



# **Report on the Mental Health Program for Veterans for Fiscal Year 2018**

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## **As Required by**

**Health and Safety Code, Section 1001.224  
and 2018-19 General Appropriations Act,  
Senate Bill 1, 85th Legislature, Regular  
Session, 2017 (Article II, Health and Human  
Services Commission, Rider 78)**

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## Executive Summary

The *Report on the Mental Health Program for Veterans* is submitted in compliance with the 2018-19 General Appropriations Act, Senate Bill (S.B.) 1, 85th Legislature, Regular Session, 2017 (Article II, Health and Human Services Commission [HHSC], Rider 78), and Health and Safety Code, Section 1001.224, as amended by S.B. 27, 85th Legislature, Regular Session, 2017. The rider and statute require a report describing the activities of the program in fiscal year 2018.

HHSC and the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) coordinate to administer the Mental Health Program for Veterans (MHPV). 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 2018, LMHAs and LBHAs reported an overall increase in the number of services delivered and the number of individuals trained compared to fiscal year 2017:

- 168,947 peer services were delivered to service members, veterans, and their families, representing a 27 percent increase;
- 6,807 peers were trained, representing a 12 percent increase;
- 28,315 interactions with justice-involved service members, veterans, and their families occurred, representing a 56 percent increase.

Increases in the amount of peer services delivered and interactions with trusted, trained peers, suggests the program successfully:

- Engaged service members, veterans, and their families;
- 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:

- Continue coordination with other veteran and behavioral health initiatives to increase access to mental health resources for service members, veterans, and their families and increase veteran suicide prevention efforts;
- Leverage partnerships with federal, state, and local organizations to enhance opportunities for women veterans and veterans living in rural areas to connect with mental health supportive services; and

- Further identify opportunities to provide Military Informed Care (MIC) training to mental health professionals and community partners.

## 1. Introduction

The rider and statute require HHSC to submit a report on the MHPV 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, a summary of the contracts issued under the program, and services provided through those contracts;
- The number of veterans served;
- The number of peers and peer service coordinators trained; and
- Recommendations for program improvements.

In addition, the statute requires an evaluation of the services provided under the program.

## 2. Background

HHSC and the TVC coordinate to administer the MHPV. Services are implemented by the TVC, LMHAs, LBHAs, and TAMUHSC. The program was 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 their families, outlined the role of peer services coordinators, assigned initiatives to address the needs of women veterans and veterans living in rural areas<sup>1</sup>, and required the program to include<sup>2</sup>:

- Access to licensed mental health professionals (LMHPs);
- Training and technical assistance for peers, peer service coordinators, and LMHPs;
- Identification, retention, and screening of community-based LMHPs;
- Suicide prevention training for peer service coordinators, and peers; and
- Jail diversion services.<sup>3</sup>

Rider 78 appropriated \$5 million per fiscal year of the biennium to administer the program.

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<sup>1</sup> S.B. 1304 and S.B. 1305, 84th Legislature, Regular Session, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> House Bill 2392, 83rd Legislature, Regular Session, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> S.B. 27, 85th Legislature, Regular Session, 2017, modified the program by changing the language of "recruiting" to "identifying" licensed mental health providers and by removing the requirement to provide grants to regional and local organizations.

## 3. Program Operations and Summary of Contracts Issued

Using \$5 million appropriated for fiscal year 2018, HHSC implemented the MHPV through contracts with TVC, LMHAs, LBHAs, and TAMUHSC. Table 1 shows the funding allocated to these organizations to implement the program.

### Contracts

**Table 1. Summary of Contracts Issued for Fiscal Year 2018**

Organization	Services Provided	Amount
LMHAs and LBHAs	To hire or contract for peer service coordinators	\$3.1 million
TAMUHSC	To provide online information and resources through the TexVet program	\$200,000
TVC	To provide training and technical assistance to peer service coordinators, community-based partners, and providers; to coordinate services for justice-involved veterans (JIV); and to hire and support field clinicians	\$1.7 million
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$5 million</b>

### 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-related 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 2-1-1 Texas. The TexVet website is linked to TVC's online peer and provider platform.

## **Texas Veterans Commission**

HHSC contracted with TVC to provide training and technical assistance to peer service coordinators, community- and faith-based organizations, LMHPs, and to coordinate services for justice-involved veterans. 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, LMHPs, and community- and faith-based organizations to increase their military cultural competency.

## **Training Peers and Peer Service Coordinators**

TVC held 20 trainings and 37 technical assistance visits with 37 LMHAs and LBHAs in fiscal year 2018. TVC also maintains an online platform to connect peers, peer service coordinators, and LMHPs with one another, as well as to resources, information, and training opportunities. In fiscal year 2018, 403 new peers registered on the online platform, bringing the overall total of registered peers to 3,986 and representing an increase of 10 percent from fiscal year 2017.

## **Licensed Mental Health Professionals**

TVC also coordinates MIC training provided to community partners and LMHPs to increase their military cultural competency. During fiscal year 2018, TVC trained 484 LMHPs to better interact with and understand the veteran population being served. Through trainings, 296 LMHPs across the state received 2,683 continuing education units.

In fiscal year 2018, 140 new providers registered on TVC's online platform, for an overall total of 223 registered providers, representing a 63 percent increase from fiscal year 2017.

## **Community-Based Organizations**

TVC conducted training and technical assistance visits with community groups to enhance or expand services to peers, including 2 trainings and 15 technical assistance visits related to community-based organization collaborations, and 32 trainings and 12 technical assistance visits related to faith-based organization collaborations.

In fiscal year 2018, TVC provided information on how to better serve veterans to 16 community- and faith-based organizations, resulting in over 31 referrals to TexVet for inclusion in its registry of veteran-serving organizations. This is a 15 percent increase from fiscal year 2017.

## **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 2018, over 711 law enforcement officers (an increase of 54 percent) in 22 communities (an increase of 72 percent) received information on how to de-escalate situations involving trauma-affected veterans.

TVC also provides training and technical assistance to probation 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 2018, over 190 Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) staff were trained in military-related traumas and cultural competency. This represents a 53 percent increase in adult supervision staff trained.

## 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 2018. Additional information about services is provided below.

**Table 2. Number of Services Provided by Program Service Type<sup>4</sup>**

Program Service	Number of Reported Services Delivered
Peer-to-peer services	168,947
Counseling by LMHPs	1,641
Services coordinated for JIV	28,315
<b>Total</b>	<b>198,903</b>

### Peer Service Coordinators

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

Peer service coordinators self-identify as service members, veterans, and their families and are trained and certified by TVC using HHSC-approved curricula. Peer services include one-on-one peer counseling, peer referrals to vetted community

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<sup>4</sup> Anonymity is of high importance to the individuals served through the MHPV. As a result, data reflected in Table 3 may be duplicated and may represent service members, veterans, and their families who receive multiple types of services or more than one instance of a service provided.

resources, peer referrals to LMHPs, and 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 their families who could benefit from direct peer services.

Of the 37 LMHAs and LBHAs with peer service coordinators:

- 26 serve service members, veterans, and their families residing in rural counties;
- 14 reported having initiatives with a specific focus on the needs of women veterans; and
- 13 programs have women serving as peer service coordinators.

In fiscal year 2018, LMHAs and LBHAs reported trained peers and peer services coordinators provided 114,640 peer-to-peer services to service members, veterans, and their families; 11,567 clinical mental health services referrals; and 42,740 referrals to community organizations for supportive services.

## **Field Clinicians**

Trained peers who are also LMHPs, 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 and Dallas areas delivered 1,641 face-to-face or telephonic clinical services during fiscal year 2018. This subcontract ended on August 31, 2018.

Beginning September 1, 2018, 6 LMHA-based pilot sites will provide these services during fiscal year 2019 through implementation of changes related to S.B. 27, 85th Legislature, Regular Session, 2017.

## **Justice-Involved Veterans Engagement**

TVC coordinates services for justice involved veterans by facilitating training and technical assistance to local, state, and federal agencies in criminal justice settings.

There are key points<sup>5</sup> in the criminal justice system where Justice-Involved Veterans (JIVs) can be given information on veteran services and benefits, provided peer-to-peer counseling, or offered referral to supportive services that may prevent recidivism.

In fiscal year 2018, LMHAs and LBHAs reported trained peers interacted with JIVs 28,315 times during initial law enforcement response, through Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) programs<sup>6</sup>, at county jails, state jails, and prisons, and within the probation and parole system.

Internal to the TVC, services for JIVs are a combined effort between the TVC's Peer Coordinator and JIV coordinator, which result in technical assistance to peers and peer service coordinators interacting with justice involved veterans at key points in the criminal justice system, including:

- Sponsoring and training peers to participate in VTC as peer mentors;
- Providing training and technical assistance to VTC 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 TDCJ Veteran Reentry Dorm<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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 two regional and 31 local veteran treatment court programs.

<sup>7</sup> House Bill 865, 85th Legislature, Regular Session, 2017, codified the Veteran Reentry Dorm under TDCJ.

## 5. Number of Peers Trained

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

### Training Initiatives

Military Veteran Peer Network (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 and statewide training events. In fiscal year 2018, there were 106 TVC-certified MVPN Basic Training instructors and 87 MVPN Basic Training classes reported to TVC staff.

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

- Bring Everyone in the Zone
- Veterans Court Advocacy Mentor Program
- Table Talk™: Color Me Camo
- Suicide Awareness
- Mental Health First Aid for Veterans
- MIC

Table 4 shows the number of peers trained as reported by peer service coordinators at LMHAs and LBHAs during fiscal year 2018.

**Table 3. Number of Peers Trained**

<b>Training Curriculum</b>	<b>Number of Peers Trained</b>
MVPN Basic Training	1,789
Bring Everyone in the Zone	274
Veterans Court Advocacy Mentor Program	115
Table Talk™: Color Me Camo	38
Suicide Awareness	583
Mental Health First Aid for Veterans	748
MIC	609
Other community trainings	2,657
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,813</b>

## 6. Program Evaluation and Recommendations

Overall, the MHPV met its goals and provided significantly more services than in fiscal year 2017. However, HHSC and TVC will coordinate efforts to address the following recommendations to improve the program in fiscal year 2019.

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

In fiscal year 2018, the Director of TVC's Veterans Mental Health Department was hired to serve as Director of Veteran Mental Health Coordination and Programs within the HHSC Office of Mental Health Coordination (OMHC), with oversight of both the MHPV and the Texas Veterans + Family Alliance Grant Program. Additionally, the Statewide Suicide Prevention Coordinator position is now staffed within OMHC. These transitions provide significant opportunities to create efficiencies in the coordination of efforts with other veteran and behavioral health initiatives within federal, state, and local programs, including veteran suicide prevention.

**Recommendation 2: Leverage partnerships with federal, state, and local organizations to enhance opportunities for women veterans and veterans living in rural areas to connect with mental health supportive services.**

Enhanced efforts to coordinate federal, state, and local partnerships to serve the mental health needs of women and rural veterans will continue. Telemedicine will continue to be a focus for mental health service delivery to rural veterans. Additional focus will be placed on supportive networks for women veterans to engage with mental health services.

**Recommendation 3: Further identify opportunities to provide MIC training to LMHPs and community partners.**

During fiscal year 2018, TVC renewed its status as a pre-approved provider of continuing education units for LMHPs. Emphasis on training LMHPs in MIC will continue to assist in the reduction of stigma associated with self-identification by military trauma-affected veterans. In addition, ongoing efforts will target

opportunities to provide MIC trainings to community organizations and faith-based organizations, which remain gateways to engage with these veterans and assist in referral to mental health supports.

## **7. Conclusion**

In fiscal year 2018, the MHPV 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 their families to help them become aware of mental health service options and helped increase their access to community-based mental health services.

In fiscal year 2019, HHSC will coordinate with TVC to implement changes in the program required by S.B. 27, focus on efficiencies in the delivery of mental health services for veterans, continue to evaluate the program, and address recommendations.

## **List of Acronyms**

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Full Name</b>
HHSC	Health and Human Services Commission
JIV	Justice-Involved Veteran
LBHA	Local Behavioral Health Authority
LMHP	Licensed Mental Health Provider
LMHA	Local Mental Health Authority
MHPV	Mental Health Program for Veterans
MIC	Military Informed Care
MVPN	Military Veteran Peer Network
OMHC	Office of Mental Health Coordination
S.B.	Senate Bill
TAMUHSC	Texas A&M University Health Science Center
TCOLE	Texas Commission on Law Enforcement
TVC	Texas Veterans Commission
VTC	Veteran Treatment Court