



Black Hills
Health Care System
Department of Veterans Affairs



Defining
EXCELLENCE
in the 21st Century

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News Release

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VA Black Hills Health Care System Mental Health Guest Editorial

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Eric Shinseki often reminds us: as the tide of war recedes we have the opportunity, and the responsibility, to anticipate the needs of returning Veterans. As these newest Veterans return home, we must ensure that they have access to quality mental health care in order to successfully make this transition to civilian life.

Last year, VA provided specialty mental health services to more than 1.3 million Veterans -- a 35 percent increase since 2007 in the number of Veterans who received mental health services at VA. That's why we recently announced that VA will add an additional 1,600 mental health staff professionals and an additional 300 support staff members nationwide, including seven here in Western South Dakota.

These efforts to hire more mental health professionals build on our record of service to Veterans. President Obama, Secretary Shinseki and the leaders of VA Black Hills Health Care System have devoted more people, programs, and resources to Veteran mental health services. VA has increased the mental health care budget by 39 percent since 2009. What's more, we've increased the number of mental health staff members by 41 percent since 2007. That means today, we have a team of professionals that's 20,590 strong -- all dedicated to who providing much-needed direct mental health treatment to Veterans.

While we have made great strides to expand mental health care access, we have much more work to do. The men and women who have had multiple deployments over a decade of combat have carried a tremendous burden for our country.

That's why Secretary Shinseki has challenged the department to improve upon our progress and identify barriers that prevent Veterans from receiving timely treatment. As we meet with Veterans here in North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Wyoming and Montana, we learn firsthand what we need to do to improve access to care. Secretary Shinseki has sought out the hardest-to-reach, most underserved places – from the remote areas of Alaska to inner city Philadelphia – to hear directly from Veterans and employees. And we're taking action to reach out to those who need mental health care instead of waiting for them to come to us.

Our mission is to increase access to our care and services. We've greatly increased the number of Veterans Readjustment Counseling Centers (Vet Centers) throughout the country. We've also developed an extensive suicide prevention program that saves lives every day. For example, our team at the Veteran Crisis Line has fielded more than 600,000 calls from Veterans in need and helped rescue more than 21,000 Veterans who were in immediate crisis. That's 21,000 Veterans who have been saved.

The mental health of America's Veterans not only touches those of us at VA and the Department of Defense, but also families, friends, co-workers, and people in our communities. We ask that you urge Veterans in your communities to reach out and connect with VA services. To locate the nearest VA facility or Vet Center for enrollment and to get scheduled for care, Veterans can visit VA's website at www.va.gov<<http://www.va.gov>>. Immediate help is available at www.VeteransCrisisLine.net<<http://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net>> or by calling the Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 (push 1) or texting 838255.

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