



# Mental Health Care Access for MHS Beneficiaries

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Chair, Neurological/Behavioral Health Subcommittee

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# Overview



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# Membership



**CHAIR**  
**Alex Valadka, MD\***



**Sonia Alemagno, PhD, MA**



**Jennifer Belding, PhD, MA**



**Jeremy Lazarus, MD\***



**Raghu Upender, MD**

**\*Board Member**

Defense Health Board

# Tasking



On May 5, 2022, the Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs directed the Defense Health Board ("the Board") **to provide recommendations to enhance the Military Health System (MHS) capacity and capabilities to meet beneficiaries' mental health needs.**

# Background



- Access to mental health care is increasingly a concern for family beneficiaries in the MHS.
- Service member mental health influences family mental health.
- The supply of military mental health resources (e.g., providers and treatment options) has not kept pace with the needs of the MHS beneficiary population.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has widened the gap between demand and supply for MHS mental health care.
- Advances in tele-behavioral health and new therapies offer opportunities to improve access to mental health treatment.

# Objectives and Scope



- Provide recommendations to enhance MHS capacity and capability to meet beneficiaries' mental health care needs, and to eliminate barriers to accessing and delivering mental health care for both adult and child beneficiaries
- Provide recommendations to promote innovative mental health care research and treatment strategies for PTSD and other behavioral health conditions

# Summary of Activities to Date



- March 30, 2022 briefing to DHB on addressing the child and adolescent mental health crisis by Dr. Lee Beers
- June 6, 2022 briefing to DHB on mental health access from the DoD's perspective by Dr. Kate McGraw
- June 28, 2022 Kickoff meeting
  - Beneficiary mental health access challenges from the 2020 DoD Inspector General's Report by Mr. Andre Brown and Mr. Thomas Bickett
  - Results of the Blue Star Families' Military Lifestyle Survey by Dr. Jessica Strong
- July 14, 2022 briefing to the Subcommittee on meeting the mental health needs of military families by Ms. Eileen Huck, National Military Families Association

# Areas of Interest (1/2)



| Topic                                     | Discussion Point  |
|---|---|
| Provider Shortages                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>National shortage</b></li><li>• Wait times</li><li>• <b>“Ghost networks”</b></li><li>• Geographic imbalance between supply and demand</li></ul>                                  |
| Recruiting Challenges:<br>(Mental Health) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Compensation (vs. other medical fields)</li><li>• Difficult patients, emotional toll</li></ul>  |
| Recruiting Challenges:<br>(MHS)           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Compensation</b> (vs. VA and other systems)</li><li>• <b>Time-intensive and highly-regulated hiring process</b></li><li>• Geography (dispersed beneficiary population)</li></ul> |



# Areas of Interest (2/2)



| Topic                | Discussion Point   |
|----------------------|--|
| Mental Health Demand | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Growth trends</li><li>• <b>MHS-civilian comparisons</b></li></ul>  |
| Demand Drivers       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Military life stressors (e.g., relocation and deployments)</li><li>• COVID-19</li><li>• Resilience</li></ul> |
| Treatment Options    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tele-behavioral health</li><li>• Schedule I treatments (e.g., psilocybin and MDMA)</li></ul>                 |

# Way Ahead



- Background chapters with Subcommittee for review and feedback
- Monthly subcommittee meetings with briefings and report development.  
Anticipated briefings to Subcommittee on:
  - TRICARE for Kids Coalition
  - TRICARE Health Plan
  - Efforts by the Services to improve mental health access
  - Tele-behavioral health
  - Other barriers to accessing treatment (e.g., schedule 1 medications)
  - Substance abuse



# Questions

