



Critical program helps veterans find health care and other benefits



(BPT) - It could be a parent, a son or daughter, a co-worker, or a best friend. With more than 21 million American men and women over the age of 18 having served in the U.S. Armed Forces, most people know at least one person who is a veteran. But unless they are veterans themselves, most don't understand what veterans face on the home front.

In combat, these warriors can count on their comrades to have their backs. Yet when they return home, they face new and daunting challenges – emotional, medical, financial and more – and for many of them, the question is, “Who has my back now?”

“We do,” says James Blaylock, president of the [Military Order of the Purple Heart Service Foundation](#).

The foundation is the fundraising engine of the [Military Order of the Purple Heart](#), a Congressionally-chartered veterans' organization whose members have been awarded the Purple Heart medal. The organization supports thousands of veterans annually in navigating the labyrinth of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in order to gain access to medical care and other earned benefits.

One of the most successful initiatives for veterans suffering from physical injuries or mental trauma is the National Service Officer Program. This program provides a nationwide network in more than 70 Veterans Administration offices, hospitals, veterans' centers, as well as state and county veterans' facilities.

Trained Service Officers, their staff and a corps of more than 1,400 volunteers assist veterans, their dependents, widows and orphans, helping them process claims for compensation, pension, medical care, education, job training, employment, housing, death and burial benefits.

Today's vets face new challenges

“As the nature of war and its impact has changed, so too is our focus shifting. For warriors returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, the challenges they face are not the same as those returning from previous wars”, says Jeff Roy, the foundation's vice president. “Our focus now is on four major challenges for today's veterans: suicide prevention, Post-Traumatic Stress, traumatic brain injury and women's health concerns.”

Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS) and brain injury

Earlier this year, the Purple Heart Service Foundation donated \$500,000 to the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund to jumpstart the construction of centers to help veterans with brain injuries and PTS. The foundation also awarded a grant to the University Of Washington Division Of Pain Medicine to develop leading-edge technologies to help reduce the risk of veteran suicides and deaths caused by accidental overdoses of opioids.

Women's health

Too many women combat veterans have been victims of sexual assault. In a majority of cases, these victims suffer what is now known as Military Sexual Trauma (MST); in many cases MST leads to PTS. They face a long and painful recovery. The Department of Veterans Affairs has online resources and a call center available in the women's health section on the VA website: www.womenshealth.va.gov.

Suicide prevention

Suicide among vets is rising at an alarming rate. The causes are complex, but Blaylock says the foundation's efforts in support of treatment of PTS and traumatic brain injury, and participating in MST prevention, will have a positive impact on reducing the number of suicides.

“Job training and employment assistance can help veterans gain self-sufficiency and reduce the feelings of helplessness,” says Blaylock. “For example, the U.S. Department of Labor has programs to help homebound disabled and combat-wounded veterans prepare for careers in customer service and information technology.” A good place to start is the Veterans Employment and Training Service website: www.dol.gov/vets.

How you can help our veterans

You can help honor our nation's heroes by texting PURPLE to 20222 to make a \$10 donation, or visiting www.PurpleHeartFoundation.org to find out how to donate cars, clothing, or household goods. All donations are tax-deductible. Since 2008, the Purple Heart Service Foundation has invested more than \$42 million in its efforts. All services are provided to vets free of charge.

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