

VA Opens New Brain Injury Center, Streamlines PTSD Claims Process

On behalf of Johnston, Moore & Thompson

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After long-term criticism of how it treats soldiers suffering from traumatic [brain injuries](#) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the Veterans Administration has made some important progress. In his June 10 radio address, President Obama announced that the VA will streamline its claims process for those injuries, which he called the "signature injuries of today's wars."

This news comes on the heels of the June 24 opening of the VA's new \$65 million treatment center exclusively for veterans with traumatic brain injuries, PTSD and other psychological issues: the National Intrepid Center of Excellence for Psychological Help and Traumatic Brain Injury.

"For years, many veterans with PTSD who have tried to seek benefits - veterans of today's wars and earlier wars - have often found themselves stymied," Obama said. "Well, I don't think our troops on the battlefield should have to take notes to keep for a claims application."

After a Flurry of Criticism, New TBI Center, New Claims Process "A Step in the Right Direction"

The opening of the National Intrepid Center and the new rules for TBI and PTSD claims come after months and even years of harsh criticism of how the VA deals with these issues. Investigative reporters and congressional reports alike found that the military had routinely failing to diagnose traumatic brain injuries, which are the most common head-related injuries among soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan

Worse, soldiers with traumatic brain injuries have been forced to wade through a vast bureaucracy in order to get needed treatment. Sadly, people with brain injuries are some of the least able to do that.

According to military records, there are around 115,000 Iraq and Afghanistan soldiers and veterans suffering from mild traumatic brain injury -- a condition that can still have devastating consequences for its victims.

Although mild traumatic brain injury and PTSD can be difficult to diagnose, the reports showed that the military and the VA had been negligent in many cases. Often, soldiers exposed to blast trauma were not tested for brain injuries even though military medical protocols called for such tests to be performed.

These failures, along with the highly publicized problems with the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., have led to changes. The director of the Defense Centers of Excellence Loree Sutton resigned on June 24, apparently under pressure. The Walter Reed hospital is scheduled to be closed by 2011.

New Brain Injury Program a Cooperative Effort Between Government and Private Sector

The National Intrepid Center was developed in a cooperative effort between the private and public sectors. 125,000 people and organizations donated money. The center is a 72,000 square-foot-facility on the grounds of the National Naval Medical Center.

"It's a step in the right direction," said deputy undersecretary of Defense William J. Lynn. "But we still face challenges in treating these wounds."

Related Resources:

- ["PTSD: New regs will make it easier for vets to get help"](#) (The Christian Science Monitor, June 10, 2010)
- "Pentagon Shifts Its Story About Departure of Leader of Brain Injury Center" ("The Two-Way" NPR News Blog, June 30, 2010)
- "Center to treat troops with brain injuries opens in Bethesda" (The Washington Post, June 25, 2010)