



**FIVE EYES
MHRIC**

A MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH AND INNOVATION COLLABORATIVE IN MILITARY, VETERAN AND FAMILY MENTAL HEALTH

Plain language summary

GETTING THE HELP THEY NEED: MENTAL HEALTH CARE SERVICE USE AMONG ACTIVE MILITARY PERSONNEL

THE ISSUE

The stress of military service and deployment is associated with increased rates of mental health issues among military personnel, both during and after service. Military leaders, policy makers, researchers, and the public have called on governments to provide timely and appropriate treatment – the right treatment at the right time – to serving members.

Treatment efforts to date have mainly focused on military service-related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Military personnel also face major depressive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and suicidal thoughts and behaviours.

WHY IT MATTERS

Research has found that military personnel under-use mental health services. It's important for them to feel comfortable and safe seeking care when they are struggling. Ultimately, better pathways to care can help prevent suicide and other adverse outcomes, and equip active personnel with strategies to live healthy, happy lives at work, at home, and in their communities.

WHY WE DID THIS RESEARCH

We examined recent research to better understand military personnel's use of mental health services for all types of mental health conditions. Our goal was to move beyond PTSD to look at a broad range of mental health concerns. We were interested in seeing whether there were improvements over time, from a person's initial contact for services to roadblocks to care and actions military organizations can take to improve the number of personnel seeking mental health support.

WHAT WE DID

We focused on recent research from the Five Eyes Nations: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and United States. A team of subject matter experts completed a critical review of articles, studies, and government reports published in the six years leading up to September 2021. We looked at mental health service use and whether care was adequate and timely. We also identified research gaps and priorities for future research.

The Five Eyes Mental Health Research and Innovation Collaborative is composed of thought leaders from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. These experts conduct research and provide advice to governments and other interested parties including policy makers, practitioners and scientists on mental health issues. Our shared goal is to improve mental health outcomes for past and present military personnel, Veterans and their families.

WHAT WE FOUND

Access to mental health services

The first point of contact for mental health care is often primary care: routine care from a doctor or nurse. The care provider connects the military member to specialist mental health care.

First contact for mental health care

Military personnel are becoming more open-minded about mental health care. Many can recognize they need care and seek help. Still, there are some who need help but are not reaching out for it.

The right care at the right time

Progress is being made. The evidence shows more people are seeking care for mental health issues, and they are doing so more quickly than in the past. Military members are also feeling more satisfied about the care they receive. Although gains have been made, there are gaps in the adequacy of care provided.

Barriers to care and closing the gaps

More and more, military personnel are starting to recognize when they need mental health care. Yet there is still stigma around seeking care; this is one reason some do not want to admit they need support. They are also concerned about confidentiality, career impact, and deployability – or whether their condition will stop them from being able to deploy on missions. Some sub-groups of military personnel, like reservists, men, people impacted by military sexual trauma, those at risk for suicide, LGBTQ members, and personnel from minority and immigrant backgrounds are less likely to seek care.

When military personnel do seek help, they don't always do it quickly enough. That gap between their first symptoms and their first contact with the mental health care system can lead to worse outcomes.

ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVEMENTS

Across military institutions, big gains have been made: there are more mental health services available. All Five Eyes Nations have invested heavily in mental health literacy efforts and suicide prevention and surveillance. There is also greater acceptance and support for personnel to seek care. With these gains, treatment gaps have significantly reduced but gaps in some areas remain and must be addressed. There is also a need to study military sub-groups and how they access care.

Key messages

- Investment in military mental health care systems matters. Each of the Five Eyes Nations has improved mental health care access, narrowed treatment gaps, and addressed some barriers by investing in mental health care and support.
- More military personnel are accessing care for mental health conditions. Still, there are treatment gaps for groups who are at risk of not receiving timely or adequate care. Coordinated investments in both military and civilian mental health care systems may be needed to close those gaps.
- Mental health interventions, or services, must be carefully developed and evaluated. Evidence-based interventions show promise in improving access to mental health care services.

This is a plain language summary of Pathways to mental health care in active military populations across the Five Eyes nations: An integrated perspective.

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