



THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

**1200 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1200**

HEALTH AFFAIRS

MAR 7 2007

The Honorable Carl Levin
Chairman, Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-6050

Dear Mr Chairman

I am forwarding the enclosed report to supplement our December 22, 2006 report on the Mental Health Self Assessment Program (MHSAP) as requested by Senate Report 109-254 that accompanied the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007

Response to this program has been excellent, with an average of 4,000 Web-based screenings completed each month. The in-person program included 355 sites participating in National Depression and Mental Health Screening and National Alcohol Screening events. In addition, we have expanded the program to include several enhancements including Spanish language versions of each program, a phone-based self-assessment tool, customized referrals based on location, and introduction of a suicide prevention program in Department of Defense middle schools and high schools to assist children of service members affected by deployments.

I am committed to ensuring that service members and their families receive the high level of health care they deserve.

Thank you for your continued support of the Military Health System

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William Winkenwerder, Jr.".

William Winkenwerder, Jr , MD

Enclosure
As stated

cc:
The Honorable John McCain
Ranking Member

Report on the

**Program for Mental Health
Awareness for Dependents**

(February 2007)

**In Response to Senate Report 109-254,
Accompanying the
National Defense Authorization Act
for Fiscal Year 2007**

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Department of Defense
Report to Congress
On
The Mental Health Self-Assessment Program

Background

It is a core value of the Department of Defense (DoD) to provide steadfast support to our service members and their families, particularly in relation to deployment and mobilization. The Mental Health Self-Assessment Program™ (MHSAP) is a natural extension of ongoing efforts by DoD to reach service members and their families with the information they need about services available to them to safeguard their mental health. It is a proactive approach to help families and service personnel to identify their own individual symptoms and their significance and to access assistance, ideally before a mental health problem becomes critical.

The MHSAP began development in October 2005, and was officially launched January 31, 2006, as a program of on-line and in-person, event-based self-assessment and education. In October 2006, funding was provided to expand the program to better serve military families through telephone technology, Spanish language services and programs addressing youth depression and suicide.

Since October 2006, the MHSAP has been expanded in the following ways:

On-line Self-Assessment

A new on-line screening module has been developed to include:

A new post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) screen (the PC-PTSD Screen by Prins, Ouimette, Kimerling, et al.), with new automated results and reporting mechanisms to reflect the new screening tool. Providing the PC-PTSD as part of the MHSAP allows for better comparison of screening and demographic results with other military screening programs that use the PC-PTSD (e.g., anonymous versus non-anonymous assessments) and provides a similar basis for all military health screening results to feed into referral resources.

The following is a screen shot of the new on-line PTSD screening tool:

Feeling Disconnected?
Put the Pieces Together.
The Mental Health Self-Assessment Program

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Screening

In your life, have you ever had any experience that was so frightening, horrible, or upsetting that, in the past month, you...

	Yes	No
1. Have had nightmares about it or thought about it when you did not want to?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Tried hard not to think about it or went out of your way to avoid situations that reminded you of it?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Were constantly on guard, watchful, or easily startled?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Felt numb or detached from others, activities, or your surroundings?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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An on-line screening for parents has been added to help them assess their children for depression or suicidality. The Brief Screen for Adolescent Depression (BSAD) screening tool is used in the nationally recognized, evidence-based Signs of Suicide® (SOS) Prevention Program for Secondary Schools and is offered as part of this year's MHSAP expansions. The SOS program includes a parent version of the BSAD. This interactive tool provides parents an assessment of their child's mental health and the results, as well as recommendations for next steps. The screenshot below shows the "symptom cues" that prompt parents to take the on-line screening if they are concerned about their child:

- Concerned about your teenage child?
- Is he or she not enjoying activities, sad all the time, not relating well to friends?

Take the **Brief Screen for Adolescent Depression - Parent Version** to evaluate your child's risk of depression or suicide>>

The screen includes the same demographic questions as does the other MHSAP on-line self-assessments, allowing DoD to determine use of this resource compared to other MHSAP on-line screenings.

A new fact sheet (see below) has also been added to educate parents about child depression.

The Depressed Child

No. 4; Updated July 2004

Not only adults become depressed. Children and teenagers also may have depression, which is a treatable illness. Depression is defined as an illness when the feelings of depression persist and interfere with a child or adolescent's ability to function.

About 5 percent of children and adolescents in the general population suffer from depression at any given point in time. Children under stress, who experience loss, or who have attentional, learning, conduct or anxiety disorders are at a higher risk for depression. Depression also tends to run in families.

The behavior of depressed children and teenagers may differ from the behavior of depressed adults. Child and adolescent psychiatrists advise parents to be aware of signs of depression in their youngsters.

If one or more of these signs of depression persist, parents should seek help:

The MHSAP expansion includes new on-line screening functionality that allows individual bases and National Guard/Reserve units serving returning veterans and their families to add customized referrals to the on-line screening, linking military families with their own installation's health and counseling services. As a result, individual installations can direct users to treatment services provided on their base, through their unit, or through local community providers, in addition to the general mental health referral resources provided by the DoD. All the usage data and results from the customized localized screenings are consolidated with the general MHSAP results for reporting purposes. Participating installations receive year-round technical assistance, as well as local promotional materials. The customized on-line screening is promoted to installations through Web sites and through phone calls and e-mails to individual installations urging them to provide the customized on-line screening to their military families.

The following screenshot shows the Web site promotion:

Military: Online Self-Assessment Program

Online Self-Assessment and Referral can be accessed 24/7 at www.MilitaryMentalHealth.org. *No login is required and the program is completed anonymously.*

Following the self-assessment, results are provided to the user as well as information about how to access services through the Department of Defense or Veterans Affairs. Self-assessments are available for depression, bipolar disorder, alcohol use, post-traumatic stress disorder, and generalized anxiety disorder.

How to Add Information about Your Base or Community Treatment Services to the Online Self-Assessment

Individual military installations or National Guard and Reserve Units can add information about local or installation treatment services to their own version of the online self-assessment. The customized version can be linked directly to the unit's website or can be publicized with a password that will bring the user directly to the customized version housed on Screening for Mental Health's website.

[Click here](#) and fill out the form to get a personalized self-assessment for your installation.

Utilization

Use of the on-line screening program from the date of its launch on January 31, 2006, through mid-January 2007, averaged more than 3,200 screens a month, or 740 per week. Of those who used the program:

- 61 percent were men; 38 percent were women; 1 percent no response.
- 60 percent were individuals where they or their family member had at least one deployment outside the continental United States.
- 7 percent were military personnel serving in Iraq.
- 30 percent completed the depression self-assessment; 22 percent completed the self-assessment for generalized anxiety disorder; 20 percent completed the bipolar disorder self-assessment; 18 percent completed the PTSD self-assessment; and 10 percent completed the alcohol self-assessment.
- Army service members and their families accounted for 47 percent of all completed self-assessments, followed by 17 percent for the Air Force, 15 percent for the Navy, 8 percent for the Marines, 1 percent for the Coast Guard, and 12 percent other.

- National Guard and Reserve personnel or their family members completed 18 percent of self-assessments.

Telephone Self-Assessment

Also added in FY 2007 is an anonymous, interactive, pre-recorded telephone screening program. The telephone screening is designed to reach those military families and service members who do not have access to the in-person or Internet-based on-line screening programs. The toll-free number, (877) 877-3647, brings callers directly to the self-assessment. Callers are provided with immediate screening results and phone numbers where they can call to access treatment or educational resources. The phone-based screenings use the same tested methodology as the on-line screening for conducting anonymous, evidence-based mental health screening and referral. The telephone screening also provides an immediate transfer to counselors at Military OneSource on a 24-hours, 7-days-a-week, basis for individuals who endorse risk-based questions and/or who want immediate assistance.

The program includes:

- Toll-free telephone technology with interactive screenings in English and Spanish for depression and alcohol problems.
- 24/7 availability to military families and service members affected by deployment.
- 24 hour transfer to a live counselor at Military OneSource for individuals who need immediate assistance.
- Customized greeting, referral information, and demographic questions.
- Bi-weekly usage reports and quarterly reports on results (utilization and screening results broken down by demographics).
- Unlimited technical assistance.
- Unlimited promotional assistance to help installations alert service members and families of the availability of the telephone screening.

The promotional wallet cards and flyers developed under the FY 2006 contract have been updated to promote the new telephone line (in addition to the on-line screening URL) to military services members and families. The cards are included in the new in-person screening kits being produced, and they will be distributed to military families by supporters or “champions” of the program, as described below in the Public Relations section. Below is a screen shot of the wallet card:



Spanish Pilot Project

A Spanish language version of the in-person self-assessment, on-line screening, and the new telephone component were developed. The Spanish language assessments are being offered as a pilot project to determine the ongoing future need for Spanish language self-directed screening services for military families. An evaluation of the results and utilization of these Spanish language services will be conducted at the end of FY 2007 to help formulate future programming for this subgroup.

Outreach to Adolescent Children of Service Members

The SOS Signs of Suicide® Prevention Program was modified to meet the specific needs of military children and is being offered to middle and high schools located on military installations in the U.S. and overseas through Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA). Kits are being produced with a quantity of education and screening materials to serve approximately 23,000 students in grades 8 through 12, and 14,000 6th and 7th grade students.

SOS is a video-based psycho-educational program with a primary objective to educate youth about depression being a treatable illness, and to teach them to respond to the potential suicide of a friend or family member using the ACT technique (Acknowledge your friend has a problem, show that you Care, and Tell a trusted adult). The SOS is an action-oriented approach instructing students how to ACT in the face of a mental health emergency. Parents and school staff are also provided with educational materials that reinforce the ACT message given to students. The BSAD screening form (both student and parent versions) are included in the program kits for those schools that choose to use them.

As part of collaboration with DoDEA to alert Department of Defense Domestic Dependent Elementary and Secondary Schools (DDESS) in the United States and the Department of Defense Dependent Schools Overseas (DoDDS) of the availability of these resources, two presentations were made by SOS program

coordinators, one in person and another via phone, to DoDEA staff and its Suicide Risk Reduction Committee. A written overview of the program was provided to the DoDEA Coordinator of Pupil Personnel Services for presentation to the area Education Chiefs in mid January.

In-person Screening Events

As of January 18, a projected 22,848 in-person self-assessments have taken place through alcohol and mental health education and screening events conducted at 355 installations worldwide. In FY 2007, an additional 175 mental health and alcohol screening kits are being produced for distribution to installations, as part of the National Alcohol Screening Day® and NDSD Mental Health Screening™ programs. This is an increase over the 150 program kits available in FY 2006 to meet the overwhelming demand for the product among military bases and National Guard and Reserve units. (Additional kits were produced midway through Fiscal Year 2006 to meet this increased demand.) Each kit contains materials for 500 participants. A new PTSD screening tool, the PC-PTSD, has replaced the Sprint 4 screening tool that was used last year (see description above, under On-line Assessment). The Suicide Risk Questionnaire (SRQ) is provided in the kits (and in downloadable form from the Web site) to teach friends and family members to recognize signs of suicide in a loved one and how to get help for the suicidal person.

Expanded Program Registration Mechanism

A new on-line, centralized registration system has been developed to allow installations to register for the alcohol and mental health screening and education kits, including the new Spanish language and SOS high school and middle school kits. The registration system also allows installations to register to receive the new customized on-line screening module. A screen shot follows:

**Screening for Mental Health, Inc. -
Mental Health Self-Assessment Program for Military (MHSAP)
(Registration & Order)**

Contact and Registration Information:

All fields in bold are required fields.

Organization Name:

First Name:

Last Name:

Street 1:

(Note: We cannot ship kits to P.O. boxes. Please enter a valid street address.)

Street 2:

City:

State:

Country:

Zip Code:

Phone:

Fax:

Email:

Select your branch of the military:

Ordering Kits

- National Alcohol Screening Day - MHSAP Kit (English)
- National Alcohol Screening Day - MHSAP Kit (Spanish)
- NDSD Mental Health Screening - MHSAP Kit (English)
- NDSD Mental Health Screening - MHSAP Kit (Spanish)
- High School SOS - MHSAP Kit
- Middle School SOS - MHSAP Kit

For installations that order National Alcohol Screening Day or NDSD Mental Health Screening kits. Click here if you would like to receive a free, customized online mental health screening module for your website. Our staff will contact you to set-up and customize (with your installation's health provider information) the online screening for your website. The online screening tools are intended for use by individuals 18 and over and are available to installations only; not to schools.

New Educational DVD

A new educational DVD format is being developed for service members, family, and installation staff. The DVD addresses the symptoms of common mental health and alcohol disorders among military service members and families and the types of available help. An advisory board comprised of DoD mental health and alcohol experts, military families, and retired service members has been established to guide the development of the DVD. A script and treatment are under development and will feature vignettes from military life addressing typical stressors and experiences shared by many service members and their families affected by deployment, including:

- Long separations and adjustments on return.
- Raising children alone.
- Financial challenges.
- Exposure to violence.
- Nightmares and other types of sleep problems.
- Flashbacks and emotional numbness.
- Excessive drinking and use of alcohol to self-medicate.
- Difficult emotions such as anger and frustration (lashing out), fear, sadness and hopelessness.

Specific educational goals have been developed, including:

- Reduce stigma associated with help-seeking; communicate that help-seeking is a sign of resilience and strength.
- Educate viewers to recognize signs of mental health or alcohol problems and signs of resilience.
- Empower family members and friends to take steps to help themselves or someone who shows signs of a problem.
- Raise awareness that mental health and alcohol problems are common and highly treatable.

Follow-Up and Outcome Evaluation

A follow-up study of those individuals participating in the on-line and in-person screenings is being developed to determine the percentage of follow through on screening recommendations, what services were accessed, the increase in knowledge about mental health and alcohol problems, the increase in knowledge about services provided by the military and veterans services, and user satisfaction.

In addition, data from all in-person screening form results, all summary reports from in-person screening sites and analysis and reporting on the outcomes of this data is stored electronically for future use in program evaluation efforts.

Public Relations and Media

Promotional Strategy and Outreach for the MHSAP:

Promotion of the MHSAP continues to be an important component and is necessary to ensure use of the program and to educate military families about mental health issues and how to access counseling or health care services. Promotion is achieved through several strategies, including media coverage in national or local media outlets and communications directly to commanders or others directly working with service members and their families.

Media Outreach via Community, Military, and Mental Health Press:

Media outreach to press outlets continues to be a viable method of creating awareness of the program.

Examples of recent coverage include an article on-line at the DoD Commanders Page (www.commanderspage.dod.mil) with a link to the screening and the American Forces Press Service story on the program. The Army National Guard magazine, *GX*, carried a large article on Army suicide prevention highlighting the link to the MHSAP Web site. WCVB-Channel 5, an ABC News affiliate in Boston, aired a story on the program featuring a Massachusetts family whose father/husband is a Marine deployed to Iraq. A media feed was established to Iraq so the story could include an interview with both the Marine and his family. The story aired twice, in the evening news and again at mid-day on the following day, with a companion story on-line. The MHSAP Web site was featured within the segment and linked in the on-line story.

Another audience interested in MHSAP consists of professional mental health clinicians, so information is sent to a variety of outlets for internal dissemination. Interested organizations that receive updates on the program include the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC), the American Psychiatric Association, and the Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN). *Mental Health Weekly*, a trade publication for mental health professionals, carried a story on December 11, 2006, announcing the expansion of MHSAP and outlining the new enhancements for 2007.

Media Outreach to Installation and Base Newspapers:

MHSAP outreach staff contacted installation and base newspapers urging them to include information about the program and tie them in with related issues timely to the calendar year. In the 4th quarter of 2006, an e-mail was sent linking the program to the topic of “holiday blues” along with a “tip sheet” on handling the stresses of the season. An example of resulting coverage came from the Aberdeen Proving Ground newspaper, *APG News*, which ran a story entitled “Holidays: A time of stress for service members, families,” in its November 23 issue incorporating both the screening Uniform Resource Locator (URL) and the tips provided in the release.

Supporting Messaging:

Promotional materials that can be used and customized by registered bases and installations continue to be available on-demand at the MHSAP Web site in order to support effective messaging.

The materials are designed to empower the installation or base to promote their own programs and educate their service members about mental health and available services. The emphasis is on empowering the individual to seek help without fear, without stigma, and before a crisis emerges.

In Millington, Tennessee, the *Navy News Stand* ran a story in December communicating the suicide prevention message of MHSAP, which is “ACT – Acknowledge, Care and Treatment.” Drawing from MHSAP provided materials and the expertise of the local director of the Navy Suicide Program at OPNAV N-135 in Millington, the article effectively communicated the signs of suicide and the message that it is possible to save the life of a shipmate by simple and quick action.

Partnerships:

Developing partnerships with individuals and organizations concerned about military mental health and the health of family members and service members affected by deployment is an important strategy in promoting the MHSAP program. The strategy is to continue to cultivate program “champions” who will use every available opportunity to let people know the program is available for use.

Kristin Henderson, author of “While They’re At War: The True Story of American Families on the Homefront,” regularly speaks about MHSAP at

book signings, distributes wallet cards with the MHSAP URL and recently wrote an op-ed on *www.Military.com* about holiday stresses and the benefit of the Mental Health Self-Assessment Program.

Excerpts from media coverage:

The Web site *www.thebostonchannel.com*, January 10, 2007

“The O’Briens said that their friends and family help them get through the tough times, and there is a new program to help all military families who may need help coping.

“‘We want people to get the help they need,’ Dr. Douglas Jacobs said.

“On *MilitaryMentalHealth.org*, all military members and their families, including the National Guard, can get a free mental health assessment. You take an anonymous test. The results are immediate, and help is there if you need it.”

www.commanderspage.dod.mil, December 28, 2006

“Mental Health Self-Assessment Program Available”
By DoD Health Affairs and Navy LIFELines

“This private, self-assessment mental health screening tool has been made available by DoD Health Affairs in partnership with Screening for Mental Health, Inc. Results from this assessment can be printed and taken to military or civilian health professionals and counselors for follow-on assistance as needed. This is not a treatment program ... click for more ... (link to larger story and screening).”

GX: The Guard Experience, November 14, 2006

“Persons considering suicide are not trying to end their lives—they are trying to end their pain and suffering. Be aware of the warning signs and cries for help, and don’t be afraid to ask a person whether he or she is considering suicide and whether they have a plan to commit to suicide. Contrary to popular myth, asking will not increase the risk they will follow through with it. To assist an individual, you can encourage them to take an anonymous on-line Suicide Risk Questionnaire to help determine their risk level. It is

offered by Mental Health Screening at
www.mentalhealthscreening.org/military/index.aspx.

“You can also take a self-screening and find out what resources are available to you through the military ... at www.MentalHealthScreening.org. There is always a solution to help you prevent suicide.”

www.Military.com, December 14, 2006

“These examples of profound loneliness have no simple answer. But sometimes a single small step can make a big difference. Here’s a suggestion of one step that’s easy to take. If you think you might have a problem or if the people around you are telling you that you have a problem and you’re not sure you believe them, go to www.militarymentalhealth.org and take a self-assessment test. It’s free. And more importantly, it’s anonymous. After you take the test, it tells you, confidentially, whether or not you may be suffering from a psychological injury or illness. If a problem is suspected, it lists resources that can help. The test doesn’t report you to anyone. It leaves the next step to you. For people who are concerned about admitting they need help, www.militarymentalhealth.org is a safe way to find out if they do. For those who don’t know where to turn, it’s an easy way to get started on the path toward feeling better again.”

Navy News Stand, December 4, 2006

“Beginning next year, a new Navy suicide prevention campaign asks Sailors to ‘ACT’ to save a life.

“ACT is a three-step process designed to help determine if someone is suicidal and to prevent them from hurting themselves. It stands for: Ask – ask the person if they are thinking of hurting themselves, Care – listen and let the person know they are not alone, and Treatment – get your shipmate to help as quickly as possible; such as the duty officer, chaplain, friend, medical personnel, or others who can help.”

APG News, November 23, 2006

“The holidays can be a time of stress for any family, but particularly so for families affected by deployments or those who have lost

someone in theater. Separation at this special season is particularly difficult and the feelings of loss can intensify into emotional issues that impact functioning and the ability to relate to the family.

“The Mental Health Self-Assessment Program is an on-line mental health screening program available 24/7 at www.MilitaryMentalHealth.org. It is taken anonymously and is designed to help families address emotional issues by letting them walk through a self-assessment and connect with support and treatment services provided by the Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs.”