

***20 Veteran Suicides Every Day:***

20 American veterans die by suicide everyday in the United States. The Veterans Administration reports that veteran suicide increased 31% between 2001 and 2014. The high suicide rates among veterans has been linked to the lack of access to mental health services.

***The Shield:***

The Shield (501 c 3) believes that we must act now to remove the obstacles to mental health care for local veterans in our community.

***Four years ago:***

In 2014, congress enacted the Veteran Administration's "Choice Program", designed to utilize non-VA health care providers to improve response time and access to health services for veterans.

The Choice Program was created in response to a history of criticism of the VA's long wait times including media coverage of cases with veterans waiting months for care and sometimes giving up before care is ever provided. One of the top-level requirements of the Choice Program is that veterans receive care within 30 days.

In 2016 the Government Accountability Office (GAO) published their report on the performance of the Choice Program. When the GAO audited a random sample of cases, they found the average time for the veterans to receive care was 64 days and sometimes longer. In addition, the GAO identified that the VA does not have adequate systems for tracking/reporting wait times for care.

***Four years later:***

In 2018, the VA and congress acknowledged that the Choice Program has failed to result in the improvements in care that it was designed to provide since 2014. The Choice Program exhausted it's funding this year and so a new program, The Mission Act was enacted. The Mission Act is intended to replace the Choice Program while funding the faulty Choice Program for another year until the new program can be implemented.

***The Shield:***

The founders of The Shield (501 c 3), believe that we can no longer wait for lawmakers and administrators to solve the problems of access to mental health care for veterans in our community. Until the VA can effectively support the local veterans in need, The Shield will provide high quality mental health services now, at no cost, to those who have served us.