

'That Is The Exact Reason VFW Provides Essential Free Services'

A new study found that two-thirds of troops surveyed upon separation from the military showed signs of a mental health condition requiring follow-up

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A government watchdog study in June revealed a high rate of potential mental health conditions among more than 50,500 troops surveyed upon exiting the military in 2023 and early 2024.

Published on June 5 by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the report found that two-thirds of those troops might suffer from mental health conditions requiring follow-up.

“We know that military service is by nature dangerous and stressful,” said VFW National Veterans Service (NVS) Director Michael Figlioli. “Exposure to stressors of all types often causes PTSD, depression or other related issues. That is the exact reason VFW provides essential free services linking these separating members with their VA benefits.”

GAO, which also examined the VA’s mental health screening for troops on their way out of the service between 2023 and early 2024, noted flaws in the manner in which service members were screened for PTSD and other mental health risks.

“Given concerns about the risk of suicide and other mental health challenges following service members’ separation from military service, it is essential that they receive effective mental health screenings prior to separation,” GAO officials wrote. “Such screenings can lead to the early identification of individuals potentially at high risk and help direct them to further assessment, treatment and intervention.”

The concern stemmed from another troubling statistic noted in the report.

Of the troops who exhibited mental health risks, according to the study, more than half

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declined referrals to transitional programs run by the DOD, which offer counseling and other treatment opportunities to service members leaving the military.

For service officers at VFW, this conundrum is a two-fold problem requiring a solution.

“VFW knows statistically, separating service members are most at risk for suicide during the first year of leaving the military,” Figlioli said. “That is why we stress the importance of working with these transitioning service members as early as possible. These critical benefits provide the safety net of income, housing, employment assistance and health care that their service has earned them.”

Last year, VFW’s NVS network of 2,000 service officers helped more than 590,500 veterans receive \$14.62 billion in VA benefits, including back pay. Among other locations, VFW service officers are located in 26 pre-discharge claim sites across the U.S. and abroad, with locations in Europe, Guantanamo Bay and Korea being covered remotely by service officers.

To find a service officer near you, visit <https://www.vfw.org/NVS>.

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