



Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

Congressional Brain Injury Task Force Newsletter February 2011

The **Congressional Brain Injury Task Force Newsletter** aims to educate and promote 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 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.

As you may already know, 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.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 1.7 million deaths, hospitalizations, and emergency department visits related to traumatic brain injury (TBI) occur in the United States each year. TBIs contribute to nearly a third or 30.5 percent of injury-related deaths here in the United States.

We hope that you and your staff find this newsletter informative. Please contact Rose Hacking (rose.hacking@mail.house.gov; 5-5751) in Rep. Pascrell's office or Mollie Van Lieu (Mollie.VanLieu@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 of the Task Force

Todd Russell Platts
Co-Chair of the Task Force

Note: Membership to the Congressional Brain Injury Task Force is open only to Senators and Members of Congress.

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— **Brain Injury Awareness Day: March 16th on Capitol Hill**

Each year, individuals from all over the country—representing brain injury survivors, families, advocates, and providers, among others—gather on Capitol Hill in honor of March as Brain Injury Awareness Month. On this day, the Congressional Brain Injury Task Force partners with these individuals to increase awareness about brain injury among Members of Congress and their staff. The day includes a fair for exhibits, a briefing in the afternoon, and a reception. We have scheduled this event for Wednesday, March 16th and welcome all to attend. To participate as an exhibitor in the fair, please email brain.injury@mail.house.gov for a RSVP form. This event is open to the public and we invite all to attend.

Current Initiatives

— **Protecting Kids from Repeat Concussions**

The Concussion Treatment and Care Tools Act (ConTACT Act), H.R. 1347/S. 2840 passed the House of Representatives unanimously on September 30th, 2010. Considering the little time which was left in the 111th Congress, the committee of jurisdiction, the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions sent a letter to the CDC this month recommending the implementation of the ConTACT Act. The letter requests a timeline of actions that the CDC plans to take in terms of developing federal standards on concussion management and on disseminating these policies.

STATUS: Awaiting CDC's timeline in implementing parts of the ConTACT Act.

Related News Articles:

- [House approves Concussion Treatment and Care Tools \(ConTACT\) Act](#)
- [ER visits for concussions soar among child athletes](#)
- [Kids' concussions need follow-up after ER visit](#)
- [Parents, Coaches Worry About Concussion Risks](#)

— **Helping Soldiers with Brain Injuries Access Therapy (Cognitive Rehabilitation)**

In September 2008, the task force led the charge by submitting a letter to Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, requesting that TRICARE cover cognitive rehabilitation therapies for returning service personnel. Over 65 House Members signed this important letter.

Adding to this, in the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2010, Senator Bayh included language requiring a large-scale study of cognitive rehabilitation in hopes of proving its benefit and getting DoD and TRICARE to cover this treatment.

STATUS: The Department of Defense has given Congress a report on how they will study the effectiveness of cognitive rehab. However, the study will not be completed for 3 years.

January Sign-On Letter: Having worked on this issue since 2008, the task force circulated a sign-on letter in January asking the Department to develop and share with us their contingency plan on how they will help service members with TBIs returning today from the battlefield. The letter requests a meeting with representatives of the Department to discuss coverage of treatment options for our service members with brain injuries.

Related News Articles:

- [Service Members Struggle to Receive Care](#)
- [Pentagon Told Congress It's Studying Brain-Damage Therapy](#)
- [Brain Injury Association of America Urges President Obama to Include Cognitive Rehabilitation for Returning Service Members as a Part of TRICARE Coverage](#)
- [Cognitive Rehab Helps People with Acquired Brain Injury](#)
- [Bayh and Obama Seek to Broaden Treatment for Signature Injury of Iraq, Afghanistan Wars](#)

— **Update on Screening our Service Members: The Amendment to the Defense Authorization and the Requested GAO Report**

Media coverage continues to find problems in the military's medical system such as their ability to diagnose, identify, and treat soldiers that have suffered traumatic brain injuries. In July, over 20 members of Congress including task force members, requested that GAO look into this problem.

Status of the GAO Report: The GAO is working on the request and has sat down with the Co-Chairs of the task force.

Status of the Defense Authorization Amendment: In June, the Pascrell-Platts-Andrews-Cole-Ortiz-Wilson-Coffman Amendment was added to the FY2011 Department of Defense Authorization bill to ensure proper screening of our service members for brain injury. [Click here for more information.](#) The Senate Armed Services Committee reported the bill out with similar TBI language on May 28th. The compromise bill that was voted on in December included language requiring the Secretary of Defense to develop and implement a comprehensive policy by January 31, 2011.

September Meeting: In September, the Co-Chairs of the task force were joined by other task force members to discuss TBI issues with the Surgeons General from the Army, Air Force, and Navy as well as representatives from the Under Secretary of Health for Veterans' Affairs. A follow up meeting may follow depending on the progress made from this meeting.

Related News Articles:

- [Military Still Failing To Diagnose, Treat Brain Injuries](#)
- [Military reckons with the mental wounds of war](#)
- [At Fort Bliss, Brain Injury Treatments Can Be as Elusive as Diagnosis](#)

— **Accountability for TBI Funding and TBI Treatments**

Between 2007 and 2010, the Department of Defense received over \$1.73 billion for psychological health and traumatic brain injury. For FY 2011, members of the task force have requested \$920 million for the Department of Defense to care for wounded warriors with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and psychological health (PH) issues and to improve research into these critical areas.

Unfortunately, we continue to hear from many groups that the Department has not spending the money wisely. Similarly, the Department of Veterans' Affairs has been on the defense over the last few months on their use of TBI funding, which was meant for research.

STATUS: We will continue to oversee the funding provided for TBI under accounts within the Department of Defense and Veteran Affairs.

Related News Articles:

- [VA explains where \\$6.3M meant for brain injury research went](#)
- [Pentagon questions drug study on troops](#)

— **Purple Heart and TBI:**

In January 2009, the Pentagon decided against awarding the Purple Heart to war veterans who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) because they claim it is not a physical wound.

Following this announcement, Co-Chairs of the Task Force, Congressman Pascrell and Congressman Platts, wrote to Secretary Gates inquiring into the military's position on TBI victims, which is clearly a physical wound, even if oftentimes not visibly apparent.

Furthermore, in the fiscal 2010 National Defense Authorization Act, Congressman Pascrell and Congressman Platts inserted language requiring Defense Secretary Robert Gates to review the policies surrounding the eligibility and the awarding of the Purple Heart to service members who sustain TBI.

STATUS: The Department of Defense was to report back to Congress by March 31. The Task Force received a copy of the report in June. Though the report indicates that all service members with TBI are eligible to receive the Purple Heart, a letter was sent by Co-Chairs of the task force regarding further concerns with the report.

Recent Legislative Activity/Events

September 29, 2010 House Veterans Affairs Legislative Hearing: On Legislation Including H.R. 6123, the Veterans' Traumatic Brain Injury Rehabilitative Services Improvements Act.

July 20, 2010 House Veterans Affairs Hearing: Roundtable on Innovative Treatments for Traumatic Brain Injury and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

June 22, 2010 Senate Armed Services Hearing on the progress in preventing military suicides and challenges in detection and care of the invisible wounds of war.

May 24, 2010 Judiciary Committee Hearing on Key Issues Related to the Identification and Prevention of Head Injuries in Football

May 20, 2010—Education and Labor Committee Hearing on “the Impact of Concussions on High School Athletes.”

May 5, 2010—Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Hearing on "Oversight Hearing: TBI (traumatic brain injury) - Progress in Treating the Signature Wound of the Current Conflicts."

April 20, 2010—House Armed Services Committee Hearing on implementation of the requirement to provide a medical examination before separating members diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and the capacity of the Department of Defense to provide care to PTSD cases. [Congressman Pascrell spoke at the hearing]

March 17, 2010—The Annual Brain Injury Awareness Day Fair put on by the Congressional Brain Injury Task Force

Participants: Washington Redskins General Manager Bruce Allen; James Kelly, director of the National Intrepid Center of Excellence; Richard Hunt, director of the Division of Injury Response at the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; Peter Patrick, director of pediatric psychology/ neuropsychology at the Kluge Children's Rehabilitation Center at the University of Virginia Children's Hospital; Robert Stern, co-director of the Center for the Study of Traumatic Encephalopathy at Boston University School of Medicine; and former NFL player John Booty.
Reception sponsored by: The National Association of State Head Injury Administrators, National Disability Rights Network, St. Joseph's Regional Medical Center and Carepath.

Media Coverage: Developments in Traumatic Brain Injury

Domestic

- [As Injuries Rise, Scant Oversight of Helmet Safety](#)
- [NFL To Begin Suspending Players For Violent Hits](#)
- [\(NFL\) What's Been Done](#)
- ['Virtual Biopsy' May Detect Athletes' Brain Injury](#)

Military

- [More troops' concussions diagnosed under new rules](#)
- [Hundreds of PTSD soldiers likely misdiagnosed](#)
- [Discharges for adjustment disorder soar](#)
- [Troops With Traumatic Brain Injury Face Long Road to Recovery](#)
- [Center to treat troops with brain injuries opens in Bethesda](#)

Science

- [Army finds simple blood test to identify mild brain trauma](#)
- [Brain Injury May Raise Soldier's Epilepsy Risk](#)
- [Veterans can have seizures decades after a head injury, study finds](#)
- [Should Traumatic Brain Injury Be Considered a Chronic Disease?](#)
- [Study Says Brain Trauma Can Mimic A.L.S.](#)