We Are The People In The VA Who Welcome Home All Combat Veterans With Honor
“To Care For Those Who Have Borne The Battle and Their Widow and Orphans”
Abraham Lincoln

Vet Centers serve Veterans and their families by providing a continuum of quality care that adds value for Veterans, families, and communities.....

We are the people in VA who welcome home war Veterans with honor by providing readjustment counseling in a caring manner.

Vet Centers understand and appreciate Veterans’ war experiences while assisting them and their family members toward a successful post-war adjustment in or near their community.
What is Trauma?

• Trauma is defined as an event where an individual experiences, witnesses -- or in the case of a family member, hears about -- an event where they are confronted with the death, threat of death, and/or serious injury to themselves or another.

• Their response involves intense fear, helplessness, or horror. Feelings and physical reactions associated with trauma are the body’s natural, hardwired skills to help us survive these events. Normally, in time, these emotions and reactions will naturally diminish in intensity.
Experiences During Deployment

• During combat deployment, soldiers experience things that are sometimes hard to adjust to and have trouble forgetting about.
What is Combat Stress?

• Combat stress is a physical, chemical, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension.

• For a combat Veteran, there is often not just one event in one moment in time, but multiple events over the course of a deployment. These natural reactions help to not only to keep the soldier alive, but combined with other skills they learn in the military, allow them to complete their mission.
Examples of Combat Stress

- Away from home, family, civilian job
- Intense heat in the desert
- Long work hours with little rest
- Witness of death or destruction
- Death or injury of a fellow soldier
- Prolonged exposure to threat or perceived threat
Battle Skills

- After deployment, some soldiers find that the hardwired skills that kept them alive in combat now do not fully “turn off” and keep being reactivated by things that remind them of these events.
What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?

• PTSD develops when the natural reactions of a traumatic experience do not reduce and continue to be triggered with similar intensity by daily events.
• PTSD is often identified through three symptoms clusters:
  • Re-experiencing
  • Arousal
  • Avoidance
Re-experiencing

- Re-experiencing symptoms include:
  - Nightmares
  - Intrusive thoughts
  - Flashbacks
Arousal

• Arousal symptoms include:
  • Anger and irritability
  • Hyper-startle response
  • Hypervigilance
  • Poor concentration
  • Sleep disturbance
  • Poor memory
Avoidance

**Avoidance symptoms include:**

- Avoiding thoughts, feelings, or conversations that remind the Veteran of the event.
- Avoiding people, places, and activities that remind them of the event.
- Feeling detached from family and friends.
- Lack of participation in activities they used to enjoy.
- May overwork, stay angry, use substances, or participate in high-risk activities.
OK, So what is a TBI?

- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) is defined as a blow or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the function of the brain. Not all blows or jolts to the head result in a TBI.
Severity of TBI

- The severity of such an injury may range from “mild” (a brief change in mental status or consciousness) to “severe” (an extended period of unconsciousness or amnesia after the injury).
- TBI can result in short or long-term problems with independent functioning.
Signs and Symptoms of TBI

- Headaches or neck pain that do not go away
- Difficulty remembering, concentrating, or making decisions
- Slowness in thinking, speaking, acting, or reading
- Getting lost or easily confused
- Feeling tired all the time, having no energy or motivation
- Mood changes (feeling sad or angry for no reason)
More Signs and Symptoms...

• Changes in sleep patterns (sleeping a lot more or having a hard time sleeping)
• Light-headedness, dizziness, or loss of balance
• Nausea
• Increased sensitivity to lights, sounds, or distractions
• Blurred vision or eyes that tire easily
• Loss of sense of smell or taste
• Ringing in the ears (tinnitus)
So, is it TBI or PTSD? Or Both?

- Diagnosis can be difficult due to the significant number of common signs and symptoms that are present in both PTSD and TBI.
- Proper evaluation for both PTSD and TBI is essential to provide the most appropriate psychological and medical treatment for the soldier.
Normal Readjustment Problems that may require attention:

- Difficulty communicating
- Relationship problems
- Trouble sleeping
- Increased irritability and anger
- Disorderly behavior
- Increased alcohol use
- Increased stress
- Concentration and memory problems
- Thinking about events from deployment

If these symptoms last more than one month after returning home from combat, Post Traumatic Stress may be present.
The Impact on Families

- Irritability and interpersonal conflict
- Veteran getting lost and not being able to communicate his location or needs.
- Withdrawal from family and friends.
- Concerns about Veteran’s drinking.
Tips for Families

• Be patient with your Veteran. This is a learning process for both of you. Knowing your Veteran’s ebbs and flows will help you through the rough times.

• Encourage independence. Your Veteran is still a full human being. Encourage them to do all they can, even if it is different that what they used to do.
More Tips for Families

• Take care of yourself. You can’t be there for your Veteran if you’re not there for yourself.
• Utilize all the supports offered to you including family, friends, and Veteran and community organizations.
• Connect with counseling, information, and education services through the Vet Center or VA Medical Center.
Tips for Providers

• A comprehensive assessment is a must!
  • Full military history, in particular combat experiences
  • Ask about head injury – even one that “just rings the bell.”
  • When in doubt, refer for evaluation. Vet Centers offer screening and treatment for PTSD. Medical Centers provide evaluation treatment for both PTSD and TBI.
The Vietnam Veteran

- **Institutional rejection.** Prior to 1980, the returning Vietnam Veteran had few options to which to turn for help with war-related psychological stress.
- **Societal rejection.** The unpopularity of the war with much of the country, particularly among academic and professional elites.

Several hundred bitter and disillusioned Veterans came together in "rap groups" established by themselves in cities across the US.
VET CENTER History

- Two-year pilot program that was started by Max Cleland
- Established by Congress in 1979 for Vietnam Veterans
- In 1980, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) added PTSD to the third edition of its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III).

Within the soul of each Vietnam veteran there is probably something that says "Bad war, good soldier." Only now are Americans beginning to separate the war from the warrior.

― Max Cleland
Vet Center Today

- Contemporary Community Mental Health Model

Vet Centers are a community mental health model that emphasizes the normalizing of psychological and emotional adjustment problems in an outpatient treatment setting. Counseling may involve the inclusion of significant others in the treatment process. A primary goal of the treatment setting is to eliminate the stigma that individuals may feel when seeking help for psychological and emotional adjustment problems.

- Mission

The treatment setting is informal and provides a wide variety of services from meeting resource needs to individual and family (significant others). If warranted, clients are referred to VA medical centers or community partners for more intensive treatment and/or medications. The central focus of Vet Center interventions is the treatment of PTSD, by assisting the client to work through troubling war experiences and their impact on the Veteran's present life.
Vet Center Organization

- Vet Centers are organized within the Veterans Health Administration of the VA. However, their operations—policymaking, management, fiscal control, and supervision—are directly under a special office designated the Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS).

- Vet Center services are normally delivered by a 4-7 person team. Staff may include psychologists, social workers, marriage and family therapists, or other mental health counselors, nurses, and paraprofessionals. While most Vet Center staff are Veterans, others include individuals with a professional interest and commitment to working with Veterans and experience in the assessment and treatment of PTSD.

- Vet Center and VAMC arrangement provides for a continuum of care for the Veteran and family.

- Each Vet Center organizes its service delivery to meet the needs of the user population. According to RCS Chief Officer Blank (1993) and Batres, the philosophical approach to Vet Center organization, management, and methods of operation bears resemblance to that of a Special Forces organization. The goal is to be flexible, adaptable, and immediately responsive to a broad range of challenges.
What Does the Vet Center Offer?

- A safe and protected place to talk
- Confidentiality
- No stigma
- Flexible hours
- Easily accessible community-based setting
- Network knowledgeable about the resources available
- Vet Center Staff are >65% Combat Veterans
- Veterans serving Veterans
- All family members are welcome
- No cost....ever
ELIGIBILITY:

Any Veterans and active duty Service members, to include members of the National Guard and Reserve components, who:

• Have served on active military duty in any combat theater or area of hostility*

• Experienced a military sexual trauma;

• Provided direct emergent medical care or mortuary services, while serving on active military duty, to the casualties of war, or;

• Served as a member of an unmanned aerial vehicle crew that provided direct support to operations in a combat zone or area of hostility.

• Vet Center services are also provided to Veterans and Service members for military related issues when it is found to aid in the readjustment of those that have served. This includes bereavement counseling for families who experience an active duty death.

Services for family members are available if Veteran or service member meet requirements from above.
VET CENTER SERVICES

- Individual Counseling
- Group Counseling
- Military Sexual Trauma Counseling
- Marital/Family Counseling
- Bereavement Counseling
- Drug and Alcohol Referral
- Liaison with VA & Community Resources
- Benefits Assistance Referral
- Community Education and Career Referral
UNIQUE FEATURES

- Vet Centers maintain a “welcome home” attitude that promotes customer service in a relaxing and non-bureaucratic environment.
- Veterans are welcome to stop by the Vet Center at any time, as there are no waiting lists to receive care.
- Vet Centers maintain extensive outreach programs to help veterans gain early access to care.
- Vet Centers are community-based, operating outside of the larger VA medical facilities.
- Vet Centers guarantee confidentiality and informed consent to avoid the effects of stigma on war zone and sexually traumatized Veterans.
- Vet Centers tailor local service programs and staff composition to best fit the social and cultural needs of the Veteran community being served.
Outreach

Currently, there are over 100 Veterans Outreach Program Specialists located in Vet Centers nationwide. These positions are staffed mostly by OIF / OEF Combat Veterans.
Veterans Helping Veterans

- As Veterans, Veterans Outreach Program Specialists are familiar with multiple deployment cycles, austere environments, and the challenges that accompany the military lifestyle.
Outreach – Our Foundation
Outreach – continued.
More Outreach!
Our Mission Continues

Department of Veterans Affairs Mission

“...to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and orphan...”
  - Abraham Lincoln, 1865

Vet Center
Keeping the Promise
References

North Carolina Vet Centers

**Charlotte Vet Center**
2114 Ben Craig Dr., #300
Charlotte, NC 28262
(704) 549-8025

**Fayetteville Vet Center**
2301 Robeson St. Suite 103
Fayetteville, NC 28305
(910) 488-6252

**Greensboro Vet Center***
3515 W Market St., Suite 120
Greensboro, NC 27406
(336) 323-2660

**Greenville Vet Center***
1021 W.H. Smith Blvd., #100
Greenville, NC 27834
(252) 355-7920

**Raleigh Vet Center**
8851 Ellstree Lane, Suite 122
Raleigh, NC 27617
(919) 361-6419

**Jacksonville Vet Center**
110A Branchwood Dr
Jacksonville, NC 28546
(910) 577-1100

Vet Centers maintain after normal business hours and some weekend hours to accommodate the schedules of Veterans and their family members. Please call local Vet Center for details on their hours.

* Denotes locations with Mobile Vet Center (MVC) Vehicles.

District 1 RCS Regional Office
305 W. Chesapeake Avenue, Suite 300
Towson, MD 21204
Phone: 410-828-6619
Fax: 410-962-5151

For a complete listing of Vet Centers in your state, please call: 877-927-8387 OR
Visit our web address at www.vetcenter.va.gov
National Resources

Vet Center Combat Call Center For combat veterans and their families
1-877-WAR-VETS

1-888-823-7458

Sexual Assault Support for the DoD Community DoD Safe Helpline
1-877-995-5247 Help is Available 24/7; Toll Free Worldwide or Online
NC Resources

- **NC National Guard HELP Line** – 855-322-3848
- NC Division of Military and Veterans Affairs
- **Alcohol/Other Drug Help in NC** – 800-688-4232
- **NC Problem Gambling Helpline** – 877-718-5543

- The NCDHHS Office of Citizen Services offers a toll-free information and referral telephone service; the toll-free helpline number is 800-662-7030. It is available Monday through Friday, from 8AM to 5PM (except holidays).
NC Homeless Guides at high risk areas

Buncombe County (Asheville):

Mecklenburg County (Charlotte):
https://www.mecknc.gov/HealthDepartment/CommunityHealthServices/Documents/CommunityResourceGuide.pdf

Wake County (Raleigh):

Durham County (Durham):
NC Homeless Guides at high risk areas (Cont.)

Forsyth County (Winston-Salem):
http://www.cityofws.org/portals/0/pdf/housing/Neighborhood%20Development/Brochure%20of%20Services%20to%20Homeless.pdf

Guilford County (Greensboro and High Point):

Wilmington/Brunswick, New Hanover, and Pender Counties:

Orange County (Chapel Hill):
NC Homeless Guides at high risk areas (Cont.)

Onslow County (Jacksonville):
http://www.onslowcountync.gov/DocumentCenter/View/345

Cumberland County (Fayetteville):

Help for Homeless Veterans
877-4AID-VET
(877) 424-3838
va.gov/homeless
Contact Information
Vet Center Call Center
1-877-WAR-VETS
www.vetcenter.va.gov