ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

• VA offers a wide range of mental health services to Veterans. The goal of VA mental health care is to support recovery and enable Veterans who experience mental health problems to live meaningful lives in their communities and achieve their full potential.

• VA aims to provide coordinated care for the whole person, not just for the person’s mental illness. The department promotes the idea that having a healthy body, satisfying work, and supportive family and friends are integral to mental health.

• All Veterans who receive specialty mental health care have mental health treatment coordinators to help them define and work toward their overall mental health goals.

• Mental health services are available in VA’s mental health specialty clinics, primary care clinics, nursing homes, and residential care facilities. Those with serious mental health problems may take part in specialized programs such as mental health intensive case management, day centers, work programs, and psychosocial rehabilitation.

• Emergency mental health care is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week at VA medical centers. Facilities that do not have 24-hour emergency rooms must provide emergency services through a local non-VA hospital.

• Veterans thinking about hurting or killing themselves or others, experiencing an emotional crisis, feeling hopeless or engaging in self-destructive behavior such as drug abuse, should call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-TALK (8255). Press 1 for Veterans.

• The area of mental health is covered in several other VA fact sheets as well as this one, including Depression, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Substance Use Disorders, and Suicide Prevention.

VA RESEARCH ON MENTAL HEALTH: OVERVIEW

• VA researchers are looking at potential new approaches for treating and preventing mental health disorders. They are also working on related projects such as developing and evaluating collaborative primary care models, and improving access to services from rural and other remote areas by using the Internet and other technologies.

• Among the areas VA researchers are focusing on are mood disorders, such as depression and bipolar disorder; psychotic disorders, such as schizophrenia; PTSD and other anxiety conditions; and substance use disorders.

• VA investigators are also looking at the co-occurrence of mental health issues and physical disorders—for instance, depression in those with spinal cord injury, or substance abuse in patients with chronic pain.

• The National Research Action Plan is a wide-reaching plan developed in 2013 by VA and the departments of Defense; Health and Human Services; and Education. The plan is designed to improve access to mental health services for Veterans, service members, and military families. Implementation of the plan will improve scientific understanding of PTSD, traumatic brain injury (TBI), various co-occurring conditions, and suicide. Other goals of the plan include providing effective treatments for these diseases, and reducing their occurrence.

• VA’s 15 Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Centers (MIRECCs) were established by Congress with the goal of researching the causes and treatments of mental disorders, and using education to put new knowledge into routine clinical practice in VA. Specialized mental health centers of excellence are an essential part of VA’s ability to meet Veterans’ mental health needs.

According to the most recent National Survey on Drug Use and Health, an estimated 43.8 million adults had a mental illness in 2014 (not including substance use disorders), representing about 18 percent of all U.S. adults.

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