

Mental Health Screening for Recruits: Clinical Data Supports Establishment of Baseline Information for Military Personnel

- The need to address mental health challenges in the military is critical, given the impact of those illnesses on service members and their families.
- While all military recruits are subject to a physical screening, not all receive a mental health evaluation, which would provide a baseline from which to measure any changes during their military careers.
- New, innovative technologies could make mental health care screenings for service members more accessible and cost effective than ever before.

Studies Support Instituting Mental Health Screenings for Military Recruits



INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE
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According to the Institute of Medicine's *"Preventing Psychological Disorders in Service Members and Their Families: An Assessment of Programs"*:

- "There is a need for DoD to improve approaches for identifying and intervening with service members and members of their families who may already have or may be at risk for developing a psychological disorder."¹
- "The Department of Defense [should] consistently use validated psychological screening instruments appropriate to the type of screening and conduct systematic targeted prevention annually and across the military life cycle (from accession to pre-deployment, deployment, post-deployment, reintegration, and separation) for service members and their families."²
- "The use of non-validated screening instruments at accession is a concern, as studies show that enlistees may enter the military with elevated rates of psychological health disorders."²



The Journal of the American Medical Association

According to *"Risk Factors Associated With Suicide in Current and Former U.S. Military Personnel"*, a study published last year in the Journal of the American Medical Association:

- "Knowing the psychiatric history, screening for mental and substance use disorders, and early recognition of associated suicidal behaviors combined with high-quality treatment are likely to provide the best potential for mitigating suicide risk"³



Army Study to Assess Risk and Resilience in Servicemembers

According to the U.S. Army/ National Institute of Mental Health's *"The Army Study to Assess Risk and Resilience in Servicemembers (Army STARRS)"*, the largest study of mental health risk and resilience ever conducted among U.S. military personnel:

- "Almost 85 percent of those [soldiers] who self-identified as having had a mental health disorder reported that the problem began prior to joining the Army."^{4,5}
- "The rise in suicide deaths from 2004 to 2009 occurred not only in currently and previously deployed soldiers, but also among soldiers never deployed; nearly half of soldiers who reported suicide attempts indicated their first attempt was prior to enlistment; and soldiers reported higher rates of certain mental disorders than civilians."⁵
- "The fact that approximately one-third of post-enlistment suicide attempts are associated with pre-enlistment mental disorders suggests that pre-enlistment mental disorders might be targets for early screening and intervention."⁶



Telehealth/ Telepsychiatry Can Offer Clinical and Cost-Effective Alternatives for Identifying and Treating Mental Health Issues

- "Today, telemental health services are unquestionably effective... They are effective for diagnosis and assessment, across many populations (adult, child, geriatric, and ethnic), and in disorders in many settings (emergency, home health), are comparable to in-person care, and complement other services in primary care."⁷
- "Telemental health is one of the most active telemedicine applications rendered in the United States. Mental health is particularly suited to the use of advanced communication technologies and the Internet for delivery of care. By using advanced communication technologies, mental health professionals are able to widen their reach to patients in a cost-effective manner, ameliorating the mal-distribution of specialty care."⁸

The Medical Evaluation Parity for Servicemembers (MEPS) Act, Which Would Institute a Mental Health Assessment for All Incoming Military Recruits, Has Been Endorsed by Over 40 Military, Veteran, and Mental Health Advocacy Groups, and Passed the U.S. House of Representatives as Part of the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act

A July, 2014 Reserve Officers Association (ROA) symposium examined the full spectrum of mental health challenges facing America's military and veteran communities. As part of the symposium, a panel of clinical and research experts addressed the issue of mental health screenings for military and veterans.⁹ Key excerpts include:

- Heather O'Beirne Kelly, Ph.D., American Psychological Association: **"We do screen military officers all the time, and it (requiring mental health screening for all military recruits) would not be that different from what they'll get once they are already in. There are, thankfully, some science-based approaches to this, from the National Academies, and the [proposal] requires the collaboration of community stakeholders, and of NIH and DoD experts."**
- Terri Tanielian, Senior Social Research Analyst, RAND Corporation: **"It is important that we do implement efforts that would allow us to better identify and recognize individuals who are in distress so that early interventions can be delivered."**

Key Supporters of the MEPS Act



¹Institute of Medicine. Findings from "Returning Home from Iraq and Afghanistan" and "Preventing Psychological Disorders in Service Members and Their Families". Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2014.

²Institute of Medicine. Preventing Psychological Disorders in Service Members and Their Families: An Assessment of Programs. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2014.

³Risk Factors Associated With Suicide in Current and Former US Military Personnel. Cynthia A. LeardMann, MPH; Teresa M. Powell, MS; Tyler C. Smith, MS, PhD; Michael R. Bell, MD, MPH; Besa Smith, MPH, PhD; Edward J. Boyko, MD, MPH; Tomoko I. Hooper, MD, MPH; Gary D. Gackstetter, DVM, MPH, PhD; Mark Ghamsary, PhD; Charles W. Hoge, MD. JAMA, 2013.

⁴Thirty-day prevalence of DSM-IV mental disorders among non-deployed soldiers in the U.S. Army: results from the Army Study to Assess Risk and Resilience in Servicemembers (Army STARRS). Kessler RC, Heeringa SG, Stein MB, Colpe LJ, Fullerton CS, Hwang I, Naifeh JA, Nock MK, Petukhova M, Sampson NA, Schoenbaum M, Zaslavsky AM, Ursano RJ. JAMA Psychiatry, 2014.

⁵National Institute of Mental Health. Press Release: Suicide in the Military: Army-NIH Funded Study Points to Risk and Protective Factors. March 3, 2014.

⁶Prevalence and correlates of suicidal behavior among soldiers: Results from the Army Study to Assess Risk and Resilience in Servicemembers (Army STARRS). Nock MK, Stein MB, Heeringa SG, Ursano RJ, Colpe LJ, Fullerton CS, Hwang I, Naifeh JA, Sampson NA, Schoenbaum M, Zaslavsky AM, Kessler RC. JAMA Psychiatry, 2014.

⁷The Effectiveness of Telemental Health: A 2013 Review. Donald M. Hilty, MD, Daphne C. Ferrer, MD, Michelle Burke Parish, MA, Barb Johnston, MSN, Edward J. Callahan, PhD, and Peter M. Yellowlees, MD, MBBS. Telemedicine Journal and E Health, 2013.

⁸American Telemedicine Association. Practice Guidelines for Video-Based Online Mental Health Services. 2013.

⁹Reserve Officers Association. <http://www.roa.org/events/def/military-mental-health-finding-solutions-hill-hospital>.