

Citizen Soldier Support Program (CSSP) Executive Summary

www.citizensoldiersupport.org

Objective

Increase access among rural veterans to community health care providers who are knowledgeable about and sensitive to the unique mental health challenges facing veterans returning from deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Background

Service members returning from periods of active duty in Iraq, Afghanistan and other theaters of high stress often experience symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other behavioral health issues. Many of these returning veterans live in rural areas where behavioral health providers are scarce, and providers who understand military and combat-induced PTSD and other mental health challenges are rarer still.

CSSP, established with DoD funding in 2005 at the University of North Carolina, has collaborated with the North Carolina Area Health Education Center (AHEC) and the VA VISN 6 to address this issue by developing training and education curricula and programs, and conducting outreach to community providers. The current project is focused on meeting the needs of Reserve Component members deployed after 9/11, 40% of whom live more than an hour away from a VA facility.

Initial Scope and Results

CSSP brings the innovative community outreach initiative that, through training and increasing the awareness of community health and behavioral health providers, can make a difference in the lives of veterans in rural and underserved areas. The training courses developed to date have been highly praised by training participants. Future courses are in development, which address emerging issues faced by veterans. The searchable provider database allows veterans to easily locate providers in their geographic area who have taken the CSSP training or who have expressed an interest in serving veterans.

To date, over 2,400 providers across North Carolina have been participated in nearly 50 in person and on-line training programs across several key areas including PTSD, traumatic brain injury, invisible wounds of war, and issues facing women who have deployed. The training and education increase providers' sensitivity to and awareness of the mental health issues and disorders common to this population, exposes them to experiences from troops who have returned from theater, provides education regarding the unique cultural aspects associated with having served in combat and provides providers with needed knowledge and insight to effectively identify and begin to address these significant behavioral health challenges.

CSSP has developed a CEU curriculum for both in person and on-line training, outreach materials to secure interest in the program, and a searchable database of trained providers interested in serving Reserve Component members, to include geo-maps by state of all VA facilities and directions and driving distances to community providers listed on the data base.