

**NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
OF
THE AMERICAN LEGION
October 12-13, 2022
Indianapolis, Indiana**

Resolution No. 18: Mental Health Programs for Justice-Involved Veterans

Origin: Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission

Submitted by: Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission

WHEREAS, With nearly 200,000 incarcerated veterans by the year 2019, The American Legion believes it best to ensure that justice-involved veterans suffering from a mental health disorder are cared for by professionally trained personnel who are qualified to tend to their unique behavioral needs; and

WHEREAS, A justice-involved veteran is defined as any former servicemember who has been detained by or under the supervision of the criminal justice system; and

WHEREAS, Outreach programs such as Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Reauthorization program grants have improved case management services and increased knowledge and care for mentally ill offenders with co-occurring substance use disorder (SUD); and

WHEREAS, The Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that veterans with other-than-honorable discharges often have at greater risk of mental health issues and suicide and may not know they are eligible under a 2020 Department of Veteran Affairs policy that extends mental health-care services to certain members of this subgroup; and

WHEREAS, A recent study found patients with long-term mental health conditions who missed more than two appointments per year had a greater than 8-fold increase in the risk of mortality compared with those who missed no appointments with these veterans dying prematurely from non-natural external factors such as suicide; and

WHEREAS, A snapshot from the most recent Iraq or Afghanistan conflict revealed that 43 percent of these returning veterans have a diagnosis of at least one mental illness with the top four diagnoses being alcohol dependence (44 percent); traumatic brain injury (TBI) (23 percent); post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (20 percent); or depression (15 percent); and

WHEREAS, Gulf War veterans are more than twice as likely to suffer from depression than their civilian cohort; and

WHEREAS, Veterans suffering from PTSD are also fifteen times more likely to be diagnosed with SUD, as it is common for veterans to “self-medicate” when coping with the after-effects of war trauma; and

WHEREAS, Over half of justice-involved veterans have a confirmed mental health diagnosis such as PTSD, depression, or SUD, especially for alcohol or cocaine addiction, which would require ongoing mental health supports and treatments; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion believes that veterans, especially war-exposed veterans, are a cohort with an urgently high demand for readily available mental health services and supports; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By the National Executive Committee of The American Legion in regular meeting assembled in Indianapolis, Indiana, on October 12-13, 2022, That The American Legion calls for Congress to pass legislation for establishing and funding evidence-supported programs and initiatives directed at providing mental health services to justice-involved veterans; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That mental health services and treatments be provided to all veterans suffering from substance use disorder through evidence-supported programs and initiatives; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That Congress pass legislation in support of research and implementation of rehabilitation programs and treatment initiatives, such as Veteran Treatment Courts, for justice-involved veterans.