

Veterans Day: Appreciation and Assistance

Did you know that Veterans Day was originally known as Armistice Day to acknowledge the end of World War I? Veterans Day is celebrated on November 11th each year signaling the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month when the war ended. More than 21 million Americans or roughly 6.5% of the United States population are veterans 12% of men and more than 2 million women too.

As we approach Veterans Day once again it is important to recognize the service and sacrifice as well as the continuing struggles of our military men and women. The adjustment from war to civilian life can be quite difficult as families often need to get to know one another all over again. The psychological scars of war can be just as devastating or even more so than physical wounds and injuries. Reports of moodiness, substance use disorder, angry outbursts, irritability, problems with concentration and adjusting to family routines are common place, although not the only troubling developments

An alarming 20-22 Veterans die every day by suicide including a significant number of those already engaged with the Veterans Administration (VA). According to The Veterans Suicide prevention report from September 2019, in 2017 veterans aged 18-34 had the highest suicide rate, increasing 76% since 2005 and while veterans aged 55-74 had the lowest rate the same year the absolute number was highest in this age group accounting for 38% of all veteran suicides in 2017. The Los Angeles Times reported that military men and women had a suicide rate 50% higher than non-military individuals with the United States Army representing the largest percentage with more than half of all suicide deaths despite having only about 38% of all personnel.

There are reports that indicate prior history of trauma or abuse significantly raises the risk for suicide among veterans in active service. In many suicide cases Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has been a contributing factor as well. Experience also shows that a number of our military veterans are frustrated or mistrustful of the bureaucracy at the VA and would rather seek services privately. Others have commented that the caseloads at the VA are incredibly large or the assigned therapists, often those newly out of school lack the experience necessary to provide the type of assistance that makes a real difference in recovery efforts. For those who do seek services through the VA the system is overwhelmed with requests for services and even the non-profit sector that is available cannot meet the demand for required services. There have even been several cases reported in the media in recent times describing how some veterans have resorted to taking their own lives on the grounds of VA hospitals and property after being turned away or given an appointment weeks or months down the road.

In recent years LECSA staff members have worked in conjunction with The Soldiers Project (TSP) to provide no cost services to military members. TSP while struggling to stay afloat these days has a broad network of clinicians including psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, marriage and family therapists, licensed mental health counselors and psychiatric nurses. All TSP clinicians volunteered and donated their time and services to the cause believing it is the right thing and the least they can do to help support and appreciate our veterans and the sacrifices of the related families too. Services are also available for family members, parents, spouses, children and others who are impacted.

Do you know a military veteran or family in need of assistance? LECSA with the support of the United Way is committed to helping our Veterans and their family members by providing free assessments, counseling and other needed services. This month and every month let's extend a helping hand by asking how you might be of service to them? An initial phone call is all it takes to get started.

LECSA EAP 631-851-1295

November 2019