

# MENTAL HEALTH ACCESS TO CONTINUED CARE AND ENHANCEMENT OF SUPPORT SERVICES (MENTAL HEALTH ACCESS) ACT

*LEGISLATION TO HELP OUR SERVICEMEMBERS AND VETERANS RECEIVE PROPER DIAGNOSES, AND  
INCREASED ACCESS TO THE BEST MENTAL HEALTH CARE AND SUPPORT*

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**The Problem – Our servicemembers have served and sacrificed throughout the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. They have left their families and homes, serving multiple deployments, protecting our nation’s interests at home and abroad. We owe them a medical evaluation system that treats them fairly and gives them the proper diagnosis and we owe them access to the mental health care they have earned and deserve.**

In 2012, we have lost a servicemember every day to suicide – outpacing combat deaths. Every 80 minutes, a veteran commits suicide.

We have asked a lot of our military members and their families over the last 10 years of war and they deserve access to consistent, quality behavioral health care and support services to address their needs. We must work to reduce the stigma of seeking behavioral health care through innovative, evidence-based resiliency and suicide prevention programs while ensuring their behavioral health care is based on standardized and validated screening tools and clinical best practices.

## **The Solution – The Mental Health ACCESS Act of 2012**

**The Mental Health ACCESS Act of 2012** seeks to improve access to support services and care:

- *Enhancement of Oversight for DOD Suicide Prevention and Resilience Programs:* The Mental Health ACCESS Act would require DOD to create comprehensive, standardized suicide prevention program. It would also require the Department to better oversee mental health care for servicemembers, and ensure that medical best practices are being used, and allow outside experts to help DOD provide the highest quality care possible.
- *Expanding Services for Families:* The Mental Health ACCESS Act would expand eligibility for a variety of VA mental health services to family members. This will help families cope with the stresses of deployments, and help strengthen the support network that is critical to servicemembers returning from deployment.
- *Improve Training and Education for Providers:* The Mental Health ACCESS Act would develop and implement continuing education programs for providers as well as other personnel who a servicemember could seek assistance from including chaplains and medics.
- *Creating More Peer to Peer Counseling Opportunities:* The Mental Health ACCESS Act would establish a more formal relationship between the VA and DOD to give servicemembers an opportunity to serve as peer counselors to fellow Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. It would also require VA to offer peer support services at all medical centers.
- *Require VA to Make Critical Improvements to Mental Health Services:* The Mental Health ACCESS Act would require VA to establish accurate and reliable measures for mental health services, and to implement a credible staffing model. Without these improvements, VA cannot understand the unmet needs of veterans, and cannot be effective in allocating its personnel and resources.