

Presentation to the House Defense and Veteran Affairs Committee: Implementation Updates

Trina K. Ita

Deputy Associate Commissioner, Behavioral
Health Services

Dr. Suzanna Hupp

Director, Office of Veteran Services



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Mental Health Program for Veterans

Background and Overview

- SB 1325 (81R), 2009, created the Mental Health (MH) Program for Veterans which initially provided peer-to-peer counseling for veterans.
- HB 19 (84R), 2015, required HHSC and the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) to coordinate the administration of the MH Program for Veterans.
- Using the \$5 million appropriated per fiscal year, HHSC implements the program through contracts with TVC, local mental health authorities (LMHAs), and Texas A&M University Health Science Center.
- In fiscal year 2017, LMHAs and Local Behavioral Health Authorities (LBHAs) reported an overall increase in the number of services delivered and the number of individuals trained compared to fiscal year 2016.
 - Over 133,000 peer services were delivered to service members, veterans, and their families, and more than 6,000 peers were trained.



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Senate Bill 27: Implementation

SB 27 (85R), 2017

- Allows for the addition of trained, licensed mental health professionals at LMHAs to provide clinical interventions for veterans and families within the MH Program for Veterans.
- Increases access for veterans and families to mental health services and seeks to decrease the overall cost associated with military traumas.
- Directs HHSC and TVC to collaborate with stakeholders to implement a pilot program in fiscal year 2019 to increase access to clinical treatment for service members, veterans, and their families residing in rural areas through veteran counselors.
- These counselors will:
 - receive military-informed care training through TVC, and
 - work in concert with Peer Service Coordinators to ensure service members, veterans, and families have access to military trauma-related mental health care.



SB 27: 2017-2018 Timeline

September
2017

- Bill effective September 1, 2017.
- TVC renews subcontract for field clinicians through fiscal year 2018 to ensure no gap in services.
- Drafted pilot concept brief, and identified potential sites.

November
2017

- Held initial conference call with Lead for Texas Council of Community Centers (TCCC) and Executive Director (ED) Consortium's Veterans Working Group to review pilot concept and seek feedback.

January
2018

- HHSC/TVC drafted statement of work (SOW) for Veteran Counselor.
- Shared SOW with ED Consortium Veterans Working Group for comments.
- Market analysis of salary conducted for mental health counselor.

February
2018

- Received and began review of Veteran Counselor SOW comments provided by TCCC and ED Consortium Veterans Working Group.

March
2018

- HHSC initiated contracting activities for fiscal year 2019 contracts.

April
2018

- HHSC/TVC met with TCCC to discuss Veteran Counselor SOW comments and plan next steps.

May
2018

- HHSC/TVC participated in conference call with identified prospective sites hosted by TCCC.



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SB 27: Next Steps

- Execute fiscal year 2019 contracts with six LMHA sites for veteran counselors.
 - Contracts will take effect on September 1, 2018.
- LMHA sites ramp up and prepare for service provision.
- Provide training and technical assistance:
 - Military-informed care; and
 - Educate providers about The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA's) community care provider programs, such as VA Choice Program and Patient Centered Community Care (PC3).
- Monitor performance reports and solicit feedback from centers, veteran counselors, and Peer Service Coordinators to evaluate effectiveness of pilot program.



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SB 578: Veteran Suicide Prevention Action Plan

- SB 578 (85R), 2017, directed HHSC to create a comprehensive action plan with short- and long-term goals to increase access to, and availability of, professional veteran health services to prevent suicide among the population.
- Example initiatives include:
 - Employment
 - Partnership with the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement and first responders
 - Educating clergy
 - 9-1-1 operators linking with LMHAs for crisis services
 - Development of public service announcements
- SB 578 Timeline:
 - HHSC plans to have all goals identified by September 1, 2018,
 - Short-term goals implemented by September, 2021, and
 - Long-term goals fully implemented by September, 2027.