



Home	Bill Information	California Law	Publications	Other Resources	My Subscriptions	My Favorites
------	------------------	----------------	--------------	-----------------	------------------	--------------

AJR-17 Military behavioral health care. (2021-2022)

SHARE THIS:  

Assembly Joint Resolution No. 17

CHAPTER 96

Relative to military behavioral health care.

[Filed with Secretary of State June 28, 2022.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AJR 17, Waldron. Military behavioral health care.

This measure would urge the President, the Congress of the United States, and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to take all measures to ensure that military veterans can access necessary treatment for mental health and substance abuse disorders in a timely manner.

Fiscal Committee: no

WHEREAS, Adrian Darren Bonar, a United States Army veteran who served three tours of duty in Iraq, was murdered in October 2019; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Bonar returned from serving his country admirably and faithfully and experienced post-traumatic stress disorder and substance abuse problems; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Bonar sought treatment for the problems he experienced, but there were many obstacles and delays. If treatment for veterans was more readily accessible, Mr. Bonar could have avoided the dangerous life of addiction that ultimately led to his murder. Without expanding access to needed services, more veterans will sadly follow in Mr. Bonar's footsteps; and

WHEREAS, Mental health and substance use disorders are serious and tragic public health problems that can be curtailed through increased awareness, resources, and proper treatment; and

WHEREAS, Mental health and substance use disorders affect all Americans, but data shows that active duty service members and veterans experience these problems at much higher rates than the civilian population; and

WHEREAS, In 2017, veterans accounted for 13.5 percent of all deaths by suicide among United States adults and constituted 7.9 percent of the United States adult population, indicating a substantial gap between the services veterans need and the help they actually receive, and the number of veteran's deaths stemming from unaddressed substance abuse and other behavioral health issues is unknown, but likely substantial; and

WHEREAS, A 2016 report found that, among veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, mental health diagnoses accounted for the greatest number of United States Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Health Administration (VHA) service visits per veteran, while a 2015 report found that the proportion of older veterans receiving VHA care who had a mental illness increased by 57 percent between 2005 and 2013; and

WHEREAS, The rising number of veterans with behavioral health needs has raised legitimate concerns about the health care system's capacity to serve this population. Researchers and advocates have called attention to mental health professional shortages, professional burnout among military and mental health service providers, and the importance of military cultural competence when working with service members and veterans; and

WHEREAS, A 2019 Veterans of Foreign Wars article indicated that within the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) system alone, health professionals are tracking more than 64,000 veterans with opioid disorders and quoted Dr. Karen Drexler, the VA's national mental health program director for substance abuse disorders, as saying that the prevalence of the painkillers is alarming. This point is underscored by the fact that the VA's tally of opioid use disorder for current and former service members has more than doubled since 2002; and

WHEREAS, Wait times for mental health services continue to pose a significant impediment to effective care. For example, in San Diego, one VA clinic is not accepting new patients, while two other clinics report wait times of 26 and 25 days, respectively, for mental health services; and

WHEREAS, We must recognize that the tragic epidemic of veteran mental health and substance abuse disorders is taking the lives of those who have most heavily borne the burden of protecting and serving their country, in the past and present; and

WHEREAS, It is critical that effective, scientifically proven, and timely services are available for all eligible veterans; and

WHEREAS, This resolution endeavors to promote awareness of the problem of substance abuse and mental health disorders and the particular epidemic facing the military population, and encourages President Joseph Biden's administration, the United States Congress, and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to take swift action to alleviate the mental health and substance abuse scourges plaguing those who have served our country; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Assembly and the Senate of the State of California, jointly, That the Legislature hereby urges the President of the United States, the United States Congress, and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to take all measures to ensure that military veterans can access necessary treatment for mental health and substance abuse disorders in a timely manner, ensuring veterans the level of care to which their honorable service to our country entitles them; and be it further

Resolved, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the President and Vice President of the United States, to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, to the Majority Leader of the Senate, to each Senator and Representative from California in the Congress of the United States, and to the author for appropriate distribution.