

Congressional Brain Injury Task Force

NEWSLETTER

110th Congress
October 16, 2008

The **Congressional Brain Injury Task Force Newsletter** aims to educate and promote the awareness of brain injury, one of the driving missions of the Task Force. Below you will find recent legislative activity, studies and reports, media coverage, and upcoming events related to traumatic brain injury (TBI). We believe that knowledge and information can inspire the change needed to improve the lives of individuals suffering from TBI.

Approximately 1.4 million Americans experience traumatic brain injury (TBI) each year, and an estimated 5.3 million Americans are living with long-term, severe disabilities as a result of brain injury. TBI is the leading cause of death and disability among young Americans in the United States and has been named the signature wound of the War in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We hope that you and your staff find this newsletter informative. Please contact Mandy Spears (mandy.spears@mail.house.gov; 5-5751) in Rep. Pascrell's office or Becky Wolfkiel (rebecca.wolfkiel@mail.house.gov; 5-5836) in Rep. Platts' office if you have questions about any of the information included in the newsletter, would like more information about the Task Force, or would like to join.

Sincerely,

Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Co-Chair

Todd Russell Platts
Co-Chair

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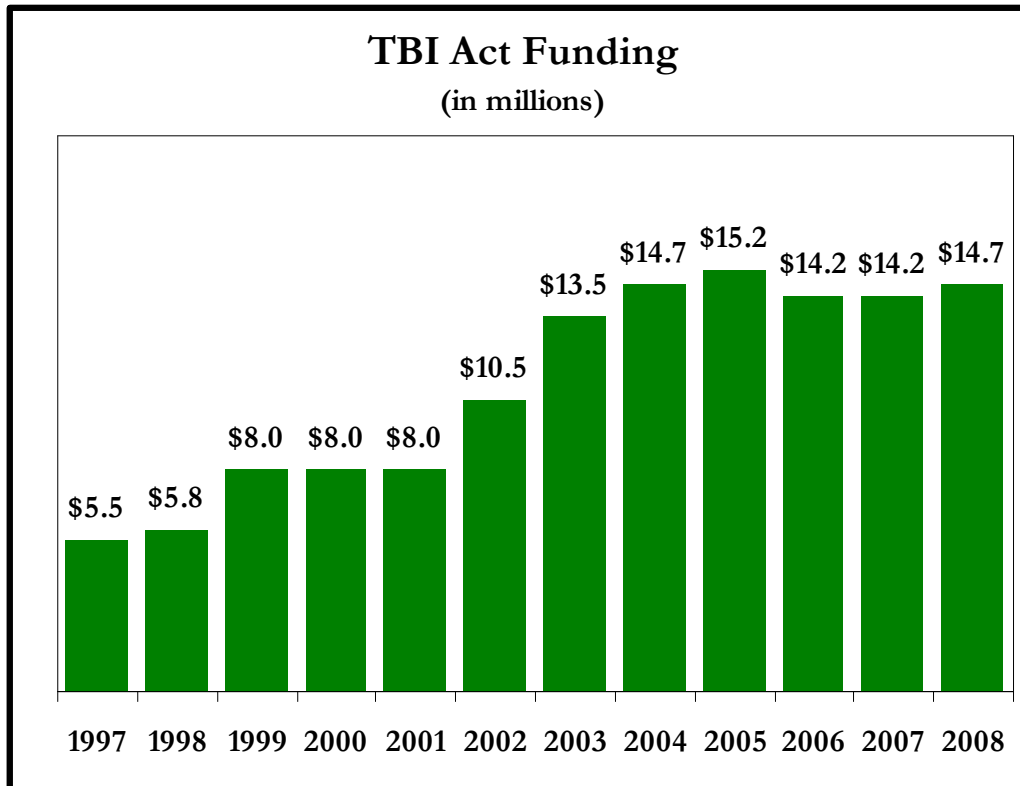
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RECENT LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY



FY 2009 Appropriations

Department of Defense - On March 19, 2008, members of the Congressional Brain Injury Task Force called on the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee to provide \$28 million to support the work of the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center (DVBIC) within the Defense Center of Excellence in Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury. *Status:* Defense Appropriations were passed as part of the [2009 Consolidated Security, Disaster Assistance, and Continuing Appropriations Act](#), which was signed into law on September 30, 2008. The bill provided \$300 million for TBI and psychological health research and treatment.

Department of Veterans Affairs - On August 1, 2008, the House of Representatives approved its version of the FY 2009 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs spending bill, which contained [report language](#) encouraging continued partnership between the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DoD) in treating soldiers with TBIs; revision of ICD-9 codes for traumatic brain injuries; the development of universal practice guidelines for TBIs, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and blast injuries; access to TBI and PTSD services through joint clinics; and projects to promote seamless transitions for individuals transitioning from DoD to the VA. Additionally, in a colloquy between House VA Appropriations Subcommittee Chair Chet Edwards and Task Force Co-Chair Bill Pascrell, Jr., Chairman Edwards agreed to work in Conference with the Senate to include language to recognize the relationship between and co-occurrence of TBI and PTSD among our armed serviced. Chairman Edwards also agreed to work with House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Bob Filner to work on suggestions related to the

establishment of a community grant program to provide rehabilitative services to veterans diagnosed with TBI or PTSD and a “heroes’ homecoming pilot program” to evaluate the effectiveness of offering compulsory screening, evaluation, and treatment for mental health conditions such as TBI and PTSD.

The Senate Appropriations Committee approved its version of the FY 2009 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs spending bill, containing increased funding for medical research, including TBI research.

The bill allocates \$526.8 million for medical research targeted to the veteran population, including research into mental health, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury, polytraumatic physical activities and sensory abilities, such as hearing and vision loss. The bill also contains [report language](#) directing the VA to establish and expand cooperative agreements with public and private groups to treat traumatic brain injury patients from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and to report on expanding the pool for expertise available to treat the injuries.

Veterans Appropriations were passed as part of the [2009 Consolidated Security, Disaster Assistance, and Continuing Appropriations Act](#), which was signed into law on September 30, 2008.

Department of Health and Human Services - On March 19, 2008, members of the Congressional Brain Injury Task Force called on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education to provide \$30 million for programs authorized under the Traumatic Brain Injury Act, including \$9 million for CDC TBI Registries, Surveillance, and Education; \$15 million for HRSA TBI State Grants; and \$6 million for HRSA TBI Protection and Advocacy Grants. *Status:* On June 26, 2008, The Senate Appropriations Committee mark-up approved its version of the [FY 2009 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill](#), which level funds these programs at \$14.5 million—including \$8.8 million for HRSA TBI Grants and \$5.7 million for CDC TBI programs. While the full House Appropriations Committee has not yet approved the Labor-HHS-Education bill, the Subcommittee’s mark-up includes a \$17.6 million for TBI Act programs—including \$11 for the HRSA TBI Grants and \$6.6 million for CDC TBI programs. The programs were level-funded at the FY 2008 through March 2009 as part of the [2009 Consolidated Security, Disaster Assistance, and Continuing Appropriations Act](#), which was signed into law on September 30, 2008.

TBI Awareness (H.Con.Res. 91)

This resolution expresses the need for enhanced public awareness of TBI and support for the designation of a National Brain Injury Awareness Month. It currently has 59 co-sponsors

TRICARE Coverage of Cognitive Rehabilitation

On September 19, 2008, Task Force Co-Chairs Bill Pascrell, Jr. and Todd Russell Platts were joined by 65 of their colleagues in sending a [letter to Defense Secretary Gates](#) calling for the coverage of cognitive rehabilitation therapy for brain injury patients under TRICARE, the military’s health care plan. Currently, cognitive rehabilitation therapy is excluded for coverage by TRICARE for brain injury patients. The letter argued that access to cognitive rehabilitation is a basic element of the continuum of care for brain injury patients and should

be covered by TRICARE. Co-signers are currently awaiting a response from Dr. David Chu, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. A group of ten Senators sent a [similar letter to Secretary Gates](#) in August.

RECENT STUDIES AND REPORTS

No empirically validated therapies exist to treat co-morbid PTSD, depression, and post-concussive disorders.

-VA Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development, "Overlap of Mild TBI & Mental Health Conditions in Returning OIF/OEF Service Members and Veterans"

Rutgers Center for State Health Policy: [Issue Brief: A Survey of Medicaid Brain Injury Programs](#); March 2008

Findings: As of late 2007, 23 states operated Medicaid waivers targeted to individuals with brain injuries. Waivers for individuals with brain injuries have grown significantly in recent years, doubling from 5,400 individuals at a cost of \$155 million in 2002 to 11,214 at a cost of \$327 million in 2006.

The Journal of Athletic Training: [Concussion in Sports: Postconcussive Activity Levels, Symptoms, and Neurocognitive Performance](#), 2008

Findings: Among student athletes, activity level after concussion, which is considered a mild traumatic brain injury, affects symptoms and neurocognitive recovery. Athletes that engage in high levels of activity after a concussion demonstrated worse performance on brain tests; while concussed athletes engaging in moderate levels of activity demonstrated the best performance.

Department of Veterans Affairs Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development: Guest Editorial: [Overlap of Mild TBI and Mental Health Conditions in Returning OIF/OEF Service Members and Veterans](#), 2008

Conclusions: An increasing number of Veterans Health Administration patients are presenting with overlapping mental health conditions such as PTSD and depression and cognitive conditions like mild TBI. Because there are no validated therapies to treat these co-morbidities, future efforts must include sharper attention to vigorous and interdisciplinary research into the relationship and treatment of mTBI and mental health conditions.

RECENT MEDIA COVERAGE

□To this day, some veterans□ it is impossible to know how many□ remain unscreened, their symptoms undiagnosed. □] Even now, with traumatic brain injury called the signature injury of the Iraq war, some

soldiers and their advocates say that complications from mild concussions often are not recognized –Lizette Alvarez, “War Veterans’ Concussions Are Often Overlooked”

[Brain Trauma in Iraq](#), *MIT Technology Review*, June 2008

[In Search of a Beautiful Mind](#), *Boston Globe*, July 12, 2008

[I Wasn't Right](#), *Jackson Hole Star-Tribune*, July 12, 2008

[Female Athletes Suffer More Head Injuries than Males](#), *Boston Globe*, July 14, 2008

[Army Issues New Guidelines for TBI Care](#), *Army Times*, July 17, 2008

[When Wounded Vets Come Home](#), *AARP Magazine*, July/August 2008

[New Programs Target Shaken-Baby Syndrome](#), *USA Today*, July 22, 2008

[More than a Headache: Surviving a Hole in the Head](#), *MSNBC*, July 23, 2008

[Troops' Brain Injuries Inspire a New Mission](#), *USA Today*, July 24, 2008

[Protecting the Brain from Spiral of Damage](#), *MSNBC*, July 24, 2008

[Invisible Blast, Indelible Wounds](#), *Baltimore Sun*, July 27, 2008

[PTSD Leaves Physical Footprints on the Brain](#), *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 27, 2008

[Pentagon Spends \\$300M to Study Troops' Stress, Trauma](#), *USA Today*, August 5, 2008

[Crystal Clue in Army Brain Injury](#), *BBC News*, August 7, 2008

[Student Athletes Need Time for Brains to Recover from Concussion](#), *USA Today*, August 13, 2008

[Many Brain Injury Patients Poised to Quit Nursing Homes for Freer Lives](#), *Boston Globe*, August 14, 2008

[Doctors See Hope as Veterans Triumph over their Injuries](#), *Tampa Tribune*, August 15, 2008

[War Veterans' Concussions Are Often Overlooked](#), *New York Times*, August 26, 2008

[Op-Eds: Support the Troops in Need of Care](#), *New York Times*, September 2, 2008

[Pentagon Awards Big Grant to UCSD](#), *San Diego Union-Tribune*, September 10, 2008

[Imaging Shows Why Injured Brains 'Work Harder'](#), *U.S. News & World Report*, September 11, 2008

[VA to Increase Benefits for Mild Brain Trauma](#), *USA Today*, September 23, 2008

[Around the Nation: Disability Rules for Vets Change](#), *Washington Post*, September 24, 2008

[Twelve Athletes Leaving Brains to Concussion Study](#), *New York Times*, September 24, 2008

[School of Hard Knocks](#), *Boston Globe*, October 6, 2009

UPCOMING EVENTS

Be on the lookout for the Report to Congress from the [International Conference on Behavioral Health and Traumatic Brain Injury](#) which was held in Paterson, NJ this week.



International Conference on Behavioral Health and Traumatic Brain Injury

St. Joseph's Regional Medical Center, Paterson, NJ
October 12-15, 2008

The International Conference on Behavioral Health and Traumatic Brain Injury brought together national and international expert neuroscientists, behavioral health specialists, and physicians to generate a comprehensive report to Congress with recommendations and priorities to address the psychological health difficulties and traumatic brain injury of our returning military veterans.

[Experts on Brain Injuries to Gather](#), *The Herald News*, June 10, 2008