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**MENTAL HEALTH CARE FOR
MILITARY FALLS SHORT**

Hundreds of thousands of troops who served in Iraq and Afghanistan are showing signs of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety and other mental health disorders. Mental health care stigma in the military remains pervasive and is a significant barrier to care, and mental health professionals are not sufficiently accessible to service members and their families. Those are among the findings in a new report from the U.S. Department of Defense Mental Health Task Force.

Service members completed surveys 90 to 120 days after returning from deployment. Nearly half of National Guard members (49 percent), and a third of soldiers (38 percent) and Marines (31 percent) report psychological symptoms.

The Task Force found that the Military Health System lacks adequate fiscal resources and personnel to address these issues. "Staffing levels were poorly matched to the high operational tempo even prior to the current conflict, and the system has become even more strained by the increased deployment of active duty providers with mental health expertise," the report says. "As such, the system of care for psychological health that has evolved over recent decades is insufficient to meet the needs of today's forces and their beneficiaries, and will not be sufficient to meet their needs in the future." There are also significant gaps in the continuum of care.

National Guard and reserve members are at particular risk because they can live far from military bases. After they return from deployment they face "particularly

constrained" access to care, military chaplains and family support networks utilized by active duty personnel.

The report also finds that mental health concerns are greater for service members who have been deployed more than once. A growing number of soldiers are experiencing multiple deployments. The mental health of family members of the men and women serving in Iraq and Afghanistan is also a concern, but their needs are yet to be quantified, the report says. Hundreds of thousands of children have experienced the deployment of a parent.

The Task Force recommends that the military build a culture of support for mental health by dispelling stigma, making mental health professionals easily accessible, and embedding mental health training throughout military life. The military should also ensure a full continuum of care for service members and their families and empower leadership to advocate for psychological health.

The Department of Defense has six months to develop and implement a corrective action plan. *The report is available at*

www.ha.osd.mil/dhb/mhtf/MHTF-Report-Final.pdf.
