Transition Assist-  
3 ance Program the expanded eligibility of vet-  
4 erans for health care under the laws adminis-  
5 tered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs pur-  
6 suant to the amendments made by this section.

7 (B) TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM  
8 DEFINED.—In this paragraph, the term “Tran-  
9 sition Assistance Program” means the Transi-  
10 tion Assistance Program under sections 1142  
11 and 1144 of title 10, United States Code.

12 (2) PUBLICATION BY DEPARTMENT OF VET-  
13 ERANS AFFAIRS.—Not later than 30 days after the  
14 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of  
15 Veterans Affairs shall publish on a website of the  
16 Department of Veterans Affairs notification of the  
17 expanded eligibility of veterans for health care under  
18 the laws administered by the Secretary pursuant to  
19 the amendments made by this section.

20 **SEC. 102. GRANTS FOR PROVISION OF TRANSITION ASSIST-**  
21 **ANCE TO FORMER MEMBERS OF THE ARMED**  
22 **FORCES TRANSITIONING TO CIVILIAN LIFE.**

23 (a) PROGRAM REQUIRED.—Commencing not later  
24 than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act,  
25 the Secretary of Labor shall, in coordination with the Sec-

1   retary of Veterans Affairs, carry out a program on the  
2   provision of assistance to former members of the Armed  
3   Forces, and spouses of such members, transitioning from  
4   service in the Armed Forces to civilian life.

5       (b) DURATION OF PROGRAM.—The Secretary of  
6   Labor shall carry out the program during the five-year  
7   period beginning on the date of the commencement of the  
8   program.

9       (c) GRANTS.—

10           (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall carry  
11   out the program through the award of grants to eli-  
12   gible organizations for the provision of assistance de-  
13   scribed in subsection (a).

14           (2) MATCHING FUNDS REQUIRED.—A grant  
15   under this section shall be in an amount that does  
16   not exceed 50 percent of the amount required by the  
17   organization to provide the services described in sub-  
18   section (f).

19       (d) ELIGIBLE ORGANIZATIONS.—For purposes of  
20   this section, an eligible organization is any nonprofit orga-  
21   nization that the Secretary of Labor determines, in con-  
22   sultation with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and State  
23   entities that serve veterans, is suitable for receipt of a  
24   grant under the program pursuant to receipt by the Sec-

1 retary of Labor of an application submitted under sub-  
 2 section (e)(1).

3 (e) SELECTION OF GRANT RECIPIENTS.—

4 (1) APPLICATIONS.—An organization seeking a  
 5 grant under the program shall submit to the Sec-  
 6 retary of Labor an application therefor at such time,  
 7 in such manner, and containing such information  
 8 and assurances as the Secretary, in consultation  
 9 with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and State en-  
 10 tities that serve veterans, may require.

11 (2) PRIORITY FOR HUBS OF SERVICES.—In  
 12 awarding grants under the program, the Secretary  
 13 of Labor shall give priority to an organization that  
 14 provides multiple forms of services described in sub-  
 15 section (f).

16 (f) USE OF GRANT FUNDS.—Each organization re-  
 17 ceiving a grant under the program shall use the grant to  
 18 provide to former members of the Armed Forces and  
 19 spouses described in subsection (a) the following:

- 20 (1) Résumé assistance.
- 21 (2) Interview training.
- 22 (3) Job recruitment training.
- 23 (4) Entrepreneurship training.
- 24 (5) Financial services.
- 25 (6) Legal assistance.

1           (7) Educational supportive services.

2           (8) Assistance with accessing benefits provided  
3 under laws administered by the Secretary of Vet-  
4 erans Affairs, including home loan benefits, edu-  
5 cation benefits, adaptive housing grants, and all  
6 other benefits.

7           (9) Nonclinical case management.

8           (10) Other related services leading directly to  
9 successful transition, as determined by the Secretary  
10 of Labor in consultation with the Secretary of Vet-  
11 erans Affairs.

12       (g) ANNUAL REPORTS.—

13           (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year  
14 after the date of the commencement of the program  
15 and not less frequently than once each year there-  
16 after until the termination of the program, the Sec-  
17 retary of Labor shall, in consultation with the Sec-  
18 retary of Veterans Affairs, submit to the appropriate  
19 committees of Congress a report on the program  
20 carried out under this section.

21           (2) CONTENTS.—Each report submitted under  
22 paragraph (1) shall include the following:

23               (A) A list of the organizations that have  
24 received grants under the program, including  
25 the geographic location of the organization and



1 the types of services outlined in subsection (f)  
2 that each organization provides.

3 (B) The number of veterans served by each  
4 organization.

5 (C) An assessment of the effectiveness of  
6 the services provided under the program at im-  
7 proving the transition process for former mem-  
8 bers of the Armed Forces and spouses described  
9 in subsection (a), based on metrics determined  
10 by the Secretary of Labor in consultation with  
11 the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

12 (D) The amount of each grant awarded to  
13 each organization under the program.

14 (E) Such other matters as the Secretary of  
15 Labor, in consultation with the Secretary of  
16 Veterans Affairs, considers appropriate.

17 (3) APPROPRIATE COMMITTEES OF CON-  
18 GRESS.—In this subsection, the term “appropriate  
19 committees of Congress” means—

20 (A) the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs  
21 and the Committee on Appropriations of the  
22 Senate; and

23 (B) the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs  
24 and the Committee on Appropriations of the  
25 House of Representatives.

1 (h) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is  
 2 authorized to be appropriated \$10,000,000 to carry out  
 3 this section.

4 **SEC. 103. STUDY OF COMMUNITY-BASED TRANSITION AS-**  
 5 **SISTANCE PROGRAMS FOR FORMER MEM-**  
 6 **BERS OF THE ARMED FORCES.**

7 (a) STUDY.—

8 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans  
 9 Affairs shall, in consultation with the Secretary of  
 10 Labor and State entities that serve former members  
 11 of the Armed Forces, enter into an agreement with  
 12 a Federal or non-Federal entity to develop or access  
 13 a comprehensive list of community-based programs  
 14 that—

15 (A) provide transition assistance to such  
 16 former members that lead directly to successful  
 17 transition to civilian life, such as—

- 18 (i) résumé assistance;
- 19 (ii) interview training;
- 20 (iii) job recruitment training;
- 21 (iv) entrepreneurship training;
- 22 (v) financial services;
- 23 (vi) legal assistance;
- 24 (vii) educational supportive services;

(viii) assistance with accessing benefits provided under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, including home loan benefits, education benefits, adaptive housing grants, and other benefits; and

(ix) nonclinical case management; and

(B) are operated by nonprofit organizations.

(2) UPDATES.—

(A) PERIODIC.—Not less frequently than once every five years, the Secretary shall update the list created under paragraph (1).

(B) UPON REQUEST.—In addition to periodic updates under subparagraph (A), the Secretary shall update the list created under paragraph (1) upon request of an organization with a program included in the list.

(C) VERIFICATION.—The Secretary shall, in consultation with State entities that serve former members of the Armed Forces and to the degree practicable, verify changes to the list made under this paragraph.

(b) TRANSMISSION TO MEMBERS.—The Secretary shall transmit the list created, and revised as the case may

1 be, under subsection (a) to the Secretary of Labor and  
 2 the Secretary of Defense so the Secretaries of the military  
 3 departments may provide information in the list to mem-  
 4 bers of the Armed Forces who participate in the Transi-  
 5 tion Assistance Program under sections 1142 and 1144  
 6 of title 10, United States Code.

7 (c) ONLINE PUBLICATION.—The Secretary of Vet-  
 8 erans Affairs shall publish the list created, and revised as  
 9 the case may be, under subsection (a) on a public website  
 10 of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

11 **SEC. 104. MODIFICATION OF ELIGIBILITY FOR CARE FROM**  
 12 **DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS FOR**  
 13 **FORMER MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES**  
 14 **WITH OTHER THAN HONORABLE DIS-**  
 15 **CHARGES AND REPORT ON SUCH CARE.**

16 (a) ELIGIBILITY.—Subsection (b)(2)(B) of section  
 17 1720I of title 38, United States Code, is amended by  
 18 striking “a discharge by court martial” and inserting “a  
 19 dismissal”.

20 (b) INFORMATION.—Subsection (e) of such section is  
 21 amended—

22 (1) in paragraph (3)—

23 (A) in subparagraph (B), by striking  
 24 “and” at the end;

1 (B) in subparagraph (C), by striking  
2 “and” at the end;

3 (C) by redesignating subparagraph (C) as  
4 subparagraph (D); and

5 (D) by inserting after subparagraph (B)  
6 the following new subparagraph (C):

7 “(C) is displayed prominently on a website  
8 of the Department; and”;

9 (2) by redesignating paragraph (4) as para-  
10 graph (5); and

11 (3) by inserting after paragraph (3) the fol-  
12 lowing new paragraph (4):

13 “(4) shall include outreach on Internet search  
14 engines; and”.

15 (c) ANNUAL REPORT.—Subsection (f) of such section  
16 is amended—

17 (1) in paragraph (1), by striking “Not less fre-  
18 quently than once” and inserting “Not later than  
19 February 15”; and

20 (2) in paragraph (2)—

21 (A) by redesignating subparagraph (C) as  
22 subparagraph (F); and

23 (B) by inserting after subsection (B) the  
24 following new subparagraphs:

1 “(C) The types of mental or behavioral  
2 health care needs treated under this section.

3 “(D) The demographics of individuals  
4 being treated under this section, including—

5 “(i) age;

6 “(ii) era of service in the Armed  
7 Forces;

8 “(iii) branch of service in the Armed  
9 Forces; and

10 “(iv) geographic location.

11 “(E) The average number of visits for an  
12 individual for mental or behavioral health care  
13 under this section.”.

## 14 **TITLE II—SUICIDE PREVENTION**

### 15 **SEC. 201. GRANTS FOR ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING MEN-** 16 **TAL HEALTH WELLNESS SERVICES TO VET-** 17 **ERANS.**

18 (a) PURPOSE.—The purpose of this section is to fa-  
19 cilitate the provision of mental health services for veterans  
20 with mental health conditions who are receiving care out-  
21 side of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

22 (b) GRANTS.—

23 (1) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter II of chapter 17  
24 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by add-  
25 ing at the end the following new section:

1   **“§ 1720J. Financial assistance for mental health sup-**  
2                   **portive services for veterans seeking**  
3                   **mental health treatment**

4           “(a) DISTRIBUTION OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE.—

5   (1) The Secretary shall provide financial assistance to eli-  
6   gible entities approved under this section to provide or co-  
7   ordinate the provision of mental health supportive services  
8   described in subsection (b) for a veteran with a mental  
9   health condition who is seeking mental health treatment.

10       “(2) Financial assistance under paragraph (1) shall  
11   consist of the award of a grant to an approved eligible  
12   entity for each veteran described in paragraph (1) for  
13   which the approved eligible entity is providing or coordi-  
14   nating the provision of mental health supportive services.

15       “(3)(A) The Secretary shall award grants under this  
16   section to each approved eligible entity that is providing  
17   or coordinating the provision of mental health supportive  
18   services under this section.

19       “(B) The Secretary may establish intervals of pay-  
20   ment for the administration of grants under this section  
21   and establish a maximum amount to be awarded, in ac-  
22   cordance with the services being provided and the duration  
23   of such services.

24       “(4) In providing financial assistance under para-  
25   graph (1), the Secretary shall give preference to entities  
26   providing or coordinating the provision of supportive men-

1 tal health services for veterans with mental health condi-  
2 tions who face barriers in accessing mental health care  
3 services from the Department.

4 “(5) The Secretary shall ensure that, to the extent  
5 practicable, financial assistance under this subsection is  
6 equitably distributed across geographic regions, including  
7 rural communities and tribal lands.

8 “(6) Each entity receiving financial assistance under  
9 this section to provide mental health supportive services  
10 to a veteran with a mental health condition shall notify  
11 that veteran that such services are being paid for, in whole  
12 or in part, by the Department.

13 “(7) The Secretary shall require entities receiving fi-  
14 nancial assistance under this section to submit a report  
15 to the Secretary that describes the services provided or  
16 coordinated with such financial assistance.

17 “(b) MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTIVE SERVICES.—  
18 The mental health supportive services described in this  
19 subsection are services provided by an eligible entity or  
20 a subcontractor of an eligible entity that address the needs  
21 of veterans with mental health conditions, including—

22 “(1) outreach services;

23 “(2) case management services;

24 “(3) assistance in obtaining any benefits from  
25 the Department that the veteran may be eligible to



1 receive, including health care services, vocational and  
2 rehabilitation counseling, employment and training  
3 services, and educational assistance; and

4 “(4) assistance in obtaining and coordinating  
5 the provision of other public benefits provided by  
6 any Federal, State, or local agency, or any other eli-  
7 gible entity, including—

8 “(A) health care services (including obtain-  
9 ing health insurance);

10 “(B) daily living services;

11 “(C) personal financial planning services;

12 “(D) transportation services;

13 “(E) income support services;

14 “(F) fiduciary and representative payee  
15 services;

16 “(G) legal services to assist the veteran  
17 with issues that interfere with the ability of the  
18 veteran to find and retain meaningful employ-  
19 ment, housing, or benefits to which the veteran  
20 may be entitled;

21 “(H) child care services;

22 “(I) housing counseling; and

23 “(J) other services necessary for maintain-  
24 ing independent living.

1       “(c) APPLICATION FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE.—

2   (1) An eligible entity seeking financial assistance under  
3   subsection (a) shall submit to the Secretary an application  
4   therefor in such form, in such manner, and containing  
5   such commitments and information as the Secretary deter-  
6   mines to be necessary to carry out this section.

7       “(2) Each application submitted by an eligible entity  
8   under paragraph (1) shall contain—

9           “(A) a description of the mental health sup-  
10   portive services described in subsection (b) proposed  
11   to be provided by the eligible entity under this sec-  
12   tion and the identified needs for those services;

13           “(B) a description of the types of veterans with  
14   a mental health condition proposed to be provided  
15   such services;

16           “(C) an estimate of the number of veterans  
17   with a mental health condition proposed to be pro-  
18   vided such services;

19           “(D) evidence of the experience of the eligible  
20   entity in providing mental health supportive services  
21   to veterans with a mental health condition; and

22           “(E) a description of the managerial capacity of  
23   the eligible entity—

24           “(i) to coordinate the provision of mental  
25   health supportive services with the provision of

1           mental health services by the eligible entity or  
2           another organization;

3                 “(ii) to assess continually the needs of vet-  
4           erans with a mental health condition for mental  
5           health supportive services;

6                 “(iii) to coordinate the provision of mental  
7           health supportive services with the services of  
8           the Department; and

9                 “(iv) to tailor supportive mental health  
10          services to the needs of veterans with a mental  
11          health condition.

12          “(3)(A) The Secretary shall establish criteria for the  
13          selection of eligible entities to be provided financial assist-  
14          ance under this section.

15          “(B) Criteria established under subparagraph (A)  
16          with respect to an eligible entity shall include the fol-  
17          lowing:

18                 “(i) Relevant accreditation as may be required  
19          by each State in which the eligible entity operates.

20                 “(ii) Experience coordinating care or providing  
21          treatment for veterans or members of the Armed  
22          Forces.

23          “(d) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—(1) The Secretary  
24          shall provide training and technical assistance to eligible  
25          entities provided financial assistance under this section re-

1   garding the planning, development, and provision of men-  
 2   tal health supportive services under this section.

3       “(2) The Secretary may provide the training de-  
 4   scribed in paragraph (1) directly or through grants or con-  
 5   tracts with appropriate public or nonprofit private entities,  
 6   including through grants awarded under section 2064 of  
 7   this title.

8       “(e) COLLECTION OF INFORMATION.—To the extent  
 9   practicable, the Secretary may collect information from an  
 10   eligibility entity awarded a grant under this section relat-  
 11   ing to a mental health condition of a veteran for inclusion  
 12   in the electronic health record of the Department for such  
 13   veteran for the sole purpose of improving care provided  
 14   to such veteran.

15       “(f) FUNDING.—From amounts appropriated to the  
 16   Department for medical services, there shall be available  
 17   to carry out subsections (a), (b), and (c) the following:

18           “(1) \$5,000,000 for fiscal year 2021.

19           “(2) \$10,000,000 for fiscal year 2022.

20           “(3) \$15,000,000 for fiscal year 2023.

21       “(g) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

22           “(1) The term ‘eligible entity’ means any of the  
 23   following:

24           “(A) An incorporated private institution or  
 25   foundation—

1           “(i) no part of the net earnings of  
2           which inures to the benefit of any member,  
3           founder, contributor, or individual;

4           “(ii) that has a governing board that  
5           is responsible for the operation of the men-  
6           tal health supportive services provided  
7           under this section; and

8           “(iii) that is approved by the Sec-  
9           retary with respect to financial responsi-  
10          bility.

11          “(B) A for-profit limited partnership, the  
12          sole general partner of which is an organization  
13          meeting the requirements of clauses (i), (ii),  
14          and (iii) of subparagraph (A).

15          “(C) A corporation wholly owned and con-  
16          trolled by an organization meeting the require-  
17          ments of clauses (i), (ii), and (iii) of subpara-  
18          graph (A).

19          “(D) A tribally designated housing entity  
20          (as defined in section 4 of the Native American  
21          Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act  
22          of 1996 (25 U.S.C. 4103)).

23          “(2) The term ‘veteran with a mental health  
24          condition’ means a veteran who has been diagnosed  
25          with, or who is seeking treatment for, one or more

1       mental health conditions, as determined by the Sec-  
2       retary.”.

3               (2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sec-  
4       tions at the beginning of chapter 17 is amended by  
5       inserting after the item relating to section 1720I the  
6       following new item:

      “1720J. Financial assistance for mental health supportive services for veterans  
      seeking mental health treatment.”.

7       (c) STUDY ON EFFECTIVENESS OF PROGRAM.—

8               (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans  
9       Affairs shall conduct a study on the effectiveness of  
10      the program of financial assistance under section  
11      1720J of title 38, United States Code, as added by  
12      subsection (b), in meeting the needs of veterans with  
13      a mental health condition, as that term is defined in  
14      that section.

15              (2) COMPARISON.—In conducting the study re-  
16      quired by paragraph (1), the Secretary shall com-  
17      pare the results of the program described in that  
18      paragraph with other programs of the Department  
19      of Veterans Affairs dedicated to the delivery of men-  
20      tal health services to veterans.

21              (3) CRITERIA.—In making the comparison re-  
22      quired by paragraph (2), the Secretary shall examine  
23      the following:

1 (A) The satisfaction of veterans targeted  
2 by the programs described in paragraph (2).

3 (B) The health status of such veterans.

4 (C) The mental wellness of such veterans.

5 (D) The degree to which such veterans are  
6 encouraged to engage in productive activity by  
7 such programs.

8 (E) The number of veterans using such  
9 programs, disaggregated by—

10 (i) veterans who have received care  
11 from the Department in the previous two  
12 years; and

13 (ii) veterans who have not received  
14 care from the Department in the previous  
15 two years.

16 (F) The number of veterans who die by  
17 suicide while receiving services from an entity  
18 in receipt of a grant under the program of fi-  
19 nancial assistance under section 1720J of title  
20 38, United States Code, as added by subsection  
21 (b), or who die by suicide during the 180-day  
22 period after receiving such services.

23 (4) REPORT.—Not later than December 31,  
24 2021, and annually thereafter, the Secretary shall  
25 submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the

1 Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of  
2 the House of Representatives a report on the results  
3 of the study required by paragraph (1).

4 (d) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The Secretary shall begin  
5 providing financial assistance under section 1720J of title  
6 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (b), not  
7 later than one year after the date of the enactment of this  
8 Act.

9 **SEC. 202. DESIGNATION OF BUDDY CHECK WEEK BY DE-**  
10 **PARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

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

16 (b) EVENTS AND EDUCATION.—

17 (1) IN GENERAL.—During Buddy Check Week,  
18 the Secretary, in consultation with organizations  
19 that represent veterans, non-profits that serve vet-  
20 erans, mental health experts, members of the Armed  
21 Forces, and such other entities and individuals as  
22 the Secretary considers appropriate, shall collaborate  
23 with organizations that represent veterans to provide  
24 educational opportunities for veterans to learn how  
25 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 available on a website  
24           of the Department.

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 of Veterans Af-  
 10 fairs; and

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

14 (d) VETERANS CRISIS LINE PLAN.—

15 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall ensure  
 16 that the Veterans Crisis Line has a plan for han-  
 17 dling the potential increase of calls that may occur  
 18 during Buddy Check Week.

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

23 (A) Additional hours for staff.

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

1 (C) Any other plan to ensure that calls  
2 from veterans in crisis are being answered in a  
3 timely manner by an individual trained at the  
4 same level as a Veterans Crisis Line responder.

5 (e) VETERANS CRISIS LINE DEFINED.—In this sec-  
6 tion, the term “Veterans Crisis Line” means the toll-free  
7 hotline for veterans established under section 1720F(h) of  
8 title 38, United States Code.

9 **SEC. 203. POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH PARTNERSHIPS.**

10 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Af-  
11 fairs, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense and  
12 the Secretary of Homeland Security, shall enter into part-  
13 nerships with nonprofit mental health organizations to fa-  
14 cilitate post-traumatic growth among veterans who have  
15 experienced trauma.

16 (b) CONSULTATION.—Before entering into a partner-  
17 ship under subsection (a), the Secretary of Veterans Af-  
18 fairs shall consult with the National Institute of Mental  
19 Health, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the Amer-  
20 ican Psychological Association, the Posttraumatic Growth  
21 Research Group, and organizations that represent vet-  
22 erans.

23 (c) SELECTION OF PARTNERS.—The Secretary of  
24 Veterans Affairs shall ensure that each organization with  
25 which the Secretary enters into a partnership under sub-

1 section (a) has a demonstrated history of success with pro-  
2 grams to facilitate post-traumatic growth, including—

3 (1) long-term follow-up with veterans who have  
4 participated in such a program for not less than one  
5 year after completion of the program; and

6 (2) sustained positive, clinically significant out-  
7 comes for veterans who have participated in such a  
8 program for not less than 180 days after completion  
9 of the program.

10 (d) OUTCOMES FROM PARTNERS.—The Secretary of  
11 Veterans Affairs shall require each nonprofit mental  
12 health organization that enters into a partnership with the  
13 Secretary under subsection (a) to submit to the Secretary  
14 a description of the outcomes from such partnership, in-  
15 cluding the following:

16 (1) The number of veterans who participate in  
17 programs of the organization to facilitate post-trau-  
18 matic growth, including the number of veterans who  
19 drop out before completion of the program.

20 (2) The types of mental or behavioral health  
21 conditions of veterans who participate in such pro-  
22 grams.

23 (3) The percentage of veterans who experience  
24 significant post-traumatic growth.

1           (4) Such other topics as the Secretary may re-  
2       quire to track post-traumatic growth.

3       (e) POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH.—

4           (1) IN GENERAL.—For purposes of this section,  
5       “post-traumatic growth” means positive responses  
6       described in paragraph (3) experienced after, and  
7       often as a result of, a traumatic event or a major  
8       life crisis.

9           (2) MEASUREMENT OF GROWTH.—Post-trau-  
10      matic growth under this section shall be measured  
11      through self-reported scales, use of the post-trau-  
12      matic stress disorder checklist set forth in the most  
13      recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Man-  
14      ual of Mental Disorders published by the American  
15      Psychiatric Association, and such other metrics as  
16      the Secretary considers necessary.

17          (3) POSITIVE RESPONSES DESCRIBED.—Posi-  
18      tive responses described in this paragraph are posi-  
19      tive responses in one or more areas of life, including  
20      the following:

- 21           (A) An appreciation of and for life.
- 22           (B) Improved relationships with others.
- 23           (C) Realization of new possibilities in life.
- 24           (D) Realization of personal strength.
- 25           (E) Spiritual change.

1 (F) Such other areas that the Secretary, in  
2 consultation with organizations specified in sub-  
3 section (b), considers necessary.

4 **SEC. 204. PROGRESS OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AF-**  
5 **FAIRS IN MEETING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**  
6 **OF NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR PREVENTING**  
7 **VETERAN SUICIDE.**

8 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
9 shall develop metrics to track progress on each of the 14  
10 goals and 43 objectives outlined in the National Strategy  
11 for Preventing Veteran Suicide, 2018–2028 prepared by  
12 the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention of the  
13 Department of Veterans Affairs.

14 (b) METRICS.—The metrics developed under sub-  
15 section (a) shall include measures of both performance and  
16 effectiveness.

17 (c) INITIAL REPORT.—

18 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days  
19 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-  
20 retary shall submit to the Committee on Veterans’  
21 Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Vet-  
22 erans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives a re-  
23 port that contains the metrics developed under sub-  
24 section (a).

1           (2) ELEMENTS.—The report submitted under  
2       paragraph (1) shall include the following:

3           (A) An explanation of why the metrics de-  
4       veloped under subsection (a) were chosen.

5           (B) An assessment of how accurately those  
6       metrics will reflect the goals and objectives  
7       specified in such subsection.

8       (d) ANNUAL REPORT.—Not later than one year after  
9       the submittal of the report under subsection (b), and an-  
10      nually thereafter, the Secretary shall submit to the Com-  
11      mittee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Com-  
12      mittee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representa-  
13      tives a report that contains—

14           (1) an assessment of the progress of the De-  
15      partment in meeting the goals and objectives speci-  
16      fied in subsection (a);

17           (2) a description of any action to be taken by  
18      the Department if those goals and objectives are not  
19      being met;

20           (3) a description of any changes to those goals  
21      and objectives;

22           (4) an identification of any new programs or  
23      partnerships that have resulted from the implemen-  
24      tation of the National Strategy for Preventing Vet-  
25      eran Suicide, 2018–2028;

- 1           (5) an assessment of the effectiveness of the  
 2       National Strategy for Preventing Veterans Suicide,  
 3       2018–2028 at reducing veteran suicide; and  
 4           (6) such other topics as the Secretary considers  
 5       necessary.

6 **SEC. 205. STUDY ON FEASIBILITY AND ADVISABILITY OF**  
 7                   **PROVIDING CERTAIN COMPLEMENTARY AND**  
 8                   **INTEGRATIVE HEALTH SERVICES.**

9       (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the  
 10   date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Vet-  
 11   erans Affairs shall complete a study on the feasibility and  
 12   advisability of providing complementary and integrative  
 13   health treatments described in subsection (b) at all facili-  
 14   ties of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

15       (b) TREATMENTS DESCRIBED.—Complementary and  
 16   integrative health treatments described in this subsection  
 17   shall consist of the following:

- 18           (1) Yoga.  
 19           (2) Meditation.  
 20           (3) Acupuncture.  
 21           (4) Chiropractic care.  
 22           (5) Other treatments that show sufficient evi-  
 23   dence of efficacy at treating mental or physical  
 24   health conditions, as determined by the Secretary.



1 (c) PROVISION OF TREATMENT.—The Secretary may  
 2 provide complementary and integrative health treatments  
 3 under this section at a facility of the Department in per-  
 4 son or by telehealth.

5 (d) REPORT.—Not later than 90 days after the com-  
 6 pletion of the study under subsection (a), the Secretary  
 7 shall submit to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the  
 8 Senate and the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the  
 9 House of Representatives a report on such study, includ-  
 10 ing—

11 (1) the results of such study; and

12 (2) such recommendations regarding the fur-  
 13 nishing of complementary and integrative health  
 14 treatments described in subsection (b) as the Sec-  
 15 retary considers appropriate.

16 **SEC. 206. PROGRAM TO PROVIDE VETERANS ACCESS TO**  
 17 **COMPLEMENTARY AND INTEGRATIVE**  
 18 **HEALTH SERVICES THROUGH ANIMAL THER-**  
 19 **APY, AGRI-THERAPY, AND OUTDOOR SPORTS**  
 20 **THERAPY.**

21 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the  
 22 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Vet-  
 23 erans Affairs shall commence the conduct of a program  
 24 to provide complementary and integrative health services  
 25 described in subsection (b) to veterans from the Depart-

1 ment of Veterans Affairs or through the use of non-De-  
2 partment entities for the treatment of post-traumatic  
3 stress disorder, depression, anxiety, or other conditions as  
4 determined by the Secretary.

5 (b) TREATMENTS DESCRIBED.—Complementary and  
6 integrative health treatments described in this subsection  
7 shall consist of the following:

8 (1) Equine therapy.

9 (2) Other animal therapy.

10 (3) Agri-therapy.

11 (4) Outdoor sports therapy.

12 (c) ELIGIBLE VETERANS.—A veteran is eligible to  
13 participate in the program under this section if the vet-  
14 eran—

15 (1) is enrolled in the system of patient enroll-  
16 ment of the Department established and operated  
17 under section 1705(a) of title 38, United States  
18 Code; and

19 (2) has received health care under the laws ad-  
20 ministered by the Secretary during the two-year pe-  
21 riod preceding the initial participation of the veteran  
22 in the program.

23 (d) DURATION.—

24 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall carry  
25 out the program under this section for a two-year

1 period beginning on the commencement of the pro-  
 2 gram.

3 (2) EXTENSION.—The Secretary may extend  
 4 the duration of the program under this section if the  
 5 Secretary, based on the results of the interim report  
 6 submitted under subsection (e)(1), determines that  
 7 it is appropriate to do so.

8 (e) LOCATIONS.—

9 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall select  
 10 not fewer than five facilities of the Department at  
 11 which to carry out the program under this section.

12 (2) SELECTION CRITERIA.—In selecting facili-  
 13 ties under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall ensure  
 14 that—

15 (A) the locations are in geographically di-  
 16 verse areas; and

17 (B) not fewer than three facilities serve  
 18 veterans in rural or highly rural areas (as de-  
 19 termined through the use of the Rural-Urban  
 20 Commuting Areas coding system of the Depart-  
 21 ment of Agriculture).

22 (f) REPORTS.—

23 (1) INTERIM REPORT.—

24 (A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year  
 25 after the commencement of the program under

1           this section, the Secretary shall submit to the  
2           Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate  
3           and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the  
4           House of Representatives a report on the  
5           progress of the program.

6           (B) ELEMENTS.—The report required by  
7           subparagraph (A) shall include the following:

8                   (i) The number of participants in the  
9                   program.

10                   (ii) The types of therapy offered at  
11                   each facility at which the program is being  
12                   carried out.

13                   (iii) An assessment of whether partici-  
14                   pation by a veteran in the program re-  
15                   sulted in any changes in clinically relevant  
16                   endpoints for the veteran with respect to  
17                   the conditions specified in subsection (a).

18                   (iv) An assessment of the quality of  
19                   life of veterans participating in the pro-  
20                   gram, including the results of a satisfac-  
21                   tion survey of the participants in the pro-  
22                   gram, disaggregated by treatment under  
23                   subsection (b).

1 (v) The determination of the Sec-  
 2 retary with respect to extending the pro-  
 3 gram under subsection (c)(2).

4 (vi) Any recommendations of the Sec-  
 5 retary with respect to expanding the pro-  
 6 gram.

7 (2) FINAL REPORT.—Not later than 90 days  
 8 after the termination of the program under this sec-  
 9 tion, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on  
 10 Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee  
 11 on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives  
 12 a final report on the program.

13 **SEC. 207. COMPTROLLER GENERAL REPORT ON MANAGE-**  
 14 **MENT BY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AF-**  
 15 **FAIRS OF VETERANS AT HIGH RISK FOR SUI-**  
 16 **CIDE.**

17 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 18 months after  
 18 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Comptroller  
 19 General of the United States shall submit to the Com-  
 20 mittee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Com-  
 21 mittee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representa-  
 22 tives a report on the efforts of the Department of Veterans  
 23 Affairs to manage veterans at high risk for suicide.

24 (b) ELEMENTS.—The report required by subsection  
 25 (a) shall include the following:

1           (1) A description of how the Department identi-  
2       fies patients as high risk for suicide, with particular  
3       consideration to the efficacy of inputs into the Re-  
4       covery Engagement and Coordination for Health –  
5       Veterans Enhanced Treatment program (commonly  
6       referred to as the “REACH VET” program) of the  
7       Department, including an assessment of the efficacy  
8       of such identifications disaggregated by age, gender,  
9       Veterans Integrated Service Network, and, to the ex-  
10      tent practicable, medical center of the Department.

11          (2) A description of how the Department inter-  
12      venes when a patient is identified as high risk, in-  
13      cluding an assessment of the efficacy of such inter-  
14      ventions disaggregated by age, gender, Veterans In-  
15      tegrated Service Network, and, to the extent prac-  
16      ticable, medical center of the Department.

17          (3) A description of how the Department mon-  
18      itors patients who have been identified as high risk,  
19      including an assessment of the efficacy of such mon-  
20      itoring and any follow-ups disaggregated by age,  
21      gender, Veterans Integrated Service Network, and,  
22      to the extent practicable, medical center of the De-  
23      partment.

1           (4) A review of staffing levels of suicide preven-  
 2           tion coordinators across the Veterans Health Admin-  
 3           istration.

4           (5) A review of the resources and programming  
 5           offered to family members and friends of veterans  
 6           who have a mental health condition in order to as-  
 7           sist that veteran in treatment and recovery.

8           (6) An assessment of such other areas as the  
 9           Comptroller General considers appropriate to study.

10 **TITLE III—PROGRAMS, STUDIES,**  
 11 **AND GUIDELINES ON MENTAL**  
 12 **HEALTH**

13 **SEC. 301. PROGRAM TO PROVIDE VETERANS ACCESS TO**  
 14 **COMPUTERIZED COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL**  
 15 **THERAPY.**

16       (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 210 days after the  
 17 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Vet-  
 18 erans Affairs shall commence the conduct of a program  
 19 to assess the feasibility and advisability of using computer-  
 20 ized cognitive behavioral therapy to treat eligible veterans  
 21 suffering from depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress  
 22 disorder, military sexual trauma, or substance use dis-  
 23 order who are already receiving evidence-based therapy  
 24 from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

1 (b) ELIGIBLE VETERANS.—A veteran is eligible to  
2 participate in the program under this section if the vet-  
3 eran—

4 (1) is enrolled in the system of patient enroll-  
5 ment of the Department of Veterans Affairs estab-  
6 lished and operated under section 1705(a) of title  
7 38, United States Code; and

8 (2) has received health care under the laws ad-  
9 ministered by the Secretary during the two-year pe-  
10 riod preceding the initial participation of the veteran  
11 in the program.

12 (c) DURATION.—The Secretary shall carry out the  
13 program under this section for a two-year period begin-  
14 ning on the commencement of the program.

15 (d) LOCATIONS.—

16 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall select  
17 not fewer than three facilities of the Department of  
18 Veterans Affairs at which to carry out the program  
19 under this section.

20 (2) SELECTION CRITERIA.—In selecting facili-  
21 ties under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall ensure  
22 that—

23 (A) the locations are in geographically di-  
24 verse areas; and



1 (B) not fewer than two facilities serve vet-  
2 erans in rural or highly rural areas (as deter-  
3 mined through the use of the Rural-Urban  
4 Commuting Areas coding system of the Depart-  
5 ment of Agriculture).

6 (e) ACCESS TO CHAT.—In carrying out the program  
7 under this section, the Secretary shall ensure that vet-  
8 erans participating in the program have access via chat  
9 to a mental health provider 24 hours per day, seven days  
10 per week.

11 (f) PROMOTION OF VETERANS CRISIS LINE.—The  
12 Secretary shall promote the availability of the Veterans  
13 Crisis Line to veterans participating in the program under  
14 this section.

15 (g) DEPARTMENT WEBSITE.—In implementing the  
16 program under this section, the Secretary, to the extent  
17 feasible, shall use a website of the Department of Veterans  
18 Affairs to host the program.

19 (h) REPORTS.—

20 (1) INTERIM REPORT.—

21 (A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year  
22 after the commencement of the program under  
23 this section, the Secretary shall submit to the  
24 Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate  
25 and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the

1 House of Representatives a report on the  
2 progress of the program.

3 (B) ELEMENTS.—The report required by  
4 subparagraph (A) shall include the following:

5 (i) The number of participants in the  
6 program.

7 (ii) An assessment of whether partici-  
8 pation by a veteran in the program re-  
9 sulted in any changes in clinically relevant  
10 endpoints for the veteran with respect to  
11 the conditions specified in subsection (a).

12 (iii) Any recommendations of the Sec-  
13 retary with respect to extending or expand-  
14 ing the program.

15 (2) FINAL REPORT.—Not later than 90 days  
16 after the termination of the program under this sec-  
17 tion, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on  
18 Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee  
19 on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives  
20 a final report on the program.

21 (i) VETERANS CRISIS LINE DEFINED.—In this sec-  
22 tion, the term “Veterans Crisis Line” means the toll-free  
23 hotline for veterans established under section 1720F(h) of  
24 title 38, United States Code.

1 **SEC. 302. STUDY ON CONNECTION BETWEEN LIVING AT**  
2 **HIGH ALTITUDE AND SUICIDE RISK FACTORS**  
3 **AMONG VETERANS.**

4 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the  
5 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Vet-  
6 erans Affairs, in consultation with Rural Health Resource  
7 Centers of the Office of Rural Health of the Department  
8 of Veterans Affairs, shall commence the conduct of a study  
9 on the connection between living at high altitude and the  
10 risk of developing depression or dying by suicide among  
11 veterans.

12 (b) COMPLETION OF STUDY.—The study conducted  
13 under subsection (a) shall be completed not later than  
14 three years after the date of the commencement of the  
15 study.

16 (c) INDIVIDUAL IMPACT.—The study conducted  
17 under subsection (a) shall be conducted so as to determine  
18 the effect of high altitude on suicide risk at the individual  
19 level, not at the State or county level.

20 (d) REPORT.—Not later than 150 days after the com-  
21 pletion of the study conducted under subsection (a), the  
22 Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Af-  
23 fairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Af-  
24 fairs of the House of Representatives a report on the re-  
25 sults of the study.

26 (e) FOLLOW-UP STUDY.—

1           (1) IN GENERAL.—If the Secretary determines  
2           through the study conducted under subsection (a)  
3           that living at high altitude is a risk factor for devel-  
4           oping depression or dying by suicide, the Secretary  
5           shall conduct an additional study to identify the fol-  
6           lowing:

7                   (A) The most likely biological mechanism  
8                   that makes living at high altitude a risk factor  
9                   for developing depression or dying by suicide.

10                   (B) The most effective treatment or inter-  
11                   vention for reducing the risk of developing de-  
12                   pression or dying by suicide associated with liv-  
13                   ing at high altitude.

14           (2) REPORT.—Not later than 150 days after  
15           completing the study conducted under paragraph  
16           (1), the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on  
17           Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee  
18           on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives  
19           a report on the results of the study.

20 **SEC. 303. ESTABLISHMENT BY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS**  
21 **AFFAIRS AND DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OF**  
22 **CLINICAL PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR CO-**  
23 **MORBID MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS.**

24           (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than two years after the  
25           date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Vet-

1 erans Affairs, in consultation with the Secretary of De-  
2 fense and the Secretary of Health and Human Services,  
3 shall complete the development of clinical practice guide-  
4 lines for the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder,  
5 military sexual trauma, and traumatic brain injury that  
6 is comorbid with substance use disorder or chronic pain.

7 (b) WORK GROUP.—

8 (1) ESTABLISHMENT.—In carrying out sub-  
9 section (a), the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the  
10 Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary of Health  
11 and Human Services shall create a Trauma and Co-  
12 morbid Substance Use Disorder or Chronic Pain  
13 Work Group (in this section referred to as the  
14 “Work Group”).

15 (2) MEMBERSHIP.—The work group created  
16 under paragraph (1) shall be comprised of individ-  
17 uals that represent Federal Government entities and  
18 non-Federal Government entities with expertise in  
19 the areas covered by the work group, including the  
20 following:

21 (A) Academic institutions that specialize in  
22 research for the treatment of conditions de-  
23 scribed in subsection (a).

1 (B) The National Center for Posttraumatic  
2 Stress Disorder of the Department of Veterans  
3 Affairs.

4 (C) The Office of the Assistant Secretary  
5 for Mental Health and Substance Use of the  
6 Department of Health and Human Services.

7 (3) RELATION TO OTHER WORK GROUPS.—The  
8 Work Group shall be created and conducted in the  
9 same manner as other work groups for the develop-  
10 ment of clinical practice guidelines for the Depart-  
11 ment of Veterans Affairs and the Department of De-  
12 fense.

13 (c) MATTERS INCLUDED.—In developing the clinical  
14 practice guidelines under subsection (a), the Work Group,  
15 in consultation with the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder  
16 Work Group, Concussion-mTBI Work Group, Opioid  
17 Therapy for Chronic Pain Work Group, and Substance  
18 Use Work Group, shall ensure that the clinical practice  
19 guidelines include the following:

20 (1) Guidance with respect to the following:

21 (A) The treatment of patients with post-  
22 traumatic stress disorder who are also experi-  
23 encing a substance use disorder or chronic pain.

24 (B) The treatment of patients experiencing  
25 a mental health condition, including anxiety, de-

pression, or post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of military sexual trauma who are also experiencing a substance use disorder or chronic pain.

(C) The treatment of patients with traumatic brain injury who are also experiencing a substance use disorder or chronic pain.

(2) Guidance with respect to the following:

(A) Appropriate case management for patients experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder that is comorbid with substance use disorder or chronic pain who transition from receiving care while on active duty in the Armed Forces to care from health care networks outside of the Department of Defense.

(B) Appropriate case management for patients experiencing a mental health condition, including anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of military sexual trauma that is comorbid with substance use disorder or chronic pain who transition from receiving care while on active duty in the Armed Forces to care from health care networks outside of the Department of Defense.

1 (C) Appropriate case management for pa-  
2 tients experiencing traumatic brain injury that  
3 is comorbid with substance use disorder or  
4 chronic pain who transition from receiving care  
5 while on active duty in the Armed Forces to  
6 care from health care networks outside of the  
7 Department of Defense.

8 (3) Guidance with respect to the treatment of  
9 patients who are still members of the Armed Forces  
10 and are experiencing a mental health condition, in-  
11 cluding anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress  
12 disorder as a result of military sexual trauma that  
13 is comorbid with substance use disorder or chronic  
14 pain.

15 (4) Guidance with respect to the assessment by  
16 the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering,  
17 and Medicine of the potential overmedication of vet-  
18 erans, as required pursuant to the Senate report ac-  
19 companying S. 1557, 115th Congress (Senate Re-  
20 port 115-130), under the heading “Overprescription  
21 Prevention Report” under the heading “COMMITTEE  
22 RECOMMENDATION”.

23 (d) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this sec-  
24 tion shall be construed to prevent the Secretary of Vet-  
25 erans Affairs and the Secretary of Defense from consid-



1 ering all relevant evidence, as appropriate, in creating the  
 2 clinical practice guidelines required under subsection (a)  
 3 or from ensuring that the final clinical practice guidelines  
 4 developed under such subsection and subsequently up-  
 5 dated, as appropriate, remain applicable to the patient  
 6 populations of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the  
 7 Department of Defense.

8 **SEC. 304. UPDATE OF CLINICAL PRACTICE GUIDELINES**  
 9 **FOR ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF PA-**  
 10 **TIENTS AT RISK FOR SUICIDE.**

11 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than two years after the  
 12 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Vet-  
 13 erans Affairs and the Secretary of Defense, through the  
 14 Assessment and Management of Patients at Risk for Sui-  
 15 cide Work Group (in this section referred to as the “Work  
 16 Group”), shall issue an update to the VA/DOD Clinical  
 17 Practice Guideline for Assessment and Management of  
 18 Patients at Risk for Suicide.

19 (b) MATTERS INCLUDED.—In carrying out the up-  
 20 date under subsection (a), the Work Group shall ensure  
 21 that the clinical practice guidelines updated under such  
 22 subsection includes the following:

23 (1) Enhanced guidance with respect to the fol-  
 24 lowing:

1 (A) Gender-specific risk factors for suicide  
2 and suicidal ideation.

3 (B) Gender-specific treatment efficacy for  
4 depression and suicide prevention.

5 (C) Gender-specific pharmacotherapy effi-  
6 cacy.

7 (D) Gender-specific psychotherapy efficacy.

8 (2) Guidance with respect to the following:

9 (A) The efficacy of alternative therapies,  
10 other than psychotherapy and pharmacothera-  
11 py, including the following:

12 (i) Yoga therapy.

13 (ii) Meditation therapy.

14 (iii) Equine therapy.

15 (iv) Other animal therapy.

16 (v) Training and caring for service  
17 dogs.

18 (vi) Agri-therapy.

19 (vii) Art therapy.

20 (viii) Outdoor sports therapy.

21 (ix) Music therapy.

22 (x) Any other alternative therapy that  
23 the Work Group considers appropriate.

24 (3) Guidance with respect to the findings of the

25 Creating Options for Veterans' Expedited Recovery

1 Commission (commonly referred to as the “COVER  
2 Commission”) established under section 931 of the  
3 Jason Simcakoski Memorial and Promise Act (title  
4 IX of Public Law 114–198; 38 U.S.C. 1701 note).

5 (c) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this sec-  
6 tion shall be construed to prevent the Secretary of Vet-  
7 erans Affairs and the Secretary of Defense from consid-  
8 ering all relevant evidence, as appropriate, in updating the  
9 VA/DOD Clinical Practice Guideline for Assessment and  
10 Management of Patients at Risk for Suicide, as required  
11 under subsection (a), or from ensuring that the final clin-  
12 ical practice guidelines updated under such subsection re-  
13 main applicable to the patient populations of the Depart-  
14 ment of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense.

15 **SEC. 305. PRECISION MEDICINE INITIATIVE OF DEPART-**  
16 **MENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO IDENTIFY**  
17 **AND VALIDATE BRAIN AND MENTAL HEALTH**  
18 **BIOMARKERS.**

19 (a) IN GENERAL.—Beginning not later than 18  
20 months after the date of the enactment of this Act, the  
21 Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall develop and implement  
22 an initiative of the Department of Veterans Affairs to  
23 identify and validate brain and mental health biomarkers  
24 among veterans, with specific consideration for depression,  
25 anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain

1 injury, and such other mental health conditions as the  
2 Secretary considers appropriate. Such initiative may be re-  
3 ferred to as the “Precision Medicine for Veterans Initia-  
4 tive”.

5 (b) MODEL OF INITIATIVE.—The initiative under  
6 subsection (a) shall be modeled on the All of Us Precision  
7 Medicine Initiative administered by the National Insti-  
8 tutes of Health with respect to large-scale collection of  
9 standardized data and open data sharing.

10 (c) USE OF DATA.—

11 (1) PRIVACY AND SECURITY.—In carrying out  
12 the initiative under subsection (a), the Secretary  
13 shall develop robust data privacy and security meas-  
14 ures to ensure that information of veterans partici-  
15 pating in the initiative is kept private and secure.

16 (2) OPEN PLATFORM.—

17 (A) RESEARCH PURPOSES.—The Secretary  
18 shall make de-identified data collected under  
19 the initiative available for research purposes  
20 both within and outside of the Department of  
21 Veterans Affairs.

22 (B) DATA MAY NOT BE SOLD.—Data col-  
23 lected under the initiative may not be sold.

24 (3) STANDARDIZATION.—

1 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall en-  
2 sure that data collected under the initiative is  
3 standardized.

4 (B) CONSULTATION.—The Secretary shall  
5 consult with the National Institutes of Health  
6 and the Food and Drug Administration to de-  
7 termine the most effective, efficient, and cost-  
8 effective way of standardizing data collected  
9 under the initiative.

10 (C) MANNER OF STANDARDIZATION.—  
11 Data collected under the initiative shall be  
12 standardized in the manner in which it is col-  
13 lected, entered into the database, extracted, and  
14 recorded.

15 (4) MEASURES OF BRAIN FUNCTION OR STRUC-  
16 TURE.—Any measures of brain function or structure  
17 collected under the initiative shall be collected with  
18 a device that is approved by the Food and Drug Ad-  
19 ministration.

20 (d) INCLUSION OF INITIATIVE IN PROGRAM.—The  
21 Secretary shall assess the feasibility and advisability of co-  
22 ordinating efforts of the initiative under subsection (a)  
23 with the Million Veterans Program of the Department.

1 **SEC. 306. PREVENTATIVE AND COMPLEX DATA ANALYSIS**  
2 **BY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

3 (a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 1 of title 38, United  
4 States Code, is amended by adding at the end the fol-  
5 lowing new section:

6 **“§ 119. Contracting for preventative or complex sta-**  
7 **tistical analysis**

8 “In order to carry out statistical analysis required  
9 under section 302 of the Commander John Scott Hannon  
10 Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019,  
11 or any other preventative or complex statistical analysis  
12 required under this title or any other provision of law, the  
13 Secretary may contract with academic institutions or  
14 other qualified entities, as determined by the Secretary,  
15 to carry out the statistical analysis.”.

16 (b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections  
17 at the beginning of chapter 1 of such title is amended by  
18 inserting after the item relating to section 118 the fol-  
19 lowing new item:

“119. Contracting for preventative or complex statistical analysis.”.

1 **TITLE IV—OVERSIGHT OF MEN-**  
2 **TAL HEALTH CARE AND RE-**  
3 **LATED SERVICES**

4 **SEC. 401. STUDY ON EFFECTIVENESS OF SUICIDE PREVEN-**  
5 **TION AND MENTAL HEALTH OUTREACH PRO-**  
6 **GRAMS OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AF-**  
7 **FAIRS.**

8 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the  
9 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Vet-  
10 erans Affairs shall enter into an agreement with a non-  
11 Federal Government entity to conduct a study on the ef-  
12 fectiveness of the suicide prevention and mental health  
13 outreach materials prepared by the Department of Vet-  
14 erans Affairs and the suicide prevention and mental health  
15 outreach campaigns conducted by the Department.

16 (b) USE OF FOCUS GROUPS.—

17 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall convene  
18 not fewer than eight different focus groups to evalu-  
19 ate the effectiveness of the suicide prevention and  
20 mental health materials and campaigns as required  
21 under subsection (a).

22 (2) LOCATION OF FOCUS GROUPS.—Focus  
23 groups convened under paragraph (1) shall be held  
24 in geographically diverse areas as follows:

1 (A) Not fewer than two in rural or highly  
2 rural areas.

3 (B) Not fewer than one in each of the four  
4 districts of the Veterans Benefits Administra-  
5 tion.

6 (3) TIMING OF FOCUS GROUPS.—Focus groups  
7 convened under paragraph (1) shall be held at a va-  
8 riety of dates and times to ensure an adequate rep-  
9 resentation of veterans with different work sched-  
10 ules.

11 (4) NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS.—Each focus  
12 group convened under paragraph (1) shall include  
13 not fewer than five and not more than 12 partici-  
14 pants.

15 (5) REPRESENTATION.—Each focus group con-  
16 vened under paragraph (1) shall, to the extent prac-  
17 ticable, include veterans of diverse backgrounds, in-  
18 cluding—

19 (A) veterans of all eras, as determined by  
20 the Secretary;

21 (B) women veterans;

22 (C) minority veterans;

23 (D) Native American veterans, as defined  
24 in section 3765 of title 38, United States Code;



1 (E) veterans who identify as lesbian, gay,  
2 bisexual, transgender, or queer (commonly re-  
3 ferred to as “LGBTQ”);

4 (F) veterans who live in rural or highly  
5 rural areas; and

6 (G) individuals transitioning from active  
7 duty in the Armed Forces to civilian life.

8 (c) REPORT.—

9 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 90 days after  
10 the last focus group meeting under subsection (b),  
11 the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Vet-  
12 erans’ Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on  
13 Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives a  
14 report on the findings of the focus groups.

15 (2) ELEMENTS.—The report required by para-  
16 graph (1) shall include the following:

17 (A) Based on the findings of the focus  
18 groups, an assessment of the effectiveness of  
19 current suicide prevention and mental health  
20 outreach efforts of the Department in reaching  
21 veterans as a whole as well as specific groups  
22 of veterans (for example, women veterans).

23 (B) Based on the findings of the focus  
24 groups, recommendations for future suicide pre-  
25 vention and mental health outreach efforts by

1 the Department to target specific groups of vet-  
2 erans.

3 (C) A plan to change the current approach  
4 by the Department to suicide prevention and  
5 mental health outreach or, if the Secretary de-  
6 cides not to change the current approach, an  
7 explanation of the reason for maintaining the  
8 current approach.

9 (D) Such other issues as the Secretary  
10 considers necessary.

11 (d) REPRESENTATIVE SURVEY.—

12 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year  
13 after the last focus group meeting under subsection  
14 (b), the Secretary shall complete a representative  
15 survey of the veteran population that is informed by  
16 the focus group data in order to collect information  
17 about the effectiveness of the mental health and sui-  
18 cide prevention outreach campaigns conducted by  
19 the Department.

20 (2) VETERANS SURVEYED.—

21 (A) IN GENERAL.—Veterans surveyed  
22 under paragraph (1) shall include veterans de-  
23 scribed in subsection (b)(5).

1 (B) DISAGGREGATION OF DATA.—Data of  
2 veterans surveyed under paragraph (1) shall be  
3 disaggregated by—

4 (i) veterans who have received care  
5 from the Department during the two-year  
6 period preceding the survey; and

7 (ii) veterans who have not received  
8 care from the Department during the two-  
9 year period preceding the survey.

10 (e) TREATMENT OF CONTRACTS FOR SUICIDE PRE-  
11 VENTION AND MENTAL HEALTH OUTREACH MEDIA.—

12 (1) FOCUS GROUPS.—

13 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall in-  
14 clude in each contract to develop media relating  
15 to suicide prevention and mental health out-  
16 reach a requirement that the contractor convene  
17 focus groups of veterans to assess the effective-  
18 ness of suicide prevention and mental health  
19 outreach.

20 (B) REPRESENTATION.—Each focus group  
21 required under subparagraph (A) shall, to the  
22 extent practicable, include veterans of diverse  
23 backgrounds, including—

24 (i) veterans of all eras, as determined  
25 by the Secretary;

- 1 (ii) women veterans;
- 2 (iii) minority veterans;
- 3 (iv) Native American veterans, as de-
- 4 fined in section 3765 of title 38, United
- 5 States Code;
- 6 (v) veterans who identify as lesbian,
- 7 gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (com-
- 8 monly referred to as “LGBTQ”);
- 9 (vi) veterans who live in rural or high-
- 10 ly rural areas; and
- 11 (vii) individuals transitioning from ac-
- 12 tive duty in the Armed Forces to civilian
- 13 life.

14 (2) SUBCONTRACTING.—

15 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall in-

16 clude in each contract described in paragraph

17 (1)(A) a requirement that, if the contractor

18 subcontracts for the development of media, the

19 contractor shall subcontract with a subcon-

20 tractor that has experience creating impactful

21 media campaigns that target individuals age 18

22 to 34.

23 (B) BUDGET LIMITATION.—Not more than

24 two percent of the budget of the Office of Men-

25 tal Health and Suicide Prevention of the De-

1           partment for contractors for suicide prevention  
 2           and mental health media outreach shall go to  
 3           subcontractors described in subparagraph (A).

4           (f) **RURAL AND HIGHLY RURAL DEFINED.**—In this  
 5 section, with respect to an area, the terms “rural” and  
 6 “highly rural” have the meanings given those terms in the  
 7 Rural-Urban Commuting Areas coding system of the De-  
 8 partment of Agriculture.

9   **SEC. 402. OVERSIGHT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE**  
 10                   **PREVENTION MEDIA OUTREACH CONDUCTED**  
 11                   **BY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

12           (a) **ESTABLISHMENT OF GOALS.**—

13                   (1) **IN GENERAL.**—The Secretary of Veterans  
 14           Affairs shall establish goals for the mental health  
 15           and suicide prevention media outreach campaigns of  
 16           the Department of Veterans Affairs in raising  
 17           awareness about mental health and suicide preven-  
 18           tion.

19                   (2) **USE OF METRICS.**—

20                           (A) **IN GENERAL.**—The goals established  
 21           under paragraph (1) shall be measured by  
 22           metrics specific to different media types as fol-  
 23           lows:

24                                   (i) Metrics relating to social media  
 25           shall include the following:

1 (I) Impressions.

2 (II) Reach.

3 (III) Engagement rate.

4 (IV) Such other metrics as the  
5 Secretary considers necessary.

6 (ii) Metrics relating to television shall  
7 include the following:

8 (I) Nielsen ratings.

9 (II) Such other metrics as the  
10 Secretary considers necessary.

11 (iii) Metrics relating to email shall in-  
12 clude the following:

13 (I) Open rate.

14 (II) Response rate

15 (III) Click rate.

16 (IV) Such other metrics as the  
17 Secretary considers necessary.

18 (B) UPDATE.—The Secretary shall periodi-  
19 cally update the metrics under subparagraph

20 (A) as more accurate metrics become available.

21 (3) TARGETS.—The Secretary shall develop tar-  
22 gets to track the metrics used under paragraph (2).

23 (4) CONSULTATION.—In establishing goals  
24 under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall consult  
25 with the following:

1           (A) Relevant stakeholders, such as organi-  
2           zations that represent veterans, as determined  
3           by the Secretary.

4           (B) Mental health and suicide prevention  
5           experts.

6           (C) Such other persons as the Secretary  
7           considers appropriate.

8           (5) INITIAL REPORT.—Not later than 180 days  
9           after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-  
10          retary shall submit to the Committee on Veterans’  
11          Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Vet-  
12          erans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives a re-  
13          port detailing the goals established under paragraph  
14          (1) for the mental health and suicide prevention  
15          media outreach campaigns of the Department in  
16          raising awareness about mental health and suicide  
17          prevention, including the metrics and targets for  
18          such metrics by which those goals are to be meas-  
19          ured under paragraph (2).

20          (6) ANNUAL REPORT.—Not later than one year  
21          after the submittal of the report under paragraph  
22          (3), and annually thereafter, the Secretary shall sub-  
23          mit to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the  
24          Senate and the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of  
25          the House of Representatives a report detailing—

1 (A) the progress of the Department in  
2 meeting the goals established under paragraph  
3 (1) and targets developed under paragraph (3);  
4 and

5 (B) a description of action to be taken by  
6 the Department to modify mental health and  
7 suicide prevention media outreach campaigns if  
8 those goals and targets are not being met.

9 (b) ESTABLISHMENT OF OVERSIGHT PROCESS.—

10 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 90 days after  
11 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary  
12 shall establish a process to oversee the mental health  
13 and suicide prevention media outreach campaigns of  
14 the Department.

15 (2) COMPONENTS OF OVERSIGHT PROCESS.—

16 The process established under paragraph (1) shall  
17 include the following components:

18 (A) A delineation of the roles and respon-  
19 sibilities of all suicide prevention officials within  
20 the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Pre-  
21 vention of the Veterans Health Administration.

22 (B) A schedule for creating, approving, im-  
23 plementing, and evaluating all unpaid media  
24 and paid media content relating to mental  
25 health and suicide prevention.



1 (C) Lines of reporting, as the Secretary  
2 considers necessary, to report to management  
3 information relating to the mental health and  
4 suicide prevention media outreach campaigns of  
5 the Department.

6 (c) CONTRACT REQUIREMENTS.—The Secretary shall  
7 ensure that each contract into which the Secretary enters  
8 to develop mental health and suicide prevention outreach  
9 media includes requirements that the contractor—

10 (1) track metrics used by the Secretary under  
11 subsection (a)(2); and

12 (2) not less frequently than quarterly, report  
13 such metrics to the Office of Mental Health and Sui-  
14 cide Prevention of the Veterans Health Administra-  
15 tion.

16 (d) REPORT ON USE OF FUNDS BY OFFICE OF MEN-  
17 TAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION.—Not later than  
18 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, and  
19 semiannually thereafter, the Secretary shall submit to the  
20 Committee on Appropriations and the Committee on Vet-  
21 erans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Appro-  
22 priations and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the  
23 House of Representatives a report containing the expendi-  
24 tures and obligations of the Office of Mental Health and

1 Suicide Prevention of the Veterans Health Administration  
2 during the period covered by the report.

3 **SEC. 403. ANNUAL REPORT ON PROGRESS OF DEPARTMENT**  
4 **OF VETERANS AFFAIRS IN MEETING GOALS**  
5 **AND OBJECTIVES OF EXECUTIVE ORDER**  
6 **13822.**

7 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 120 days after the  
8 date of the enactment of this Act, and annually thereafter,  
9 the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in consultation with the  
10 Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Homeland Se-  
11 curity, shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
12 of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of  
13 the House of Representatives a report that contains the  
14 following:

15 (1) An assessment of the progress of the De-  
16 partment of Veterans Affairs, the Department of  
17 Defense, and the Department of Homeland Security  
18 in meeting the goals and objectives outlined in the  
19 report required under section 2(c) of Executive  
20 Order 13822 (83 Fed. Reg. 1513; relating to sup-  
21 porting our veterans during their transition from  
22 uniformed service to civilian life) with respect to the  
23 implementation by the Department of Veterans Af-  
24 fairs of the Joint Action Plan required under section  
25 2(b) of such Executive order.

1           (2) A description of action to be taken by the  
 2       Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of  
 3       Defense, and the Department of Homeland Security  
 4       if those goals and objectives are not being met.

5           (3) An assessment of the effectiveness of Exec-  
 6       utive Order 13822 at improving the transition proc-  
 7       ess for members of the Armed Forces and veterans.

8           (4) Such other topics as the Secretary of Vet-  
 9       erans Affairs, the Secretary of Defense, or the Sec-  
 10      retary of Homeland Security consider necessary.

11       (b) SUBMITTAL BY SECRETARY OF VETERANS AF-  
 12      FAIRS.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit  
 13      each report required under paragraph (1) with respect to  
 14      the Department of Veterans Affairs regardless of whether  
 15      the Secretary of Defense or the Secretary of Homeland  
 16      Security provides any information for the report.

17      **SEC. 404. COMPTROLLER GENERAL MANAGEMENT REVIEW**  
 18                                   **OF MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVEN-**  
 19                                   **TION SERVICES OF DEPARTMENT OF VET-**  
 20                                   **ERANS AFFAIRS.**

21       (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than three years after  
 22      the date of the enactment of this Act, the Comptroller  
 23      General of the United States shall submit to the Com-  
 24      mittee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Com-  
 25      mittee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representa-

1 tives a management review of the mental health and sui-  
2 cide prevention services provided by the Department of  
3 Veterans Affairs.

4 (b) ELEMENTS.—The management review required  
5 by subsection (a) shall include the following:

6 (1) An assessment of the infrastructure under  
7 the control of or available to the Office of Mental  
8 Health and Suicide Prevention of the Department of  
9 Veterans Affairs or available to the Department of  
10 Veterans Affairs for suicide prevention efforts not  
11 operated by the Office of Mental Health and Suicide  
12 Prevention.

13 (2) A description of the management and orga-  
14 nizational structure of the Office of Mental Health  
15 and Suicide Prevention, including roles and respon-  
16 sibilities for each position.

17 (3) A description of the operational policies and  
18 processes of the Office of Mental Health and Suicide  
19 Prevention.

20 (4) An assessment of suicide prevention prac-  
21 tices and initiatives available from the Department  
22 and through community partnerships.

23 (5) An assessment of the staffing levels at the  
24 Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention,

1       dissaggregated by type of position, and including the  
2       location of any staffing deficiencies.

3           (6) An assessment of the Nurse Advice Line  
4       pilot program conducted by the Department.

5           (7) An assessment of recruitment initiatives in  
6       rural areas for mental health professionals of the  
7       Department.

8           (8) An assessment of strategic planning con-  
9       ducted by the Office of Mental Health and Suicide  
10      Prevention.

11          (9) An assessment of the communication, and  
12      the effectiveness of such communication—

13           (A) within the central office of the Office  
14      of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention;

15           (B) between that central office and any  
16      staff member or office in the field, including  
17      chaplains, attorneys, law enforcement per-  
18      sonnel, and volunteers; and

19           (C) between that central office, local facili-  
20      ties of the Department, and community part-  
21      ners of the Department, including first respond-  
22      ers, community support groups, and health care  
23      industry partners.

1           (10) An assessment of how effectively the Office  
2           of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention implements  
3           operational policies and procedures.

4           (11) An assessment of how the Department of  
5           Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense co-  
6           ordinate suicide prevention efforts, and recommenda-  
7           tions on how the Department of Veterans Affairs  
8           and Department of Defense can more effectively co-  
9           ordinate those efforts.

10          (12) An assessment of such other areas as the  
11          Comptroller General considers appropriate to study.

12 **SEC. 405. COMPTROLLER GENERAL REPORT ON EFFORTS**  
13 **OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO**  
14 **INTEGRATE MENTAL HEALTH CARE INTO**  
15 **PRIMARY CARE CLINICS.**

16          (a) INITIAL REPORT.—

17           (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than two years  
18           after the date of the enactment of this Act, the  
19           Comptroller General of the United States shall sub-  
20           mit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the  
21           Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of  
22           the House of Representatives a report on the efforts  
23           of the Department of Veterans Affairs to integrate  
24           mental health care into primary care clinics of the  
25           Department.

1           (2) ELEMENTS.—The report required by sub-  
2       section (a) shall include the following:

3           (A) An assessment of the efforts of the  
4       Department to integrate mental health care  
5       into primary care clinics of the Department.

6           (B) An assessment of the effectiveness of  
7       such efforts.

8           (C) An assessment of how the health care  
9       of veterans is impacted by such integration.

10          (D) A description of how care is coordi-  
11       nated by the Department between specialty  
12       mental health care and primary care, including  
13       a description of the following:

14           (i) How documents and patient infor-  
15       mation are transferred and the effective-  
16       ness of those transfers.

17           (ii) How care is coordinated when vet-  
18       erans must travel to different facilities of  
19       the Department.

20           (iii) How a veteran is reintegrated  
21       into primary care after receiving in-patient  
22       mental health care.

23          (E) An assessment of how the integration  
24       of mental health care into primary care clinics

1 is implemented at different types of facilities of  
2 the Department.

3 (F) Such recommendations on how the De-  
4 partment can better integrate mental health  
5 care into primary care clinics as the Comp-  
6 troller General considers appropriate.

7 (G) An assessment of such other areas as  
8 the Comptroller General considers appropriate  
9 to study.

10 (b) COMMUNITY CARE INTEGRATION REPORT.—

11 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than two years  
12 after the date on which the Comptroller General  
13 submits the report required under subsection (a)(1),  
14 the Comptroller General shall submit to the Com-  
15 mittee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the  
16 Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of  
17 Representatives a report on the efforts of the De-  
18 partment to integrate community-based mental  
19 health care into the Veterans Health Administration.

20 (2) ELEMENTS.—The report required by para-  
21 graph (1) shall include the following:

22 (A) An assessment of the efforts of the  
23 Department to integrate community-based men-  
24 tal health care into the Veterans Health Admin-  
25 istration.



1 (B) An assessment of the effectiveness of  
2 such efforts.

3 (C) An assessment of how the health care  
4 of veterans is impacted by such integration.

5 (D) A description of how care is coordi-  
6 nated between providers of community-based  
7 mental health care and the Veterans Health  
8 Administration, including a description of how  
9 documents and patient information are trans-  
10 ferred and the effectiveness of those transfers  
11 between—

12 (i) the Veterans Health Administra-  
13 tion and providers of community-based  
14 mental health care; and

15 (ii) providers of community-based  
16 mental health care and the Veterans  
17 Health Administration.

18 (E) An assessment of any disparities in the  
19 coordination of community-based mental health  
20 care into the Veterans Health Administration  
21 by location and type of facility.

22 (F) An assessment of the military cultural  
23 competency of health care providers providing  
24 community-based mental health care to vet-  
25 erans.

(G) Such recommendations on how the Department can better integrate community-based mental health care into the Veterans Health Administration as the Comptroller General considers appropriate.

(H) An assessment of such other areas as the Comptroller General considers appropriate to study.

(3) COMMUNITY-BASED MENTAL HEALTH CARE DEFINED.—In this subsection, the term “community-based mental health care” means mental health care paid for by the Department but provided by a non-Department health care provider at a non-Department facility, including care furnished under section 1703 of title 38, United States Code (as in effect on the date specified in section 101(b) of the Caring for Our Veterans Act of 2018 (title I of Public Law 115–182)).

**SEC. 406. JOINT MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS BY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE.**

(a) REPORT ON MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, and annually thereafter, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs

1 and the Secretary of Defense shall submit to the  
2 Committee on Armed Services and the Committee on  
3 Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee  
4 on Armed Services and the Committee on Veterans'  
5 Affairs of the House of Representatives a report on  
6 mental health programs of the Department of Vet-  
7 erans Affairs and the Department of Defense and  
8 joint programs of the Departments.

9 (2) ELEMENTS.—The report required by para-  
10 graph (1) shall include the following:

11 (A) A description of mental health pro-  
12 grams operated by the Department of Veterans  
13 Affairs, including the following:

14 (i) Transition assistance programs.

15 (ii) Clinical mental health initiatives,  
16 including—

17 (I) the Million Veterans Pro-  
18 gram; and

19 (II) centers of excellence of the  
20 Department of Veterans Affairs for  
21 traumatic brain injury and post-trau-  
22 matic stress disorder.

23 (iii) Programs that may secondarily  
24 improve mental health, including employ-

1                   ment, housing assistance, and financial lit-  
2                   eracy programs.

3                   (iv) Research into mental health  
4                   issues and conditions.

5                   (B) A description of mental health pro-  
6                   grams operated by the Department of Defense,  
7                   including the following:

8                   (i) Transition assistance programs.

9                   (ii) Clinical mental health initiatives,  
10                  including the National Intrepid Center of  
11                  Excellence.

12                  (iii) Programs that may secondarily  
13                  improve mental health, including employ-  
14                  ment, housing assistance, and financial lit-  
15                  eracy programs.

16                  (iv) Research into mental health  
17                  issues and conditions.

18                  (C) A description of mental health pro-  
19                  grams jointly operated by the Department of  
20                  Veterans Affairs and the Department of De-  
21                  fense, including the following:

22                  (i) Transition assistance programs.

23                  (ii) Clinical mental health initiatives.

24                  (iii) Programs that may secondarily  
25                  improve mental health, including employ-

1                   ment, housing assistance, and financial lit-  
2                   eracy programs.

3                   (iv) Research into mental health  
4                   issues and conditions.

5                   (D) Recommendations for coordinating  
6                   mental health programs of the Department of  
7                   Veterans Affairs and the Department of De-  
8                   fense to improve the effectiveness of those pro-  
9                   grams.

10                  (E) Recommendations for novel joint pro-  
11                  gramming of the Department of Veterans Af-  
12                  fairs and the Department of Defense to improve  
13                  the mental health of members of the Armed  
14                  Forces and veterans.

15                  (b) ESTABLISHMENT OF JOINT CENTER OF EXCEL-  
16                  LENCE.—

17                  (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than two years  
18                  after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-  
19                  retary of Defense, in consultation with the Secretary  
20                  of Veterans Affairs, shall establish a center of excel-  
21                  lence to be known as the “Joint DOD/VA National  
22                  Intrepid Center of Excellence Intrepid Spirit Cen-  
23                  ter” (in this subsection referred to as the “Center”).

1           (2) DUTIES.—The Center shall conduct joint  
2           mental health programs of the Department of Vet-  
3           erans Affairs and the Department of Defense.

4           (3) LOCATION.—The Center shall be estab-  
5           lished in a location that—

6                   (A) is geographically distant from already  
7                   existing and planned Intrepid Spirit Centers of  
8                   the Department of Defense; and

9                   (B) is in a rural or highly rural area (as  
10                  determined through the use of the Rural-Urban  
11                  Commuting Areas coding system of the Depart-  
12                  ment of Agriculture).

13   **TITLE V—MEDICAL WORKFORCE**  
14   **Subtitle A—Improvement of Mental**  
15   **Health Medical Workforce**

16   **SEC. 501. TREATMENT OF PSYCHOLOGISTS.**

17           (a) TREATMENT AS TITLE 38 EMPLOYEES.—Section  
18   7401 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

19                   (1) in paragraph (1) by inserting “psycholo-  
20                   gists,” after “chiropractors,”; and

21                   (2) in paragraph (3), by striking “psycholo-  
22                   gists,”.

23           (b) INCLUSION IN CONTRACTS FOR SCARCE MEDICAL  
24   SPECIALIST SERVICES.—Section 7409(a) of title 38,

1 United States Code, is amended by inserting “psycholo-  
2 gists,” after “chiropractors,”.

3 **SEC. 502. STAFFING IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR PSYCHIA-**  
4 **TRISTS AND PSYCHOLOGISTS OF DEPART-**  
5 **MENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

6 (a) STAFFING PLAN.—Not later than 270 days after  
7 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of  
8 Veterans Affairs, in consultation with the Inspector Gen-  
9 eral of the Department of Veterans Affairs, shall submit  
10 to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and  
11 the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Rep-  
12 resentatives a plan to address staffing shortages of psychi-  
13 atrists and psychologists of the Department of Veterans  
14 Affairs, including filling any open positions.

15 (b) ELEMENTS.—The plan required by subsection (a)  
16 shall include the following:

17 (1) The number of positions for psychiatrists  
18 and psychologists of the Department that need to be  
19 filled to meet demand, disaggregated by Veterans  
20 Integrated Service Network and medical center.

21 (2) An identification of the steps that the Sec-  
22 retary will take in each Veterans Integrated Service  
23 Network to address such shortages, include the fol-  
24 lowing:

1 (A) A description of any region-specific  
 2 hiring incentives to be used by the Secretary in  
 3 consultation with the directors of Veterans Inte-  
 4 grated Service Networks and medical centers of  
 5 the Department.

6 (B) A description of any local retention or  
 7 engagement incentives to be used by directors  
 8 of Veterans Integrated Service Networks.

9 (3) Such recommendations for legislative or ad-  
 10 ministrative action as the Secretary considers nec-  
 11 essary to aid in addressing staffing shortages of psy-  
 12 chiatrists and psychologists of the Department.

13 **SEC. 503. OCCUPATIONAL SERIES AND STAFFING IMPROVE-**  
 14 **MENT PLAN FOR LICENSED PROFESSIONAL**  
 15 **MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELORS AND MAR-**  
 16 **RIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPISTS OF DEPART-**  
 17 **MENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

18 (a) OCCUPATIONAL SERIES.—Not later than one year  
 19 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary  
 20 of Veterans Affairs, in consultation with the Office of Per-  
 21 sonnel Management, shall develop an occupational series  
 22 for licensed professional mental health counselors and  
 23 marriage and family therapists of the Department of Vet-  
 24 erans Affairs.

25 (b) STAFFING PLAN.—



1           (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 270 days  
2           after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-  
3           retary shall submit to the Committee on Veterans’  
4           Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Vet-  
5           erans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives a  
6           plan to address staffing shortages of licensed profes-  
7           sional mental health counselors and marriage and  
8           family therapists of the Department of Veterans Af-  
9           fairs.

10          (2) ELEMENTS.—The plan required by para-  
11          graph (1) shall include the following:

12                (A) The number of positions for licensed  
13                professional mental health counselors and mar-  
14                riage and family therapists of the Department  
15                that need to be filled to meet demand,  
16                disaggregated by Veterans Integrated Service  
17                Network and medical center.

18                (B) An identification of the steps that the  
19                Secretary will take in each Veterans Integrated  
20                Service Network to address such shortages, in-  
21                clude the following:

22                    (i) A description of any region-specific  
23                    hiring incentives to be used by the Sec-  
24                    retary in consultation with the directors of

1 Veterans Integrated Service Networks and  
2 medical centers of the Department.

3 (ii) A description of any local reten-  
4 tion or engagement incentives to be used  
5 by directors of Veterans Integrated Service  
6 Networks.

7 (C) Such recommendations for legislative  
8 or administrative action as the Secretary, in  
9 consultation with the Inspector General of the  
10 Department of Veterans Affairs, considers nec-  
11 essary to aid in addressing staffing shortages of  
12 licensed professional mental health counselors  
13 and marriage and family therapists of the De-  
14 partment.

15 (c) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the sub-  
16 mittal of the plan required by subsection (b), the Secretary  
17 shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the  
18 Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the  
19 House of Representatives a report setting forth the num-  
20 ber of licensed professional mental health counselors and  
21 marriage and family therapists hired by the Department  
22 during the one-year period preceding the submittal of the  
23 report, disaggregated by Veterans Integrated Service Net-  
24 work and medical center.

1 **SEC. 504. STAFFING IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR PEER SPE-**  
2 **CIALISTS OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AF-**  
3 **FAIRS WHO ARE WOMEN.**

4 (a) ASSESSMENT OF CAPACITY.—

5 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 90 days after  
6 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary  
7 of Veterans Affairs, in consultation with the Inspec-  
8 tor General of the Department of Veterans Affairs,  
9 shall commence an assessment of the capacity of  
10 peer specialists of the Department of Veterans Af-  
11 fairs who are women.

12 (2) ELEMENTS.—The assessment required by  
13 paragraph (1) shall include an assessment of the fol-  
14 lowing:

15 (A) The geographical distribution of peer  
16 specialists of the Department who are women.

17 (B) The geographical distribution of  
18 women veterans.

19 (C) The number and proportion of women  
20 peer specialists who specialize in peer coun-  
21 seling on mental health or suicide prevention.

22 (D) The number and proportion of women  
23 peer specialists who specialize in peer coun-  
24 seling on non-mental health related matters.

25 (b) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the as-  
26 sessment required by subsection (a) has commenced, the

1 Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Af-  
2 fairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Af-  
3 fairs of the House of Representatives a report detailing  
4 the findings of the assessment.

5 (c) STAFFING IMPROVEMENT PLAN.—

6 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days  
7 after submitting the report under subsection (b), the  
8 Secretary, in consultation with the Inspector Gen-  
9 eral, shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Af-  
10 fairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans'  
11 Affairs of the House of Representatives a plan,  
12 based on the results of the assessment required by  
13 subsection (a), to hire additional qualified peer spe-  
14 cialists who are women, with special consideration  
15 for areas that lack peer specialists who are women.

16 (2) ELEMENTS.—The peer specialist positions  
17 included in the plan required by paragraph (1)—

18 (A) shall be non-volunteer, paid positions;

19 and

20 (B) may be part-time positions.

1 **SEC. 505. ESTABLISHMENT OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS**  
 2 **AFFAIRS READJUSTMENT COUNSELING**  
 3 **SERVICE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM.**

4 (a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 76 of title 38, United  
 5 States Code, is amended by inserting after subchapter  
 6 VIII the following new subchapter:

7 “SUBCHAPTER IX—READJUSTMENT  
 8 COUNSELING SERVICE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM  
 9 “§ 7698. Requirement for program

10 “As part of the Educational Assistance Program, the  
 11 Secretary shall carry out a scholarship program under this  
 12 subchapter. The program shall be known as the Depart-  
 13 ment of Veterans Affairs Readjustment Counseling Serv-  
 14 ice Scholarship Program (in this subchapter referred to  
 15 as the ‘Program’).

16 “§ 7699. Eligibility; agreement

17 “(a) IN GENERAL.—An individual is eligible to par-  
 18 ticipate in the Program, as determined by the Readjust-  
 19 ment Counseling Service of the Department, if the indi-  
 20 vidual—

21 “(1) is accepted for enrollment or enrolled (as  
 22 described in section 7602 of this title) in, a program  
 23 of study at an accredited educational institution,  
 24 school, or training program leading to—

1           “(A) a bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral de-  
 2           gree in psychology, social work, or marriage  
 3           and family therapy; or

4           “(B) a master’s degree in mental health  
 5           counseling; and

6           “(2) enters into an agreement with the Sec-  
 7           retary under subsection (c).

8           “(b) PRIORITY.—In selecting individuals to partici-  
 9           pate in the Program, the Secretary shall give priority to  
 10          the following individuals:

11           “(1) An individual who agrees to be employed  
 12          by a Vet Center located in a community that is—

13           “(A) designated as a medically underserved  
 14           population under section 330(b)(3) of the Pub-  
 15           lic Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 254b(b)(3));  
 16           and

17           “(B) in a state with a per capita popu-  
 18           lation of veterans of more than five percent ac-  
 19           cording to the National Center for Veterans  
 20           Analysis and Statistics and the Bureau of the  
 21           Census.

22           “(2) An individual who is a veteran.

23           “(c) AGREEMENT.—An agreement between the Sec-  
 24          retary and a participant in the Program shall (in addition

1 to the requirements set forth in section 7604 of this title)  
 2 include the following:

3           “(1) An agreement by the Secretary to provide  
 4       the participant with a scholarship under the Pro-  
 5       gram for a specified number of school years during  
 6       which the participant pursues a program of study  
 7       described in subsection (a)(1) that meets the re-  
 8       quirements set forth in section 7602(a) of this title.

9           “(2) An agreement by the participant to serve  
 10      as a full-time employee of the Department at a Vet  
 11      Center for a three-year period during the six-year  
 12      period following the completion by the participant of  
 13      such program of study (in this subchapter referred  
 14      to as the ‘period of obligated service’).

15      “(d) VET CENTER DEFINED.—In this section, the  
 16      term ‘Vet Center’ has the meaning given that term in sec-  
 17      tion 1712A(h) of this title.

18      **“§ 7699A. Obligated service**

19      “(a) IN GENERAL.—Each participant in the Program  
 20      shall provide service as a full-time employee of the Depart-  
 21      ment at a Vet Center (as defined in section 7699(c) of  
 22      this title) for the period of obligated service set forth in  
 23      the agreement of the participant entered into under sec-  
 24      tion 7604 of this title.

1 “(b) DETERMINATION OF SERVICE COMMENCEMENT

2 DATE.—(1) Not later than 60 days before the service com-  
3 mencement date of a participant, the Secretary shall no-  
4 tify the participant of that service commencement date.

5 “(2) The date specified in paragraph (1) with respect  
6 to a participant is the date for the beginning of the period  
7 of obligated service of the participant.

8 **“§ 7699B. Breach of agreement: liability**

9 “(a) LIQUIDATED DAMAGES.—(1) A participant in  
10 the Program (other than a participant described in sub-  
11 section (b)) who fails to accept payment, or instructs the  
12 educational institution in which the participant is enrolled  
13 not to accept payment, in whole or in part, of a scholarship  
14 under the agreement entered into under section 7604 of  
15 this title shall be liable to the United States for liquidated  
16 damages in the amount of \$1,500.

17 “(2) Liability under paragraph (1) is in addition to  
18 any period of obligated service or other obligation or liabil-  
19 ity under such agreement.

20 “(b) LIABILITY DURING PROGRAM OF STUDY.—(1)  
21 Except as provided in subsection (d), a participant in the  
22 Program shall be liable to the United States for the  
23 amount which has been paid to or on behalf of the partici-  
24 pant under the agreement if any of the following occurs:



1           “(A) The participant fails to maintain an ac-  
 2           ceptable level of academic standing in the edu-  
 3           cational institution in which the participant is en-  
 4           rolled (as determined by the educational institution  
 5           under regulations prescribed by the Secretary).

6           “(B) The participant is dismissed from such  
 7           educational institution for disciplinary reasons.

8           “(C) The participant voluntarily terminates the  
 9           program of study in such educational institution be-  
 10          fore the completion of such program of study.

11          “(2) Liability under this subsection is in lieu of any  
 12          service obligation arising under the agreement.

13          “(c) LIABILITY DURING PERIOD OF OBLIGATED  
 14          SERVICE.—(1) Except as provided in subsection (d), if a  
 15          participant in the Program does not complete the period  
 16          of obligated service of the participant, the United States  
 17          shall be entitled to recover from the participant an amount  
 18          determined in accordance with the following formula:  
 19           $A = 3\Phi(t - s/t)$ .

20          “(2) In the formula in paragraph (1):

21                 “(A) ‘A’ is the amount the United States is en-  
 22                 titled to recover.

23                 “(B) ‘ $\Phi$ ’ is the sum of—

24                         “(i) the amounts paid under this sub-  
 25                         chapter to or on behalf of the participant; and

1           “(ii) the interest on such amounts which  
 2           would be payable if at the time the amounts  
 3           were paid they were loans bearing interest at  
 4           the maximum legal prevailing rate, as deter-  
 5           mined by the Treasurer of the United States.

6           “(C) ‘t’ is the total number of months in the  
 7           period of obligated service of the participant.

8           “(D) ‘s’ is the number of months of such period  
 9           served by the participant.

10          “(d) LIMITATION ON LIABILITY FOR REDUCTIONS-  
 11          IN-FORCE.—Liability shall not arise under subsection (c)  
 12          if the participant fails to maintain employment as a De-  
 13          partment employee due to a staffing adjustment.

14          “(e) PERIOD FOR PAYMENT OF DAMAGES.—Any  
 15          amount of damages that the United States is entitled to  
 16          recover under this section shall be paid to the United  
 17          States within the one-year period beginning on the date  
 18          of the breach of the agreement.”.

19          (b) CONFORMING AND TECHNICAL AMENDMENTS.—

20                 (1) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—

21                         (A) ESTABLISHMENT OF PROGRAM.—Sec-  
 22                         tion 7601(a) of such title is amended—

23                                 (i) in paragraph (5), by striking  
 24                                 “and”;

1 (ii) in paragraph (6), by striking the  
2 period and inserting “; and”; and

3 (iii) by adding at the end the fol-  
4 lowing new paragraph:

5 “(7) the readjustment counseling service schol-  
6 arship program provided for in subchapter IX of this  
7 chapter.”.

8 (B) ELIGIBILITY.—Section 7602 of such  
9 title is amended—

10 (i) in subsection (a)(1)—

11 (I) by striking “or VI” and in-  
12 serting “VI, or IX”; and

13 (II) by striking “subchapter VI”  
14 and inserting “subchapter VI or IX”;  
15 and

16 (ii) in subsection (b), by striking “or  
17 VI” and inserting “VI, or IX”.

18 (C) APPLICATION.—Section 7603(a)(1) of  
19 such title is amended by striking “or VIII” and  
20 inserting “VIII, or IX”.

21 (D) TERMS OF AGREEMENT.—Section  
22 7604 of such title is amended by striking “or  
23 VIII” each place it appears and inserting  
24 “VIII, or IX”.

1 (E) ANNUAL REPORT.—Section 7632 of  
 2 such title is amended—

3 (i) in paragraph (1), by striking “and  
 4 the Specialty Education Loan Repayment  
 5 Program” and inserting “the Specialty  
 6 Education Loan Repayment Program, and  
 7 the Readjustment Counseling Service  
 8 Scholarship Program”; and

9 (ii) in paragraph (4), by striking “and  
 10 per participant in the Specialty Education  
 11 Loan Repayment Program” and inserting  
 12 “per participant in the Specialty Education  
 13 Loan Repayment Program, and per partic-  
 14 ipant in the Readjustment Counseling  
 15 Service Scholarship Program”.

16 (2) TABLE OF SECTIONS.—The table of sections  
 17 at the beginning of chapter 76 of such title is  
 18 amended by inserting after the items relating to sub-  
 19 chapter VIII the following:

“SUBCHAPTER IX—READJUSTMENT COUNSELING SERVICE SCHOLARSHIP  
 PROGRAM

“Sec.

“7698. Requirement for program.

“7699. Eligibility; agreement.

“7699A. Obligated service.

“7699B. Breach of agreement: liability.”.

20 (c) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The Secretary of Veterans  
 21 Affairs shall begin awarding scholarships under sub-  
 22 chapter IX of chapter 76 of title 38, United States Code,

1 as added by subsection (a), for programs of study begin-  
2 ning not later than one year after the date of the enact-  
3 ment of this Act.

4 **SEC. 506. COMPTROLLER GENERAL REPORT ON READJUST-**  
5 **MENT COUNSELING SERVICE OF DEPART-**  
6 **MENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

7 (a) IN GENERAL.—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 Committee on  
10 Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Vet-  
11 erans' Affairs of the House of Representatives a report  
12 on the Readjustment Counseling Service of the Depart-  
13 ment of Veterans Affairs.

14 (b) ELEMENTS.—The report required by subsection  
15 (a) shall include the following:

16 (1) An assessment of the adequacy and types of  
17 treatment, counseling, and other services provided at  
18 Vet Centers, including recommendations on whether  
19 and how such treatment, counseling, and other serv-  
20 ices can be expanded.

21 (2) An assessment of the efficacy of outreach  
22 efforts by the Readjustment Counseling Service, in-  
23 cluding recommendations for how outreach efforts  
24 can be improved.

1           (3) An assessment of barriers to care at Vet  
2           Centers, including recommendations for overcoming  
3           those barriers.

4           (4) An assessment of the efficacy and frequency  
5           of the use of telehealth by counselors of the Read-  
6           justment Counseling Service to provide mental  
7           health services, including recommendations for how  
8           the use of telehealth can be improved.

9           (5) An assessment of the feasibility and advis-  
10          ability of expanding eligibility for services from the  
11          Readjustment Counseling Service, including—

12                (A) recommendations on what eligibility  
13                criteria could be expanded; and

14                (B) an assessment of potential costs and  
15                increased infrastructure requirements if eligi-  
16                bility is expanded.

17          (6) An assessment of the use of Vet Centers by  
18          members of the reserve components of the Armed  
19          Forces who were never activated and recommenda-  
20          tions on how to better reach those members.

21          (7) An assessment of the use of Vet Centers by  
22          eligible family members of former members of the  
23          Armed Forces and recommendations on how to bet-  
24          ter reach those family members.

1           (8) An assessment of the efficacy of group ther-  
 2           apy and the level of training of providers at Vet  
 3           Centers in administering group therapy.

4           (c) VET CENTER DEFINED.—In this section, the  
 5           term “Vet Center” has the meaning given that term in  
 6           section 1712A(h) of title 38, United States Code.

7           **SEC. 507. EXPANSION OF REPORTING REQUIREMENTS ON**  
 8                               **READJUSTMENT COUNSELING SERVICE OF**  
 9                               **DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

10          (a) EXPANSION OF ANNUAL REPORT.—Paragraph  
 11          (2)(C) of section 7309(e) of title 38, United States Code,  
 12          is amended by inserting before the period at the end the  
 13          following: “, including the resources required to meet such  
 14          unmet need, such as additional staff, additional locations,  
 15          additional infrastructure, infrastructure improvements,  
 16          and additional mobile Vet Centers”.

17          (b) BIENNIAL REPORT.—Such section is amended by  
 18          adding at the end the following new paragraph:

19          “(3) For each even numbered year in which the re-  
 20          port required by paragraph (1) is submitted, the Secretary  
 21          shall include in such report a prediction of trends in de-  
 22          mand for care, long-term investments required with re-  
 23          spect to the provision of care, maintenance of infrastruc-  
 24          ture, and other capital investments with respect to the Re-

1 adjustment Counseling Service, including Vet Centers,  
 2 Mobile Vet Centers, and community access points.”.

3 **SEC. 508. STUDIES ON ALTERNATIVE WORK SCHEDULES**  
 4 **FOR EMPLOYEES OF VETERANS HEALTH AD-**  
 5 **MINISTRATION.**

6 (a) STUDY OF VETERANS.—

7 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days  
 8 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-  
 9 retary of Veterans Affairs shall conduct a study on  
 10 the attitudes of eligible veterans toward the Depart-  
 11 ment of Veterans Affairs offering appointments out-  
 12 side the usual operating hours of facilities of the De-  
 13 partment, including through the use of telehealth  
 14 appointments.

15 (2) ELIGIBLE VETERAN DEFINED.—In this sub-  
 16 section, the term “eligible veteran” means a veteran  
 17 who—

18 (A) is enrolled in the patient enrollment  
 19 system of the Department under section  
 20 1705(a) of title 38, United States Code; and

21 (B) received health care from the Depart-  
 22 ment at least once during the two-year period  
 23 ending on the date of the commencement of the  
 24 study under paragraph (1).

25 (b) DEPARTMENT STUDY.—



1           (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days  
2       after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-  
3       retary shall conduct a study on the feasibility and  
4       advisability of offering appointments outside the  
5       usual operating hours of facilities of the Depart-  
6       ment.

7           (2) STUDY OF EMPLOYEES.—The study re-  
8       quired by paragraph (1) shall include a study of the  
9       opinions of employees of the Veterans Health Ad-  
10      ministration, including clinical, nonclinical, and sup-  
11      port staff, with respect to offering appointments out-  
12      side the usual operating hours of facilities of the De-  
13      partment, including through the use of telehealth  
14      appointments.

15   **SEC. 509. SUICIDE PREVENTION COORDINATORS.**

16       The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall ensure that  
17   each medical center of the Department of Veterans Affairs  
18   is staffed with not fewer than one suicide prevention coor-  
19   dinator.

1 **Subtitle B—Direct Hiring Authori-**  
 2 **ties for Certain Health Care Po-**  
 3 **sitions**

4 **SEC. 521. DIRECT HIRING AUTHORITIES FOR CERTAIN**  
 5 **HEALTH CARE POSITIONS.**

6 (a) IN GENERAL.—Subpart I of part III of title 5,  
 7 United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the  
 8 following:

9 **“CHAPTER 103—DEPARTMENT OF VET-**  
 10 **ERANS AFFAIRS HIRING AUTHORITIES**

“Sec.

“10301. Department of Veterans Affairs personnel authorities.

11 **“§ 10301. Department of Veterans Affairs personnel**  
 12 **authorities**

13 “(a) FLEXIBILITIES RELATING TO APPOINT-  
 14 MENTS.—

15 “(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans  
 16 Affairs (referred to in this section as the ‘Secretary’)  
 17 shall promulgate regulations to redesign the proce-  
 18 dures that are applied by the Department of Vet-  
 19 erans Affairs in making appointments to positions  
 20 described in paragraphs (1) and (3) of section 7401  
 21 of title 38 in order to—

22 “(A) better meet mission needs;

23 “(B) respond to managers’ needs and the  
 24 needs of applicants;

1 “(C) produce high-quality applicants;

2 “(D) support timely decisions; and

3 “(E) promote competitive job offers.

4 “(2) WAIVED REQUIREMENTS.—In redesigning  
5 the process by which the appointments described in  
6 paragraph (1) shall be made, the Secretary may  
7 waive the requirements of chapter 33, and the regu-  
8 lations implementing that chapter, to the extent nec-  
9 essary to achieve the objectives of this section, while  
10 providing for the following:

11 “(A) Fair, credible, and transparent meth-  
12 ods of establishing qualification requirements  
13 for, recruitment for, and appointments to posi-  
14 tions.

15 “(B) Fair and open competition and equi-  
16 table treatment in the consideration and selec-  
17 tion of individuals to positions.

18 “(C) Fair, credible, and transparent meth-  
19 ods of assigning, reassigning, detailing, trans-  
20 ferring, or promoting employees.

21 “(3) IMPLEMENTATION REQUIREMENTS.—In  
22 implementing this subsection, the Secretary shall  
23 comply with the provisions of section 2302(b)(11),  
24 regarding veterans’ preference requirements, in a

1 manner consistent with that in which such provi-  
2 sions are applied under chapter 33.

3 “(4) TRAINING PROGRAM.—The Secretary shall  
4 develop a training program for Department of Vet-  
5 erans Affairs human resource professionals to imple-  
6 ment the requirements of this subsection.

7 “(5) INDICATORS OF EFFECTIVENESS.—The  
8 Secretary shall develop indicators of effectiveness to  
9 determine whether appointment flexibilities under  
10 this subsection have achieved the objectives de-  
11 scribed in paragraph (1).

12 “(b) CRITERIA FOR USE OF NEW PERSONNEL AU-  
13 THORITIES.—In the redesign of appointment procedures,  
14 as described in subsection (a), and with respect to the sys-  
15 tem of appointment flexibilities established under that  
16 subsection, the Secretary shall—

17 “(1) include a means for ensuring employee in-  
18 volvement (for bargaining unit employees, through  
19 their exclusive representatives) in that redesign and  
20 in the implementation of that system;

21 “(2) provide for adequate training and retrain-  
22 ing for supervisors, managers, and employees in the  
23 implementation and operation of that redesign and  
24 that system;

25 “(3) develop—

1           “(A) a comprehensive management succes-  
2           sion program to provide training to employees  
3           to develop managers for the agency; and

4           “(B) a program to provide training to su-  
5           pervisors on actions, options, and strategies  
6           that a supervisor may use in administering that  
7           system;

8           “(4) include effective transparency and account-  
9           ability measures and safeguards to ensure that the  
10          management of that system is fair, credible, and eq-  
11          uitable, including appropriate independent reason-  
12          ableness reviews, internal assessments, and employee  
13          surveys;

14          “(5) provide mentors to advise individuals on  
15          their career paths and opportunities to advance and  
16          excel within their fields;

17          “(6) develop appropriate procedures for warn-  
18          ings during performance evaluations for employees  
19          who fail to meet performance standards;

20          “(7) utilize the quadrennial strategic plan re-  
21          quired under section 7330C(b) of title 38; and

22          “(8) ensure that adequate agency resources are  
23          allocated for the design, implementation, and admin-  
24          istration of that system.”.

(b) TECHNICAL AND CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—  
 The table of chapters for part III of title 5, United States  
 Code, is amended by inserting after the item relating to  
 chapter 102 the following:

“103. Department of Veterans Affairs Hiring Authorities .....10301.”.

## **TITLE VI—IMPROVEMENT OF TELEHEALTH SERVICES**

### **SEC. 601. EXPANDED TELEHEALTH FROM DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
 shall enter into partnerships, and expand existing partner-  
 ships, between the Department of Veterans Affairs, orga-  
 nizations that represent or serve veterans, nonprofit orga-  
 nizations, private businesses, and other interested parties  
 for the expansion of telehealth capabilities and the provi-  
 sion of telehealth services to veterans through the award  
 of grants under subsection (c).

(b) PREFERENCE FOR PARTNERSHIPS.—The Sec-  
 retary shall give preference to entering into or expanding  
 partnerships under subsection (a) with organizations  
 that—

(1) represent veterans in rural or highly rural  
 areas (as determined through the use of the Rural-  
 Urban Commuting Areas coding system of the De-  
 partment of Agriculture); or

1           (2) operate in a medically underserved commu-  
 2           nity (as defined in section 799B of the Public  
 3           Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 295p)).

4           (c) AWARD OF GRANTS.—

5           (1) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out partnerships  
 6           entered into or expanded under this section with en-  
 7           tities described in subsection (a), the Secretary shall  
 8           award grants to those entities.

9           (2) MAXIMUM AMOUNT OF GRANTS.—The  
 10          amount of a grant awarded under this subsection  
 11          may not exceed \$75,000 per site per year.

12          (3) USE OF GRANTS.—

13               (A) IN GENERAL.—Grants awarded to an  
 14               entity under this subsection shall be used for  
 15               the following:

16                       (i) Purchasing or upgrading hardware  
 17                       or software necessary for the provision of  
 18                       secure and private telehealth services.

19                       (ii) Upgrading security protocols for  
 20                       consistency with the standardized tele-  
 21                       health security protocol implemented under  
 22                       section 602(a)(2), or any other security re-  
 23                       quirements of the Department.

1 (iii) Training of employees, including  
2 payment of those employees for completing  
3 that training, with respect to—

4 (I) military and veteran cultural  
5 competence, if the entity is not an or-  
6 ganization that represents veterans;  
7 and

8 (II) equipment required to pro-  
9 vide telehealth services.

10 (iv) Upgrading existing infrastructure  
11 owned or leased by the entity to make  
12 rooms more conducive to telehealth care,  
13 including—

14 (I) additional walls to create a  
15 new, private room;

16 (II) soundproofing of existing  
17 rooms; or

18 (III) new electrical or internet  
19 outlets in an existing room.

20 (v) Upgrading existing infrastructure  
21 to comply with the Americans with Disabil-  
22 ities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et  
23 seq.).

24 (vi) Upgrading internet infrastruc-  
25 ture.



1 (B) EXCLUSION.—Grants may not be used  
2 for the purchase of new property or for major  
3 construction projects, as determined by the Sec-  
4 retary.

5 (d) MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING OR AGREE-  
6 MENT ON TELEHEALTH ACCESS POINTS.—

7 (1) IN GENERAL.—An entity described in sub-  
8 section (a) that seeks to establish a telehealth access  
9 point for veterans but does not require grant fund-  
10 ing under this section to do so may enter into a  
11 memorandum of understanding or memorandum of  
12 agreement with the Department for the establish-  
13 ment of such an access point.

14 (2) INSPECTION.—The Secretary shall inspect  
15 the access point proposed to be established under  
16 paragraph (1) to ensure that it is adequately pri-  
17 vate, secure, and accessible for veterans before the  
18 access point is established.

19 (e) ASSESSMENT OF BARRIERS TO ACCESS.—

20 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 18 months  
21 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-  
22 retary shall complete an assessment of barriers faced  
23 by veterans in accessing telehealth services from  
24 home.

1           (2) ELEMENTS.—The assessment required by  
2 paragraph (1) shall include the following:

3           (A) An assessment of current and potential  
4 future cost barriers to veterans having internet  
5 access at home.

6           (B) An assessment of current and poten-  
7 tial future barriers to veterans accessing  
8 broadband services at home.

9           (C) A description of how the Department  
10 plans to address the current and potential fu-  
11 ture cost and access barriers described in sub-  
12 paragraphs (A) and (B).

13           (D) Such other matters related to internet  
14 access for veterans in their homes as the Sec-  
15 retary considers relevant.

16           (3) REPORT.—Not later than 120 days after  
17 the completion of the assessment required by para-  
18 graph (1), the Secretary shall submit to the Com-  
19 mittee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the  
20 Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of  
21 Representatives a report on the assessment, includ-  
22 ing any recommendations for legislative or adminis-  
23 trative action based on the results of the assessment.

1 (f) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is  
 2 authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Veterans  
 3 Affairs \$10,000,000 to carry out this section.

4 **SEC. 602. IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL PROTOCOL FOR**  
 5 **TELEHEALTH SECURITY AND INTERFACING**  
 6 **INSTRUCTIONS.**

7 (a) NATIONAL TELEHEALTH SECURITY PRO-  
 8 TOCOL.—

9 (1) ASSESSMENT.—

10 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Vet-  
 11 erans Affairs, in consultation with industry ex-  
 12 perts, the Chairman of the Federal Trade Com-  
 13 mission, the Assistant Secretary of Veterans Af-  
 14 fairs for Information and Technology and Chief  
 15 Information Officer, and stakeholders, shall  
 16 conduct an assessment of current telehealth se-  
 17 curity protocols.

18 (B) ELEMENTS.—The assessment con-  
 19 ducted under subparagraph (A) shall include  
 20 the following:

21 (i) An assessment of current tele-  
 22 health security protocols, including proto-  
 23 cols used by—

24 (I) the Department of Veterans  
 25 Affairs;

- 1 (II) other Federal agencies;  
2 (III) other health care providers;  
3 and  
4 (IV) such other organizations as  
5 the Secretary considers necessary to  
6 assess under such subparagraph.

7 (ii) A study of any current or future  
8 security risks—

- 9 (I) faced by veterans using tele-  
10 health services; or  
11 (II) faced by the Department in  
12 furnishing those services.

13 (C) TIMELINE.—The Secretary shall com-  
14 plete the assessment conducted under subpara-  
15 graph (A) not later than one year after the date  
16 of the enactment of this Act.

17 (2) IMPLEMENTATION.—Not later than 18  
18 months after the completion of the assessment under  
19 paragraph (1), the Secretary shall, using guidance  
20 from the assessment, fully implement a standardized  
21 telehealth security protocol at all facilities of the De-  
22 partment.

23 (3) PRIVACY AND SECURITY.—The Secretary  
24 shall ensure that the security protocol implemented  
25 under this subsection protects the privacy and secu-

1       rity of veterans, the health data of veterans, and  
2       data from the Department.

3       (b) NATIONAL TELEHEALTH INTERFACING INSTRUCTIONS.—  
4

5               (1) ASSESSMENT.—

6                       (A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Vet-  
7       erans Affairs, in consultation with industry ex-  
8       perts, organizations that represent veterans, the  
9       Chief Veterans Experience Officer, the Assist-  
10      ant Secretary of Veterans Affairs for Informa-  
11      tion and Technology and Chief Information Of-  
12      ficer, and stakeholders, shall conduct an assess-  
13      ment of current telehealth interfacing instruc-  
14      tions.

15                    (B) ELEMENTS.—The assessment con-  
16      ducted under subparagraph (A) shall include an  
17      assessment of interfacing instructions used  
18      by—

19                               (i) the Department of Veterans Af-  
20      fairs;

21                               (ii) other Federal agencies;

22                               (iii) other health care providers; and

23                               (iv) such other organizations as the  
24      Secretary considers necessary to assess  
25      under such subparagraph.

1           (C) TIMELINE.—The Secretary shall com-  
2           plete the assessment conducted under subpara-  
3           graph (A) not later than one year after the date  
4           of the enactment of this Act.

5           (2) IMPLEMENTATION.—Not later than 18  
6           months after the completion of the assessment under  
7           paragraph (1), the Secretary shall, using guidance  
8           from the assessment, fully implement standardized  
9           telehealth interfacing instructions at all facilities of  
10          the Department.

11          (3) NAVIGATION.—The Secretary shall ensure  
12          that the telehealth interfacing instructions imple-  
13          mented under this subsection are those that are  
14          easiest to navigate for veterans and health care pro-  
15          viders.

○