Needs Assessment of New York State Veterans: Overview of the Study and Key Findings

Pamela Riley
New York State Health Foundation

Veterans’ Mental Health Coalition of NYC Meeting
February 4, 2011
Background

• 2 million troops deployed as part of OEF/OIF since October 2001
  – Approximately 85,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have returned to New York State

• RAND *Invisible Wounds* study (2008)
  – Examined problem at national level
  – 1 in 5 service members with PTSD or depression
  – Only half of those received mental health care in prior year
  – Identified gaps in access to care and quality of care at the national level
NYSHealth Veterans Portfolio Update

- NYSHealth has invested more than $1.3 million in grants:
  - Veterans Outreach Center
  - Jewish Board of Family and Children’s Services
  - Veterans Treatment Court
  - IAVA
  - Mental Health Association of NYC
  - RAND

- Grants have served approximately 5,000 people

- New York Community Trust and Langeloth Foundation now considering adding veterans funding area
New York State Needs Assessment

- First-ever statewide needs assessment
- First-ever study looking just at veterans and families
- Included community-dwelling veterans, not only those served by the VA
- Examined PTSD/mental health needs and other health, occupational, or educational needs
- Included quantitative and qualitative assessments
- Reviewed available services
Profile of NYS Veterans

Rank
- Officer: 17%
- Enlisted: 82%
- Warrant Officer: 2%

Current Duty Status
- Active: 3%
- Reserve/Guard: 41%
- Retired/Discharged: 56%
Key Takeaways: Mental Health

- 22% of veterans had a probable diagnosis for mental health disorder (PTSD and/or major depression)
- 34% with self-indicated mental health need
Key Takeaways: Mental Health

- Veterans’ risk for major depression is two- to-four times higher than a comparable group of non-veterans
- Veterans’ risk for PTSD is eight times higher than that of non-veterans
- Only 1/3 of veterans in need sought mental health treatment
- Only 1/2 seeking treatment received “minimally adequate” treatment
Barriers to Seeking Mental Health Treatment

- Perceived medication side effects
- Concerns that seeking help could harm career
- Concerns about being denied security clearance
- Concerns about losing coworkers’ confidence
- Concerns about losing supervisor’s respect
Key Takeaways: Resource Needs

• Nearly half (46%) of veterans want to receive mental health care outside of the VA system

• Veterans have widely varying knowledge about their benefits eligibility and other available resources
Additional Findings

- Rates of alcohol misuse were similar to the comparable non-veteran population.
- Rates of illicit drug use were half the rates in the comparable non-veteran population.
- Physical health problems were slightly higher than the comparable non-veteran population.
Spouse Survey Findings

- Mental health and physical health needs similar to comparison group
- 44% reported having problems dealing with their spouses mood changes
- 42% worried about future deployment
Conclusions & Recommendations

• The VA alone can’t bear responsibility for veterans’ health and well-being
  – Improving quality both in the VA and in other systems is critical
  – Training VA and civilian providers on the culture and needs of veterans can help meet the needs of veterans
Conclusions & Recommendations

• Health care systems serving veterans are extremely complicated
  – Provide navigation assistance
  – Improve outreach to connect veterans with care coordinators
  – Increase peer-led programs to help vets navigate the health system and provide immediate support to returning vets
Conclusions & Recommendations

- Addressing the mental health needs of veterans will require a multi-pronged approach
  - Educate veterans about available treatment & services
  - Reduce stigma of treatment
  - Improve adherence to treatment
Questions/Discussion

• What are the highest priority areas that need to be addressed based on report findings (at the State, Federal, and local/community level)?
• What are some short- and long-term next steps that should be taken to address findings from the report?
• In what areas could NYSHealth and other foundations have the greatest impact on improving veterans’ access to mental health services in New York State?
• What other stakeholders should be targeted for dissemination of this information?