

VFW Applauds White House Efforts to Stop Military Suicide

The VFW fully supports the president's vision to prevent military suicides

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The national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S., the nation's largest organization of combat veterans, applauded the president's signing of an executive order this morning designed to curb military and veteran suicide and improve the delivery of mental health resources to our nation's heroes.

"Today, more American service members die by their own hands than at the hands of our enemies, which is why the VFW is proud to see our commander-in-chief taking action to address this national crisis," said VFW National Commander John E. Hamilton. "Long, repeat deployments through more than a decade of war have taken an immeasurable toll on our nation's newest generation of heroes. We have an obligation to care for these brave men and women when they return from the front lines, and we think this executive order will be a critical step in fulfilling that obligation."

The executive order, "Improving Access to Mental Health Services for Veterans, Service Members and Military Families," which President Obama announced during a visit to Fort Bliss in Texas, includes nearly a dozen specific initiatives designed to improve mental health resources and intervention tools.

Among the initiatives included in the executive order, VA and its partner agencies are directed to increase the capacity of the veteran crisis line, 1-800-273-8255; leverage training initiatives to hire 800 peer-to-peer counselors and 1,600 mental health professionals by June 2013; ensure veterans in crisis receive care within 24 hours; develop a National Research Action Plan across federal agencies to improve early intervention for those suffering from invisible wounds; and create an Interagency Task Force reporting directly to the White House on strategies to improve outreach and intervention for veterans, service members, and their families.

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The VFW fully supports the president's vision to prevent military suicides and improve mental health care delivery, but Hamilton also expressed concerns about potential funding shortfalls to accomplish the president's goals.

"We hope that as VA and the Pentagon work with their partner agencies to deliver on these initiatives, that a comprehensive plan is in place to fund it without negatively affecting the continuum of care that our veterans rely on," said Hamilton, who received three Purple Hearts for wounds sustained as a Marine Corps rifleman in Vietnam. "This morning the president pledged to help the brave military men and women who continue to suffer in silence, and the VFW stands ready to assist the Administration in delivering on this pledge."