



**DEFENSE CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE**  
For Psychological Health & Traumatic Brain Injury

# An Executive Level Overview of Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury in the Defense Department

Understanding the Facts and  
Recognizing the Misconceptions



# Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

## What is a TBI?



“A TBI is caused by a bump, blow or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the normal function of the brain. Not all blows or jolts to the head result in a TBI.”

## Mild TBI Symptoms

Excessive fatigue

Headaches

Poor attention/  
concentration

Dizziness/ loss  
of balance

Visual  
disturbances

Memory loss

Sleep  
disturbances

Irritability –  
emotional  
disturbances

## Epidemiology [1,2]

- 1.7 million sustain TBI each year, resulting in 52,000 deaths
- 12-20 percent of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) / Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) veterans have TBI
- 80-90 percent of military TBIs are *mild*, otherwise known as concussions

## Repeat Cerebral Trauma

- Past injury increases risk three-fold [3]
- Symptoms may be more severe and persist longer following repeat injury
- May be linked to Alzheimer’s-like, memory-related diseases

# Directive Type Memorandum (DTM) 09-033

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## **Provides guidance on the management of concussion/mild TBI in deployed settings** (June 2010 – U.S. deputy secretary of defense)

- It spells out specific protocols (e.g., clinical practice guidelines) for management of these service members
  - Requires a medical evaluation and a rest period following potentially concussive events
  - Prohibits all sports and high-risk activities until medically cleared
  - Provides new protocols for service members exposed to two or more concussions in a 12-month period
  - Requires documentation in the form of the military acute concussion evaluation (MACE)
  - Requires diagnosed service members receive a standardized educational sheet

# Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

**An anxiety disorder that can occur after exposure to traumatic events such as combat, natural disasters, assaults or motor vehicle accidents [4]**

- 8 percent of the general population will have PTSD at some point in their lives [4]
- 4-17 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans have PTSD [5]

## PTSD Symptoms

Re-experiencing the event

Avoidance and/or feeling emotionally numb

Feeling keyed-up

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# Depression and Substance Use Disorder (SUD)

Psychological health (PH) disorders are more likely following deployment and combat exposure

## Depression

Changes in eating or sleeping patterns, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, thoughts of death or suicide, or feelings of worthlessness, helplessness or hopelessness

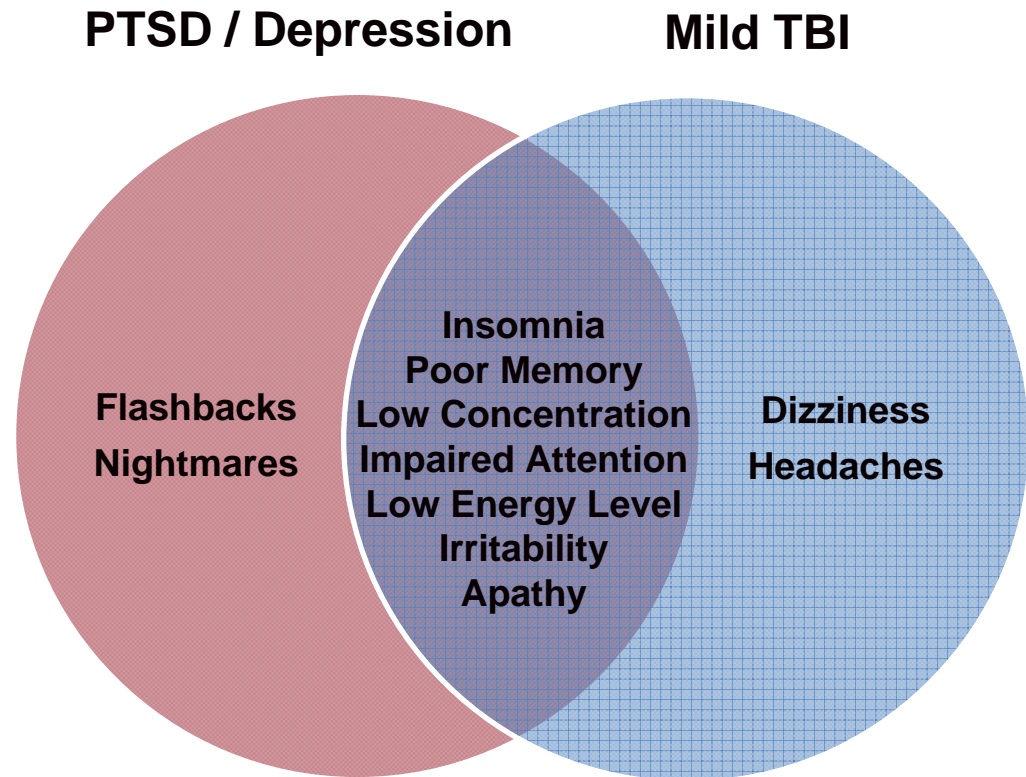
## SUD

Maladaptive pattern of substance use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress

- Major cause of disability worldwide
  - Depression has a significant effect on normal function and is a risk factor for suicide
- 
- Self-medication of psychological health disorders can be a trigger for SUD.
  - SUD leads to other high-risk behaviors

# Complex Relationships Between PH and TBI

- They can share the same etiological event. An improvised explosive device (IED) that causes a TBI can also be a trauma leading to PTSD [6]
- Common symptoms make it more difficult to diagnose the condition
- One disorder may contribute to developing another condition. TBI is a risk factor for developing depression [6]
- Having one disorder can make treatment of the other more difficult. [7,8]
  - TBI impairs attention and memory, interfering with psychotherapies for depression and PTSD



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# Misconceptions about Psychological Health Disorders

Disorders like PTSD and Depression aren't real...



Despite the evidence and numerous campaigns to the contrary, many in the military maintain this belief [9]

We're over-diagnosing PTSD...



Clinical practice guidelines are being updated and training providers throughout the system with proper diagnostic approaches

If I send someone for help, it will hurt their career...



Left untreated, PH conditions can be more detrimental to a service member's career

Many service members are only claiming PTSD...



Service members often hide emotional problems from Chain of Command

Untreated PTSD and depression can create a cascading set of consequences [2] and actually do more damage to a career

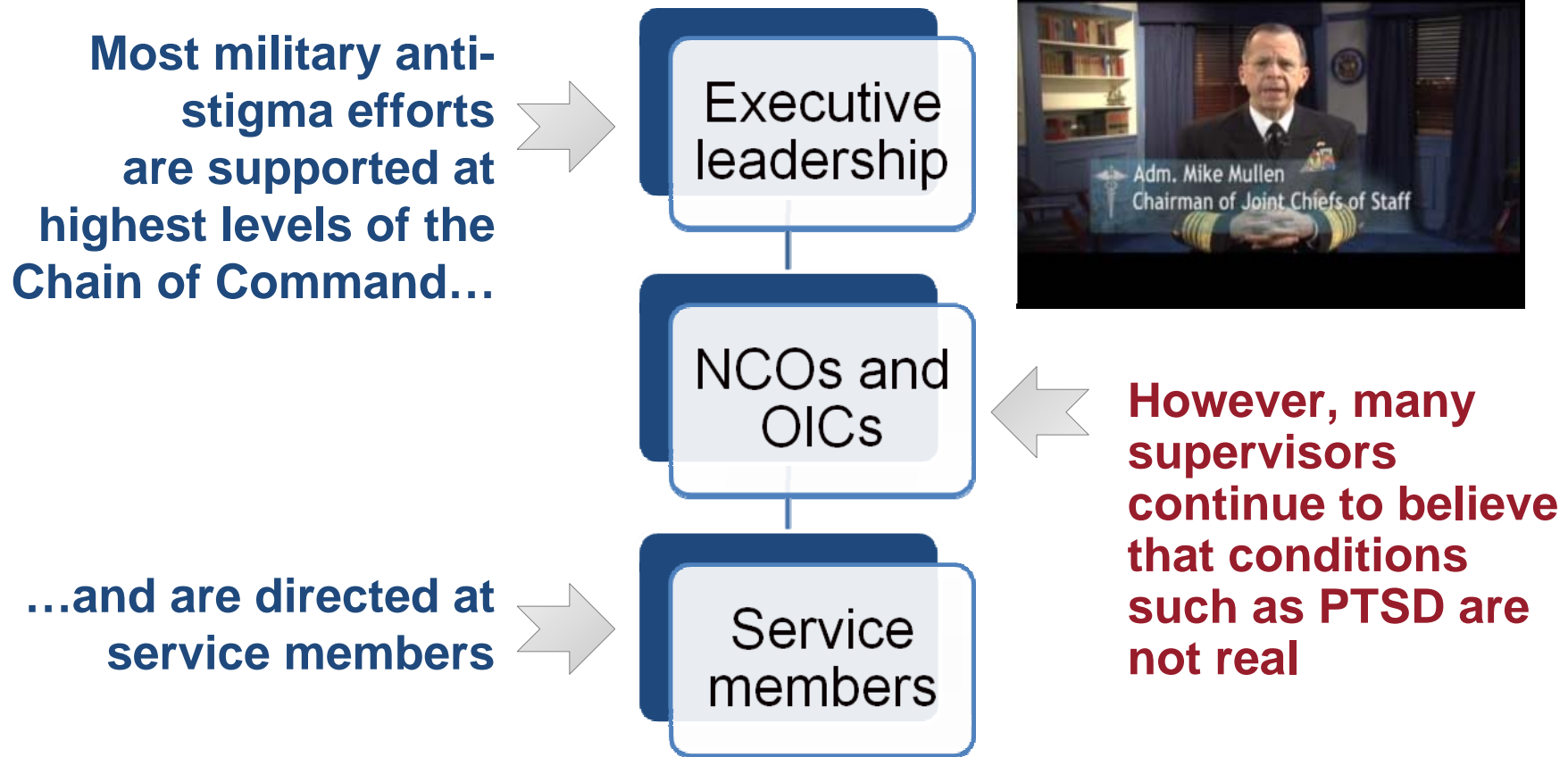
# Psychological Health Stigma

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- **Stigma typically results from the perception among leaders and service members that help-seeking behavior will either be:**
  - Detrimental to their career (e.g., prejudicial to promotion or selection to leadership positions) or
  - Reduce their social status among their peers [10,11].
- **Psychological health care carries a negative stigma in general This is especially true in the military [10,11]**
- **Negative consequences of stigma include:**
  - Preventing service members from coming forward to get help early
  - Leaving PH conditions untreated so they progressively worsen
  - Adverse outcomes (separation, high-risk behavior, suicide) due to worsening disorders



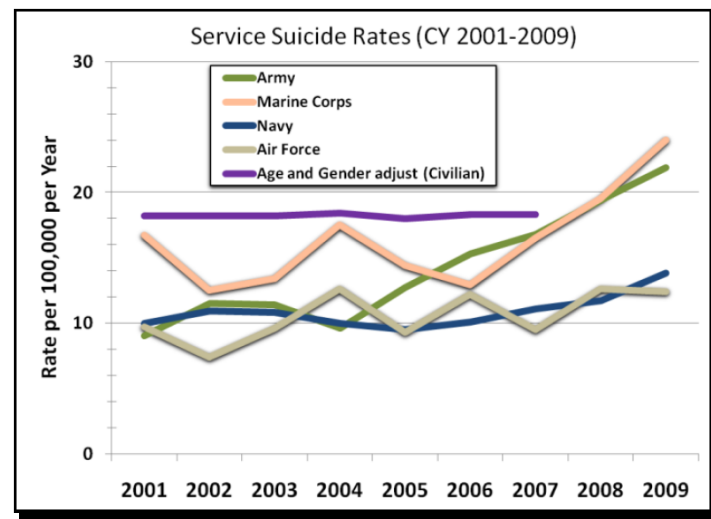
# Importance of Addressing Stigma at Multiple Levels



# Costs of Not Addressing Psychological Health

## What can happen to service members without care?

- Continued rise in rates of suicide [11]
  - Prior to 2004, the military suicide rate was *lower* than the age- and gender-adjusted civilian rate.
  - Military rate of suicide has begun to rise, and in 2008, it surpassed the civilian rate.



- Increased administrative separations due to misconduct
- High rates of spousal abuse [11,12] or increased stress at home [13]
- Service members referred for Veterans Affairs (VA) disability due to disorders worsening

# Defense Department Initiatives

- **Reducing Stigma**
- **Suicide Prevention**
- **Resiliency Programs**
- **Evidence-Based Treatments**

## RESPECT-Mil Initiative

- Provides training to primary care managers



## Real Warriors campaign

- Aimed at service members to encourage them to seek help



## Afterdeployment.org

- Provides anonymous assessment



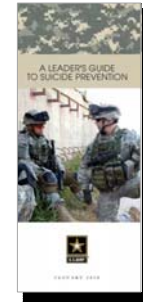
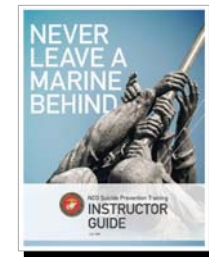
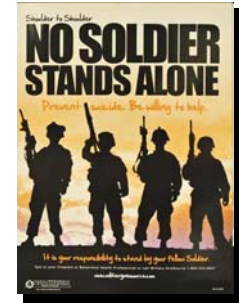
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# Defense Department Initiatives Continued

- Reducing Stigma
- **Suicide Prevention**
- Resiliency Programs
- Evidence-Based Treatments



- Public service announcements and materials
- Surveillance forms for suicides and non-fatal self injuries
- Leader's guides and training
- Annual Suicide Prevention Conference co-sponsored by Defense Centers of Excellence and Veteran Affairs



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# Defense Department Initiatives Continued

- Reducing Stigma
- Suicide Prevention
- Resiliency Programs
- Evidence-Based Treatments

## Army Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program

- Wide range of training for soldiers and families



## Marine Corps Combat Operational Stress Control

- Mission: protect and restore health of Marines and family members



## Navy Operational Stress Control

- Provides a comprehensive approach to stress injuries



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# Defense Department Initiatives Continued

- Reducing Stigma
- Suicide Prevention
- **Resiliency Programs**
- Evidence-Based Treatments

## Air Force Landing Gear

- Standardizes preparation training for airmen and the mental health component of reintegration education



## Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program

- Gives access to support for returning National Guard and reserve members, and family members



# Defense Department Initiatives Continued

- Reducing Stigma
- Suicide Prevention
- Resiliency Programs
- **Evidence-Based Treatments**

- **Several treatments have well-documented success in conditions such as:**
  - Depression [14]
  - Post traumatic stress disorder [15]
  - Substance abuse disorders [16]
  - Mild traumatic brain injury [17]
  - Co-Occurring Toolkit for mTBI and PH
- **DoD-wide clinical practice guidelines for PH/TBI conditions**
- **Access to evidence-based treatments leads to better prognosis**
- **We have shortages of providers trained in some of these specific types of treatment modalities**



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# Defense Department Initiatives

- Reducing Stigma
- Suicide Prevention
- Resiliency Programs
- **Evidence-Based Treatments**

- The Center for Deployment Psychology (CDP)
- Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center (DVBIC)
- Deployment Health Clinical Center (DHCC)
- National Intrepid Center of Excellence (NICoE)



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# Conclusions

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- **Psychological health conditions and traumatic brain injury are real and have serious consequences for DoD**
- **Left untreated, these disorders sometimes worsen, lead to adverse events and poor overall outcomes**
- **DoD has several programs in place to:**
  - Reduce the stigma of treatment
  - Reduce suicides
  - Build resilient service members
  - Increase access to evidence-based care
  - Ensure early detection and early treatment (DTM)
- **Role of executive level leadership is to encourage service members to seek help early and support them and their families**

# Resources/Contact

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Afterdeployment.org [www.afterdeployment.org](http://www.afterdeployment.org)

Air Force Suicide Prevention Program [afspp.afms.mil](http://afspp.afms.mil)

Army Suicide Prevention Program [www.armyg1.army.mil/hr/suicide](http://www.armyg1.army.mil/hr/suicide)

Center for Deployment Psychology [www.deploymentpsych.org](http://www.deploymentpsych.org)

Comprehensive Soldier Fitness [www.army.mil/csf/](http://www.army.mil/csf/)

Defense Centers of Excellence for PH-TBI [www.dcoe.health.mil](http://www.dcoe.health.mil)

Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center [www.dvbic.org](http://www.dvbic.org)

Deployment Health Clinical Center [www.pdhealth.mil](http://www.pdhealth.mil)

Marine Corps Combat Operational Stress Control [www.usmc-mccs.org/cosc](http://www.usmc-mccs.org/cosc)

Marine Suicide Prevention Program [www.usmc-mccs.org/suicideprevent](http://www.usmc-mccs.org/suicideprevent)

Navy Operational Stress Control  
[www.nmcphc.med.navy.mil/Healthy\\_Living/Psychological\\_Health/Stress\\_Management/operandcombatstress.aspx](http://www.nmcphc.med.navy.mil/Healthy_Living/Psychological_Health/Stress_Management/operandcombatstress.aspx)

Real Warriors Campaign [www.realwarriors.net](http://www.realwarriors.net)

Respect.mil [www.pdhealth.mil/respect-mil/index1.asp](http://www.pdhealth.mil/respect-mil/index1.asp)

Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program [www.arfp.org/yellowribbon](http://www.arfp.org/yellowribbon)

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