Report On the Mental Health Program for Veterans

As Required by

2018-19 General Appropriations Act,

Senate Bill 1, 85th Legislature, Regular Session, 2017 (Article II, Health and Human Services Commission, Rider 174)

and Health and Safety Code, Section 1001.224 as amended

Health and Human Services

November 2017
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Executive Summary


HHSC and the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) coordinate to administer the Mental Health Program for Veterans. This program provides peer counseling services to service members, veterans, and their families through contracts with local mental health authorities (LMHAs), local behavioral health authorities (LBHAs), and Texas A&M University Health Science Center (TAMUHSC). In fiscal year 2017, LMHAs and LBHAs reported an overall increase in the number of services delivered and the number of individuals trained compared to fiscal year 2016:

- 133,056 peer services were delivered to service members, veterans, and their families, representing a 34 percent increase.
- 6,074 peers were trained, representing a 49 percent increase.
- 18,155 interactions with justice-involved service members and veterans, occurred, representing a 36 percent increase.

Increases in peer services delivered by and interactions with trusted, trained peers suggests the program successfully engaged service members, veterans, and their family members; increased awareness of mental health service options; and increased access to needed mental health care services.

Recommendations for the ongoing operation of the program include:

- Enhance coordination with other veteran and behavioral health initiatives to increase access to mental health resources for service members, veterans, and their families.
- Focus on effective engagement of veterans and family members, including women veterans and veterans living in rural areas.
- Continue to enhance military-informed care training for peers, mental health professionals, and community partners.
1. Introduction

The rider and code require HHSC to submit a report on the Mental Health Program for Veterans annually, by December 1, to the Governor. Per the rider, the report must describe program activities from the preceding fiscal year, including:

- a description of how the program is operated and a summary of the contracts issued and services provided through those contracts;
- the number of veterans served;
- the number of peers and volunteer coordinators trained; and
- recommendations for program improvements.

In addition, the code requires an evaluation of the services provided under the subchapter.
2. Background

HHSC and TVC coordinate to administer the Mental Health Program for Veterans. Services are implemented by TVC, LMHAs, LBHAs, and TAMUHSC.

The program was initially established by S.B. 1325, 81st Legislature, Regular Session, 2009, to provide peer-to-peer counseling for veterans. Subsequent legislation defined peers as service members, veterans, and family members; outlined the role of peer service coordinators; assigned training and technical assistance responsibilities to TVC;\(^1\) added requirements to address needs of women veterans and veterans living in rural areas;\(^2\) and required the program to include:\(^3\)

- access to licensed mental health professionals;
- peer training and technical assistance;
- jail diversion services;
- recruitment, retention, and screening of community-based therapist;
- suicide prevention training for coordinators and peers; and
- grants to regional and local organizations.\(^4\)

The 2016-17 General Appropriations Act, H.B. 1, 84th Legislature, Regular Session, 2015 (Article II, Department of State Health Services, Rider 62), appropriated $5 million per fiscal year of the biennium to administer the program.

\(^1\) House Bill (H.B.) 19, 84th Legislature, Regular Session, 2015.

\(^2\) S.B. 1304 and S.B. 1305, 83rd Legislature, Regular Session, 2013.

\(^3\) H.B. 2392, 83rd Legislature, Regular Session, 2013.

\(^4\) S.B. 27, 85th Legislature, Regular Session, 2017, modified the program by removing the requirement to provide grants to regional and local organizations.
3. Program Operation and Summary of Contracts Issued

Using $5 million appropriated for fiscal year 2017, HHSC implemented the Mental Health Program for Veterans through contracts with TVC, LMHAs, LBHAs, and TAMUHSC. Table 1 shows the funding contracted to these organizations to implement the program.

Contracts

Table 1. Summary of Contracts Issued for Fiscal Year 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Services Provided</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LMHAs and LBHAs</td>
<td>To hire or contract for peer service coordinators</td>
<td>$3.1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAMUHSC</td>
<td>To provide online information and resources through the TexVet program</td>
<td>$200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVC</td>
<td>To provide training and technical assistance to peer service coordinators, community-based partners, and providers; to coordinate services for justice-involved veterans; to hire and support field clinicians; and award grants to local organizations</td>
<td>$1.7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$5 million</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Local Mental Health and Behavioral Health Authorities

HHSC contracted with 37 LMHAs and LBHAs to hire or contract for peer service coordinators to provide direct peer-to-peer services to engage veterans and family members who have experienced military trauma, are at risk for isolation from support services, and do not seek services through traditional channels.
**Texas A&M University Health Science Center**

HHSC contracted with TAMUHSC to provide online information and resources through the TexVet program. TexVet provides up-to-date information focused on mental health services and resources through the [www.texvet.org](http://www.texvet.org) website. TexVet also coordinates information through the Veterans Portal at Texas.gov and 211 Texas. The TexVet website is linked to TVC’s online peer platform.

**Texas Veterans Commission**

HHSC contracted with TVC to provide training and technical assistance to peer service coordinators, community-based partners, and providers, and to coordinate services for justice-involved veterans (JIV). TVC also subcontracted with Samaritan Center for Counseling and Pastoral Care to hire and support field clinicians.

In fulfilling its responsibility to provide training and technical assistance, TVC worked with peers and peer service coordinators, criminal justice personnel, and community- and faith-based organizations to increase partners’ and providers’ military cultural competency.

**Training Peers and Peer Service Coordinators**

TVC held 55 trainings and 140 technical assistance visits with 37 LMHAs and LBHAs in fiscal year 2017. TVC also maintains an online platform to connect peers, peer service coordinators, and licensed mental health providers with one another, as well as to resources, information, and training opportunities. In fiscal year 2017, 694 new peers registered on the online platform, bringing the overall total of registered peers to 3,571.

**Licensed Mental Health Professionals**

TVC also coordinates training provided to community partners and licensed mental health professionals to increase partners’ and providers’ military cultural competency. During fiscal year 2017, TVC trained 280 licensed mental health professionals to better interact with and understand the veteran population being served. Through trainings, 38 continuing education units were provided to 19 licensed mental health professionals across the state. An additional 30 continuing education units were provided to 15 licensed mental health professionals resulting from training TVC conducted at LMHAs and LBHAs.
In fiscal year 2017, 68 new providers registered on TVC’s online platform, for an overall total of 158 registered providers.

**Community-based Organizations**

TVC conducted training and technical assistance visits with community groups in order to enhance and/or expand services to peers, including 6 trainings and 30 technical assistance visits related to community-based organization collaborations, and 12 trainings and 14 technical assistance visits related to faith-based organization collaborations.

In fiscal year 2017, TVC provided information on how to better serve veterans to 311 community- and faith-based organizations, resulting in over 200 referrals to TexVet for inclusion in its registry of veteran-serving organizations.

**Criminal Justice Personnel**

TVC worked closely with the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) to design a training for TCOLE-certified personnel, called “De-Escalation of Trauma-Affected Veterans.” These trainings are coordinated with local police, sheriff, and other law enforcement departments. In fiscal year 2017, over 387 law enforcement officers in 16 communities received information on how to de-escalate situations involving trauma-affected veterans.

TVC also provides training and technical assistance to probationers and parole officers across the state to help them identify the needs of trauma-affected veterans and gain access to local resources to meet their needs. In fiscal year 2017, over 80 parole officers and 20 re-entry personnel were trained in military-related traumas and cultural competency.

**Grants**

In addition to contracts executed to administer the program, TVC combined a portion of its fiscal year 2017 funding with funds from its Fund for Veterans’ Assistance grant program. TVC awarded $2.1 million of these funds, through 11 grants, to local nonprofit organizations and units of local government. Grant awards support programs providing clinical counseling services and/or peer-delivered services. Table 2 shows the grants TVC awarded in fiscal year 2017 as part of the Mental Health Program for Veterans.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grantee Organization</th>
<th>TVC Region</th>
<th>Services Provided</th>
<th>Amount Awarded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Charities of Central Texas</td>
<td>Central Texas</td>
<td>Clinical counseling services</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Charities of Fort Worth</td>
<td>North Texas</td>
<td>Clinical counseling services</td>
<td>$75,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center Point</td>
<td>Central Texas</td>
<td>Clinical counseling services</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlie’s Place Recovery Center</td>
<td>North Texas</td>
<td>Clinical counseling services</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Healthcare</td>
<td>East Texas</td>
<td>Clinical counseling services</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas County Community Supervision and Corrections Department</td>
<td>North Texas</td>
<td>Clinical counseling services</td>
<td>$150,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Support Services of Amarillo</td>
<td>Panhandle</td>
<td>Peer-delivered services</td>
<td>$200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage Management Consultants</td>
<td>Statewide</td>
<td>Peer-delivered services</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian Night Shelter</td>
<td>North Texas</td>
<td>Peer-delivered services</td>
<td>$200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Amistad</td>
<td>West Texas</td>
<td>Clinical counseling services</td>
<td>$150,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grantee Organization</td>
<td>TVC Region</td>
<td>Services Provided</td>
<td>Amount Awarded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samaritan Center for Counseling and Pastoral Care</td>
<td>Statewide</td>
<td>Clinical counseling services</td>
<td>$500,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total                                         |            |                                   | $2,075,000      |

Effective September 1, 2017, awarding grants as part of the Mental Health Program for Veterans is not required.\(^5\)

4. Number of Veterans Served

Program services are delivered to service members, veterans, and their families by trained and certified peers who have similar lived experiences. Table 3 shows the number of program services provided in fiscal year 2017. Additional information about services is provided below.

Table 3. Number of Services Provided by Program Services Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Service</th>
<th>Number of Reported Services Delivered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer-to-peer services</td>
<td>133,056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling by mental health professionals</td>
<td>1,480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services coordinated for justice-involved veterans</td>
<td>18,155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>152,691</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Peer Service Coordinators

Peer service coordinators, hired or contracted by LMHAs and LBHAs, provide direct peer-to-peer services to engage veterans and family members who have experienced military trauma, are at risk for isolation from support services, and do not seek services through traditional channels.

Peer service coordinators are part of the statewide Military Veteran Peer Network (MVPN), an affiliation of certified peer service coordinators, peers, and community partners charged with promoting trust and camaraderie, identifying and vetting community resources, and collectively contributing to communities.

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6 Because of the promise of anonymity to encourage and establish trust, data provided in the table may be duplicated and may represent individual veterans and family members who receive multiple types of services and/or more than one instance of a service provided.
Peer service coordinators self-identify as service members, veterans, or family members and are trained and certified by TVC using HHSC-approved curricula. Peer services include one-on-one peer counseling, as well as structured support groups led by trained and certified peers.

Peer service coordinators and trained peers also consult with community-based partners, including veteran service organizations, schools, and faith-based organizations, to identify service members, veterans, and family members who could benefit from direct peer services.

Of the 37 LMHAs and LBHAs with peer service coordinators:

- 26 serve veterans and family members residing in rural counties;
- 11 reported having initiatives with a specific focus on the needs of women veterans; and
- 14 programs have a woman serving as peer service coordinator.

In fiscal year 2017, LMHAs and LBHAs reported trained peers interacted 90,311 times with service members, veterans, and family members; 7,409 clinical mental health services referrals; and 35,336 referrals to community organizations for supportive services.

**Field Clinicians**

Trained peers who are also licensed mental health professionals, known as field clinicians, provide short-term clinical counseling sessions. TVC subcontracted with the Samaritan Center for Counseling and Pastoral Care to hire and support field clinicians. Field clinicians in the Austin, Dallas, Killeen, San Antonio, and Waco areas delivered 1,480 face-to-face or telephonic clinical services during fiscal year 2017.

**Justice-Involved Veterans Engagement**

TVC coordinates services for JIV by coordinating and providing training and technical assistance to local, state, and federal agencies in the criminal justice
setting. There are key points\(^7\) in the criminal justice system where JIV can be provided information on veteran services and benefits that may prevent recidivism. In fiscal year 2017, LMHAs and LBHAs reported trained peers interacted 18,155 times with JIV at the key points of initial law enforcement response, through Veterans Treatment Court programs,\(^8\) at county and state jails and prisons, and within the probation and parole system.

Services for justice-involved veterans are coordinated through TVC’s JIV coordinator. The JIV coordinator provides technical assistance to peers and peer service coordinators interacting with JIV at key points in the criminal justice system, including:

- sponsoring and training peers to participate in Veteran Treatment Courts as mentors;
- providing training and technical assistance to Veteran Treatment Court staff;
- working with the Texas Commission on Jail Standards to provide all identified veterans entering county jails with “jail cards” to help them access benefits; and
- providing technical assistance and training to support the Texas Department of Criminal Justice’s Veteran Reentry Dorm\(^9\) and other projects.

\(^7\) TVC uses the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administrations’ GAINS Center for Behavioral Health and Justice Transformation’s Sequential Intercept Model to identify key criminal justice system intercepts.

\(^8\) Codified in Texas Government Code, Section 124.001, Veteran Treatment Court Program is a Texas specialty court providing treatment, counseling, and peer mentoring as an alternative to incarceration to eligible veteran defendants. There are currently 38 court programs.

\(^9\) TDCJ’s Veteran Treatment Dorm at the Travis State Jail is a voluntary six-month program offering veteran offenders rehabilitation programming. The dorm is designed to mimic the military squadron structure. Prior to release, veteran offenders are matched with a peer living in the community to assist in securing housing, upgrading military discharge status, enrolling in veteran health benefits, seeking substance abuse or PTSD treatment, accessing local employment services, and assisting with other reintegration issues. There were 48 new admissions in fiscal year 2017.
5. Number of Peers Trained

As part of its contracted responsibility, TVC provides training through HHSC-approved curricula to peers, peer service coordinators, LMHA and LBHA staff, and community-based partners and providers.

Training Initiatives

MVPN Basic Training is an HHSC-approved curriculum focusing on developing peer support skills, identifying mental health risk factors, and accessing resources. TVC trains and certifies instructors at the community level to provide MVPN Basic Training. The training is provided at LMHA and LBHA locations, statewide training events, and via web-based trainings in collaboration with the Texas Council of Community Centers. In fiscal year 2017, there were 107 TVC-certified MVPN Basic Training instructors and 122 MVPN Basic Training Classes held.

TVC facilitates other training initiatives with HHSC-approved curricula designed for peer-to-peer group facilitators, peers mentors in Veteran Treatment Court programs, and facilitators for women veterans peer support groups:

- Bring Everyone in the Zone (BEITZ)
- Veterans Court Advocacy Mentor Program
- Table Talk™: Color Me Camo
- Suicide Awareness
- Mental Health First Aid for Veterans
- Military-informed Care

Table 4 shows the number of peers trained for fiscal year 2017.

Table 4. Number of Peers Trained

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Curriculum</th>
<th>Number of Peers Trained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MVPN Basic Training</td>
<td>1,312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEITZ</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Curriculum</td>
<td>Number of Peers Trained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans Court Advocacy Mentor Program</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table Talk™: Color Me Camo</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide Awareness</td>
<td>1,129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health First Aid for Veterans</td>
<td>633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military-Informed Care</td>
<td>586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other community trainings</td>
<td>1,899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,074</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Program Evaluation and Recommendations

Overall, the Mental Health Program for Veterans was successful at meeting its goals and provided significantly more services than in fiscal year 2016. However, HHSC and TVC will coordinate efforts to address the following recommendations to improve the program in fiscal year 2018.

Recommendation 1: Enhance coordination with other veteran and behavioral health initiatives to increase access to mental health resources for service members, veterans, and their families.

In fiscal year 2017, oversight of the Mental Health Program for Veterans was transferred to HHSC’s Office of Mental Health Coordination, where the Texas Veterans + Family Alliance grant program is also administered. Additionally, the subject matter expert for the program transitioned to HHSC’s Office of Veteran Services. Both transitions provide opportunities to coordinate the program with other veteran and behavioral health initiatives, including HHSC’s efforts to implement the Statewide Behavioral Health Strategic Plan, and participation on the Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans Services led by TVC.

Recommendation 2: Focus on effective engagement of veterans and family members, including women veterans and veterans living in rural areas.

Effective September 1, 2017, TVC hired a Women and Rural Veteran Coordinator, merging efforts of TVC’s Women Veterans Program and the Veterans Mental Health Program. The coordinator will provide a greater focus on gaps in service coordination for women and rural veterans’ mental health needs.

Recommendation 3: Continue to enhance military-informed care training for peers, mental health professionals, and community partners.

HHSC and TVC will continue to identify opportunities in the upcoming fiscal year to connect peers, licensed mental health professionals, and community partners with training on military-informed care.
7. Conclusion

In fiscal year 2017, the Mental Health Program for Veterans accomplished its mission to increase veterans’ access to needed mental health care services through interaction with trusted, trained peers. The program effectively engaged service members, veterans, and family members to help them become aware of mental health service options and helped increase their access to community-based mental health services.

In fiscal year 2018, HHSC will coordinate with TVC to implement changes in the program required by S.B. 27, and will continue to evaluate the program and address recommendations.
## List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEITZ</td>
<td>Bring Everyone in the Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.B.</td>
<td>House Bill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HHSC</td>
<td>Health and Human Services Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JIV</td>
<td>Justice-Involved Veteran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LBHAs</td>
<td>Local Behavioral Health Authorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMHAs</td>
<td>Local Mental Health Authorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MVPN</td>
<td>Military Veteran Peer Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.B</td>
<td>Senate Bill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAMUHSC</td>
<td>Texas A&amp;M University Health Science Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVC</td>
<td>Texas Veterans Commission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>