

Press Release

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For a summary copy of the study, visit www.commcc.org

Community
Counseling Center 

The Center for Emotional Health

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Community Counseling Center Releases Study to Better Understand and Address the Mental Health and Readjustment Needs of Maine Veterans

(PORTLAND, ME March 12, 2007) Community Counseling Center announces the release of a research study of the mental health status and needs of Iraq War Veterans in the Maine National Guard.

This study is unique not only because of its military/civilian partnership, but also because it is the first systematic assessment of members of the Maine National Guard who were deployed to the Iraq War.

“The overarching goals of this study were to assess the real needs of returning veterans and their families, to breakdown stigma associated with needing help, and then to ensure that the entire community works together to support them so that no one slips through the cracks,” said Leslie Clark Brancato, CEO and President of Community Counseling Center.

Given the growing number of Maine deployed soldiers, Community Counseling Center contacted the Maine National Guard in 2005 to explore and investigate the readjustment needs of veterans upon returning home. The Maine National Guard, committed to using all available resources to improve the care and well-being of soldiers and their families, was eager to participate in this effort.

“Readjustment issues are a given for any deployed soldiers in time of war,” noted Major General John W. Libby, The Adjutant General, Maine National Guard “but with 231 soldiers and airmen currently serving overseas, the Maine National Guard is compelled to do the best we can by our soldiers in providing them with the services that they and their families need.”

Following a comprehensive survey process that included 532 Maine National Army Guard members, a report was generated that identified large numbers of Iraq veterans reporting mental health problems and significant stress in relationships with family and friends. These readjustment issues represent predictable and normal reactions to the experience of traumatic stress, as compared to the national average.

“As soon you (a soldier) put your boots on the ground in a combat zone, you’re going to be a changed person,” noted Amy Marcotte of the Sanford Vet Center. “You’re going to be stronger in some ways, but readjustment can bring some real challenges too.”

Vet Centers and the VA have a long history of providing veterans with services to support their readjustment, including treatment for post-traumatic stress reactions and bereavement counseling. However, the number and needs of veterans and their families continue to grow rapidly. For instance, currently there is currently a gap in services for the emerging needs of spouses and children of veterans. Additionally, there are some returning soldiers who feel more comfortable and open to pursuing counseling services in community-based agencies for a variety of reasons.

Community Counseling Center, the Maine National Guard and the VA and Vet Centers see enormous possibilities in a continued partnership to assure that a comprehensive network exists in every Maine community to meet the needs of returning soldiers and their families.

In fall of 2007, Community Counseling Center, the Maine National Guard and the VA and Vet Centers will hold a statewide conference for mental health providers on best practices for helping veterans and their families.

Community Counseling Center, a premiere provider of mental health and family services, provides a broad range of behavioral health, counseling, education, prevention and family services that effectively enhance the emotional strength and well-being of Maine residents throughout their lives. For more information, call 207.874.1030, 207.874.1043 (tty) or visit www.commcc.org.

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All **four federal delegates** have been highly supportive of this work and partnership. Quotes below:

- **From Congressman Tom Allen:**

"We owe our Armed Forces returning from Iraq and Afghanistan all the care and support we can give them. The Community Counseling Center, in partnership with the Maine National Guard, is providing vitally important services to veterans scarred emotionally by their war experiences. This study shows specifically the critical need for these services. I commend the Center and its staff, and the Guard, for their work on this study and will continue to work in Congress to provide the financial support necessary to make sure all who need these services have ready access to them."

- **From Senator Olympia Snowe:**

"The vital research conducted by Community Counseling Center gives a compelling indication of the emotional burdens of war and the hardships they have caused for the courageous members of Maine's National Guard.

In order to ensure that our brave men and women in uniform receive the care and treatment they have earned, I have introduced legislation that would significantly improve the VA's current treatment capacity for PTSD and TBI by requiring face-to-face mental health screenings, extending the window for access to mental health care by three years, and broadening the support programs for veterans and their families.

The Community Counseling Center study reveals our nation's enormous obligation to members of Maine's National Guard and veterans across the country, who have honorably risked their lives in defense of our country – they deserve nothing less."

- **From Senator Susan Collins:**

"This Nation owes the highest level of gratitude to our men and women in uniform. This groundbreaking cooperative effort of Community Counseling Center and the Maine National Guard shows what can be accomplished through a military-community partnership and it will provide a solid foundation for the treatment that these 'citizen soldiers' deserve."

- **From Congressman Mike Michaud**

"Our nation has always depended on its citizen-soldiers, and we have an obligation to offer them the care they have earned following their return from war. Nearly 8 out of 10 service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are at risk of developing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It is vitally important that we recognize the signs and properly diagnose these service members so they may receive the proper treatment.

The VA and Vet Centers offer outstanding care, but with the rapidly growing number of veterans seeking mental health services, it is important that all available resources be utilized.

I applaud the partnership between the Community Counseling Center and the Maine National Guard. As the Chair of the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health, this has been an issue of great interest and importance for me and I welcome the opportunity to continue work on this critical issue."