

For Immediate Release
Veterans For Peace: www.veteransforpeace.org

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Veterans Group Applauds Pentagon Report and Warns Action Must Be Taken Immediately

On June 15, 2007 a Pentagon task force released a report detailing major shortcomings in the military's mental health system. The report says, "The current operational tempo has exposed fundamental weaknesses in the U.S. military's approach to psychological health."

As reported by USA Today, with over 1 million service members having deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001 – many for more than one tour – mental health problems are on the rise. Health screenings show 31% of Marines, 38% of soldiers and nearly half of National Guard troops have psychological symptoms. Of nearly 230,000 new veterans who have applied for help from the Veterans Affairs Department, more than a third suffers mental disorders. One out of five married soldiers say their relationship is falling apart.

The lack of adequate care is also affecting military families. "It was not unusual for a parent to report waiting six to nine months for an initial child psychiatry outpatient appointment, or for providers to report that children had to be sent to another state for inpatient treatment," the report states.

Veterans For Peace National President, Elliott Adams comments, "From the time service members began returning from Afghanistan and Iraq, Veterans For Peace, Military Families Speak Out and later Iraq Veterans Against the War have been dealing with these issues and demanding help from the military and Congress. It seemed as if we were ignored. It is good to finally see this reality reflected in mainstream media and a Pentagon report calling for fundamental change. Now the questions remain, when will people get aid and when will this war that helped create this problem and continues to both physically and mentally damage more and more service members end? We call on the military, the President and Congress to take immediate action. We must also remember and help the Iraqi people. With so many US troops afflicted with mental health problems, one can only imagine the suffering of the people of Iraq face."

The report makes 95 recommendations for mental health care improvement. Suggestions include an annual mental health assessment for all service members. Provide commanders and mental health workers with better training to recognize and treat service members in psychological stress. Embed mental health care providers in each unit to help reduce the overwhelming stigma associated with mental health issues. Ensure that military assistance programs reach more people. Alcohol related car accidents and arrests for troops have increased, but the number of troops seen in alcohol programs has not.

Veterans For Peace National Executive Director Michael McPhearson states, "This is a tragic example of the hidden cost of war. Many of these men, women and families will be facing these issues for the rest of their lives. Our nation must challenge itself to honor their on going struggles and sacrifices by working to solve conflicts with other nations without resorting to war. People talk about winning or losing the Iraq war, no one wins in war."

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Veterans For Peace is a national organization founded in 1985. It is comprised of members across the country organized in chapters or as at-large members and supported by a national office in St. Louis, MO. There is a convention each year attended by our members, families and supporters from across the nation. Members receive periodic VFP publications. The organization includes men and women veterans of all eras and duty stations spanning the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), World War II, the Korean, Vietnam, Gulf and current Iraq wars as well as other conflicts cold or hot. Our collective experience tells us wars are easy to start and hard to stop and that those hurt are often the innocent. Thus, other means of problem solving are necessary. Veterans For Peace is an official Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) represented at the UN.