

Breaking Down Barriers to Seeking Mental Health Treatment

A [recent survey](#) conducted by the New England Journal of Medicine found that service members identify important barriers to seeking mental health services. Although some of concerns are valid, many of perceived barriers are fueled by misinformation about mental health treatment.

Mental health problems are fairly common among service members and members of the general population.



Accessing Mental Health Treatment

Perceived Barriers

- I don't know where to get help
- I don't have adequate transportation
- It is difficult to schedule an appointment
- There would be difficulty getting time off work for treatment
- Mental health care costs too much money

When people lack information about available mental health resources or do not live near a facility that provides mental health treatment, perceived barriers are legitimate. TRICARE beneficiaries can find the help they need by calling 1-888-TRIWEST, or checking out all the resources organized on this web site.

What You Should Know

- If you do not live near a facility that provides mental health treatment there are other ways to get help.
- If you are enrolled in TRICARE or insured under TRICARE Reserve Select (TRS), find a [TRICARE](#) Provider online or call 1-888-TRIWEST for help finding a provider in your area.

More Provider Locator Resources

[Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy—Find a Therapist](#)
or call 1-212-647-1890.

[American Psychological Association—Find a Psychologist](#)
or call 1-800-964-2000.

[Finding a Counselor](#)
Military Spouse Career Center

[Locate a Vet Center](#)

[Military OneSource](#)
Stateside: 1-800-342-9647, Overseas: 800-3429-6477, or Overseas collect calls: 1-484-530-5908, available 24 hours per day, 7 days a week.

- Some providers offer evening appointments.
- It is not always necessary to see a provider on a weekly basis. For example, it may be possible to meet with a provider monthly.
- Your primary care doctor may be able to prescribe medications for certain problems, such as sleep, anxiety, or depression. You can discuss these concerns with your physician during your general medical appointment, which would reduce the time away from work.
- Learn more about your [TRICARE](#) behavioral health benefits. For guard and reserve service members and families, learn more about [TRICARE Reserve Select](#).
- If you have other health insurance, check out the behavioral health benefit under that plan.
- If your insurance does not cover necessary services, some therapists offer a sliding fee scale. University training clinics also offer mental health services at a reduced rate. Community mental health centers are another resource, often with reduced treatment fees.
- Some self help tools are free or cost very little compared to the cost of professional care. Self care is often an appropriate step toward personal well-being. Investigating self help resources is also a good practice toward becoming an educated health care consumer.

Stigma Associated with Seeking Mental Health Treatment

Perceived Barriers to Treatment

- Getting help is too embarrassing
- I will harm my career
- Members of my unit might have less confidence in me
- My unit leadership might treat me differently
- My leaders might blame me for my mental health problem
- I might be seen as weak

While the military has made an effort to reduce stigma associated with accessing mental health services, it continues to be a barrier for many individuals who need help. Taking control of your physical and mental health demonstrates strength and models positive self care to others.

What You Should Know

- You can get help without seeing a mental health specialist:
 - Your primary care doctor may be able to prescribe medications for certain problems, such as sleep, anxiety, or depression.
 - There are a number of self help steps you can take on your own. Check out the self-help tools available under each condition category represented on this web site
 - Often it is family, friends, or clergy who are excellent sources of support.
- Consider the cost-benefit ratio:
 - Typically problems don't just disappear. Although it may be difficult to seek help, your family, friends, career, and personal well-being have a greater chance of being impacted negatively if symptoms are ignored and treatment is not received for a chronic problem.
- You are not alone:
 - Sometimes service members are subjected to traumatic or very stressful events, such as combat. It is normal for people to have reactions to these events that are difficult to cope with.
 - It is important for you to realize that many people seek mental health treatment. For those serving in the military, mental health reactions are normal reactions to highly abnormal and stressful situations.
- The facts about mental health:

- *Mental health problems are common.* About 22.1 percent of American adults (about 1 in 5) suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year [[reference](#): National Institute of Mental Health.]
- Mental health diagnoses are categorized by DSM-IV codes within the U.S. health care system. Categorizing is important for managing treatment, tracking health improvement, medication management, etc. Hundreds of DSM-IV codes are assigned to mental/emotional health conditions, ranging from serious conditions, like schizophrenia, to less serious conditions, like phobia.
- *Certain disorders are fairly common.* For example, in a given year about 19.1 million (13.3 %) American adults suffer from an anxiety disorder and 18.8 million (9.5%) suffer from a depressive disorder, whereas only about 2.2 million (1.1%) suffer from schizophrenia [[reference](#): National Institute of Mental Health.]
- A recent survey found that 15.6 to 17.1% of service members met screening criteria for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder after duty in Iraq [[reference](#): Hoge, C.W., Castro, C.A., Messer, S.C., McGurk, D., Cotting, D.I., & Koffman, R.L. (2004). Combat duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, Mental Health Problems, and Barriers to Care. *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 351, 13-22.]

Confidence in Mental Health Treatment

Perceived Barriers

- I don't trust mental health professionals
- Mental health care doesn't work

If you have never had contact with a mental health professional before, or if you have had a negative past experience, it makes sense to be hesitant about trusting a mental health provider. Often people have misconceptions about what occurs during therapy treatment (e.g., lying on a couch, being “analyzed”, focusing on childhood memories, etc.)

What You Should Know

- Most mental health providers will work with you to solve your current problems in a manner that feels comfortable for you.
- As a consumer of mental health services you have a right to understand the different types of services that are available. There is generally more than one way to help you solve any problem.

- Research studies have documented that certain treatments are effective for certain problems. Some treatments have not been formally researched at all. You have a right to know if evidence-based research supports the treatment you are receiving.
- Different organizations, such as the Veterans Administration or the Department of Defense, have established guidelines for treating most mental health problems. You have a right to know if your provider is following these guidelines.
- Seeking help is not generally a comfortable situation. If you are working with a provider, and despite open communication, feel like you just don't "connect", you have the right to select another provider.

[[reference](#): Hoge, C.W., Castro, C.A., Messer, S.C., McGurk, D., Cotting, D.I., & Koffman, R.L. (2004). Combat duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, Mental Health Problems, and Barriers to Care. *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 351, 13-22.]