



**THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON**

May 13, 2024

The Honorable Jon Tester
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In accordance with the requirements of 38 U.S.C. § 1720I(f), enclosed is the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) report on the mental and behavioral health care services provided to certain former members of the Armed Forces released under a condition other than honorable as described in section 1720I(b). To reduce the suicide rate among Veterans, Service members, and former Service members, VA strives to make mental health care as widely available as possible.

In addition, as required by 38 U.S.C. § 116, a statement of cost for preparing the report is included. This report has been sent to the leaders of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Denis McDonough", written over a horizontal line.

Denis McDonough

Enclosures

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



Congressionally Mandated Report:
Mental and Behavioral Health Care Services for
Certain Former Members of the Armed Forces
Released Under a Condition Other than Honorable
(38 U.S.C. § 1720I(f))

May 2024

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Background

In accordance with 38 U.S.C. § 1720I(f), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is required to submit to Congress an annual report on the mental and behavioral health care services provided under this section to include, with respect to the year preceding the report, the number of eligible individuals who were furnished mental or behavioral health care services under this section, disaggregated by the number of men who received such services and the number of women who received such services; the number of individuals who requested an initial mental health assessment under subsection (a)(1); the types of mental or behavioral health care needs treated under this section; the demographics of individuals being treated under this section, including age, era of service in the Armed Forces, branch of service in the Armed Forces, and geographic location; the average number of visits for an individual for mental or behavioral health care under this section; and such other information as VA considers appropriate.

Report

This report provides information regarding VA's implementation of 38 U.S.C. § 1720I.

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has modified the current electronic health records (EHR), both the VistA EHR and the Cerner EHR, to include additional information on the provision of care for OTH individuals. EHR modifications for documenting eligibility and status have been completed.

As shown in Figure 1 (page 2), there were a total of 9,671 members of the Armed Forces released under a condition other than honorable (OTH) individuals who received mental or behavioral health care at a VA medical facility in fiscal year (FY) 2023. Of these, 5,962 were seen for outpatient mental health care compared to 4,692 OTH individuals seen for outpatient mental health care in FY 2022. OTH individuals with adjudicated or service-connected disabilities may be eligible for non-mental health care.

Based upon a review of information within the EHR for former Service members with OTH discharges during FY 2023, Quarter (Q) 4 reporting references those receiving direct VHA care services):

- 5,962 unique individuals were treated in outpatient mental health settings.
- 352 unique individuals had an inpatient mental health stay.

132 unique individuals had a residential rehabilitation stay.

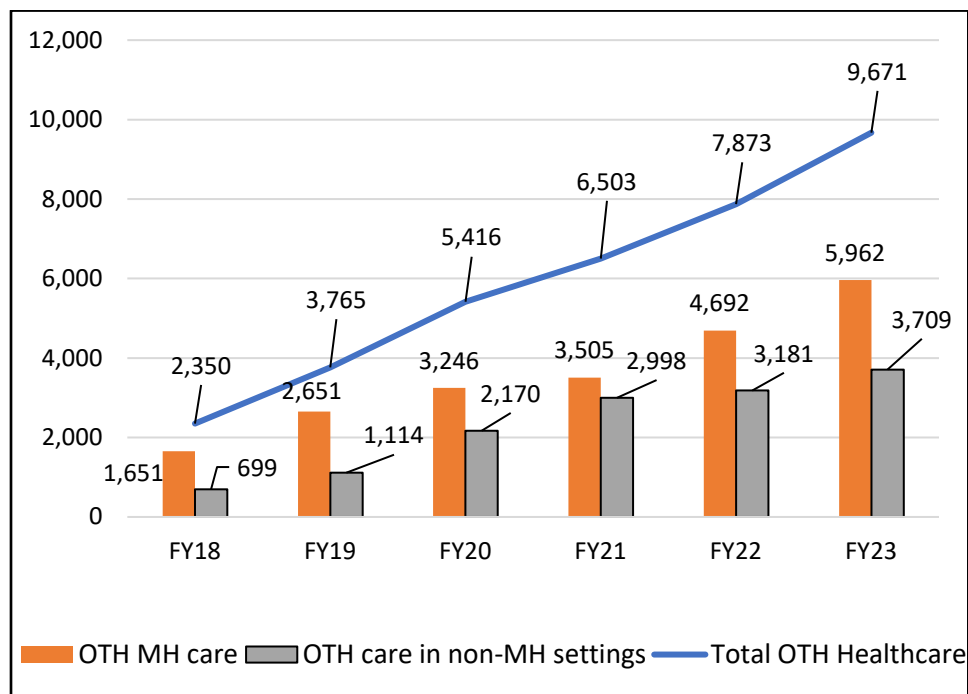
- The average number of Mental Health (MH) encounters¹ = 14 per individual.
- Maximum number of MH encounters for an individual=379.

¹ Encounters are outpatient interactions between a patient and healthcare provider(s) for the purpose of providing health care service(s) or assessing the health status of a patient. Encounters include a diagnosis and procedure code.

- Average age = 47 years (Age; Min = 18 years; Max = 94 years).
- Of the 9,671 OTH individuals, 728 were female and 8,943 were male.
- The most common mental and behavioral health diagnoses treated under this section were as follows:
 - 27% Major Depressive Disorder
 - 21% Substance Use Disorder
 - 18% Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
 - 7% Serious Mental Illnesses, e.g., schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or psychosis

Of the 9,671 OTH individuals treated anywhere in VA in FY 2023, 66.4% had been treated in VA mental health between FY 2020 and FY 2022.

Figure 1. VHA Direct Health Care Services Provided to the OTH Population



VA does not collect information on requests for an initial mental health assessment or any other medical procedure. VA records patient requests for care by scheduling appointments for patients to be seen by a clinician. It is assumed that the clinician and patient will discuss assessment and treatment needs to determine what assessments and treatments are appropriate, and then these will be scheduled and provided by clinicians. The assessment or procedure is documented only after care is received. This process is designed to ensure that patients do not make medical decisions for themselves without clinician input, as this could be dangerous to the patient. As such,

VA can only provide information about who has received a mental health assessment, not who has requested one. Mental health assessment is a standard component of mental health encounters, which are reported on page 4.

As required by 38 U.S.C. § 1720l(f)(2)(D)(ii)-(iv), Tables 1-3 below reflect the branch of service, service era, and location of service for OTH Individuals served within direct VHA care.

Table 1. Branch of Service (Number = 9,671)

Air Force	503
Army	3537
Coast Guard	39
Marine Corps	2445
Navy	3132
Undetermined	15

Table 2. Era of Service (Number [REDACTED])

Korean	16
Post Korean	16
Vietnam Era	630
Post Vietnam Era	1743
Persian Gulf War	5372
Operation Desert Shield	[REDACTED]
Undetermined	1887

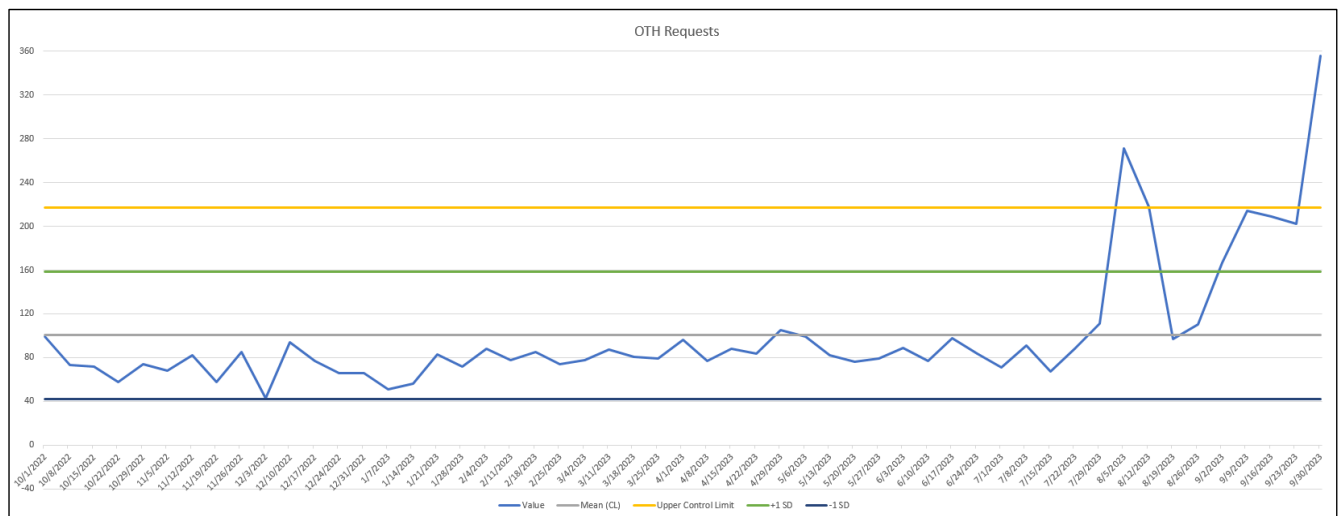
Table 3. Location and Unique Number of OTH Individuals Served

Location	Unique Individual s Served	Location	Unique Individual s Served	Location	Unique Individuals Served
Alaska	25	Louisiana	205	Oklahoma	172
Alabama	197	Massachusetts	114	Oregon	125
Arkansas	118	Maryland	65	Pennsylvania	356
Arizona	245	Maine	35	Philippines	[REDACTED]
California	993	Michigan	206	Puerto Rico	34
Colorado	143	Minnesota	91	Rhode Island	32
Connecticut	59	Missouri	240	South Carolina	242
District of Columbia	92	Mississippi	168	South Dakota	30

Location	Unique Individual s Served	Location	Unique Individual s Served	Location	Unique Individuals Served
Delaware	44	Montana	35	Tennessee	265
Florida	885	North Carolina	476	Texas	1002
Georgia	363	North Dakota	36	Utah	43
Hawaii	80	Nebraska	51	Virginia	241
Iowa	97	New Hampshire	28	Vermont	10
Idaho	32	New Jersey	94	Washington	212
Illinois	262	New Mexico	53	Wisconsin	100
Indiana	137	Nevada	214	West Virginia	100
Kansas	60	New York	289	Wyoming	19
Kentucky	121	Ohio	329		

Title 38 U.S.C. § 17201(f)(2)(F) requires VA to provide additional information as the Secretary considers appropriate. VHA continues to monitor OTH Service member requests on a weekly basis for character of discharge review. With the onset of the Coronavirus Disease, 2019 pandemic, requests decreased significantly from prior years and have remained steady across FY 2021 and FY 2022. As demonstrated in Figure 2 below, requests for character of discharge review have remained consistent across FY 2023. Please note, a single spike as shown in September is not unusual and has occurred occasionally when mapped out over the years.

Figure 2. Requests for Character of Discharge Review in FY 2023



Community Care

VA evaluated the cohort of OTH individuals with services delivered by non-VA providers. In FY 2023, VA authorized care related to mental health treatment for 335 eligible individuals (45 female, 290 male). To identify the health care needs provided under this section, a listing of unique patients by standardized episode of care (SEOC) is included in Table 4 below. As previously noted, the identification of individuals who have requested an initial mental health assessment cannot be determined.

Table 4. Services by SEOC and Unique Number of OTH Individuals Served

SEOC	Unique Individuals Served *
Acute Inpatient Psychiatric Involuntary	
Acute Inpatient Psychiatric Voluntary	15
Addiction Psychiatry Outpatient	
COMPACT MH Outpatient	
Family and Couples Psychotherapy Outpatient	15
Mental Health Intensive Outpatient	16
Mental Health Outpatient	10
Mental Health Residential Treatment	47
Neuropsych Evaluation	
Outpatient Addiction Psychiatry	
Psychiatry Outpatient	49
Psychotherapy Outpatient	234
Treatment Resistant Depression	

*Patient may have received a referral for more than one SEOC

Tables 5,6 and 7 provide additional information on the eligible individuals for whom VA authorized care related to mental health treatment in FY 2023. More specifically, Table 5 found below provides a breakdown based upon associated branches of service; Table 6 found on page 6 provides a breakdown based upon the era of service; and Table 7 also found on page 6 provides a breakdown of unique eligible individuals receiving services by state of residence.

Table 5. Branch of Service (Number =)

Air Force	17
Army	137
Coast Guard	
Marine Corps	91
Navy	87

Table 6. Era of Service (Number = [REDACTED])

Vietnam Era	13
Post-Vietnam Era	39
Persian Gulf War	268
Undetermined	15

Table 7. Location and Unique Number of OTH Individuals Served

Location	Unique Individuals Served	Location	Unique Individuals Served	Location	Unique Individuals Served
Alabama	11	Maine	[REDACTED]	Ohio	[REDACTED]
Alaska	[REDACTED]	Maryland	[REDACTED]	Oklahoma	[REDACTED]
Arizona	[REDACTED]	Massachusetts	[REDACTED]	Oregon	[REDACTED]
Arkansas	[REDACTED]	Michigan	[REDACTED]	Pennsylvania	[REDACTED]
California	58	Minnesota	[REDACTED]	Puerto Rico	[REDACTED]
Colorado	10	Mississippi	[REDACTED]	South Carolina	[REDACTED]
Connecticut	[REDACTED]	Missouri	[REDACTED]	Tennessee	[REDACTED]
Delaware	[REDACTED]	Montana	[REDACTED]	Texas	61
Florida	31	Nebraska	[REDACTED]	Utah	[REDACTED]
Georgia	[REDACTED]	Nevada	[REDACTED]	Vermont	[REDACTED]
Hawaii	[REDACTED]	New Hampshire	[REDACTED]	Virgin Islands	[REDACTED]
Illinois	[REDACTED]	New Jersey	[REDACTED]	Virginia	[REDACTED]
Indiana	[REDACTED]	New Mexico	[REDACTED]	Washington	[REDACTED]
Iowa	[REDACTED]	New York	[REDACTED]	West Virginia	[REDACTED]
Kansas	[REDACTED]	North Carolina	14	Other	[REDACTED]
Louisiana	[REDACTED]	North Dakota	[REDACTED]		

Conclusion

Title 38 U.S.C. § 1720I expanded access to mental health services for some OTH individuals. To reduce the suicide rate among Veterans, Service members, and former Service members, VA strives to make mental health care as widely available as possible. VA has the greatest respect for the men and women who have served in the Nation's Armed Forces, and VA will not relent in efforts to connect those who are experiencing an emotional or mental health crisis with lifesaving support.

Department of Veterans Affairs
May 2024