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DOD COMMISSION ON SUICIDE MUST EXAMINE UNDIAGNOSED BRAIN INJURY, PUSH FOR GREATER CONNECTION OF SERVICEMEMBERS

May 18, 2022 -- The Department of Defense recently [named](#) the members of its suicide prevention commission and listed the military installations it will visit as part of its charge to better understand and lower the rates of suicide in the armed forces.

Our view at [Warrior Call](#) is that the commission must include in its assessment the impact of undiagnosed brain injuries that service members incur during regular training and operations.

Mild traumatic brain injury, or mTBI, includes concussions and sub-concussions. In the military, they can be sustained in many ways, "including athletics, recreational activities, physical training, falls, motor-vehicle accidents and exposure to explosive blasts," [researchers reported](#) in the Journal of the Alzheimer's Association.

"Military mTBI is also random and unpredictable, ranging from a single injury to many thousands of traumatic injuries over similar time periods depending on an individual's chance exposure to blasts and impacts ... mTBI is the most common traumatic brain injury affecting military personnel; however, it is the most difficult to diagnose and the least well understood," researchers reported.

Importantly, service members suffering military-related mTBI can present as having other ailments, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, and can go misdiagnosed. The DoD commission must examine the prevalence of this condition and recommend better screening to identify personnel with mTBI and treat before they spiral into suicidal behavior.

Second, the commission in its assessment of the tragic problem of military suicides must focus on solutions that foster greater connection.

- The simple and tragic fact is that many of those who are suffering are not seeking help or treatment. Up to two-thirds of veterans who take their own lives have had no contact

with the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the COVID pandemic has only increased isolation and disconnection.

- According to the VA, researchers have identified social isolation as "arguably the strongest and most reliable predictor of suicidal ideation, [suicide] attempts and lethal suicidal behavior."

Piercing that isolation is the chief mission of [Warrior Call](#). We spur greater connection. We make calls to warriors -- to veterans and service members who may be isolated and disconnected from services. We steer them to services. We encourage all Americans to make these warrior calls. Together, we can save lives.
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