

May/June 2023

Mental health is an area that may be looked away from or minimized compared to other health concerns. Yet, the rate of mental illness in the United States continues to increase. It's estimated **one in five Americans** struggle with mental health issues, compared to **4-7% who have heart disease**. Just as people can learn to become first responders for people with cardiac arrest by learning CPR, you can learn how to respond to people struggling with mental distress. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) promotes five steps to help someone in emotional pain in their #Bethe 1 campaign.



## Risk factor for suicide

Although not all people committing suicide are mentally ill, mental illness is a significant risk factor for suicide. As reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death for all Americans, claiming 46,000 Americans annually
- Suicide rates have been rising since 2021, after two years of decline.
- In 2021, suicide was among the top nine leading causes of death for people ages 10-64, and the second leading cause of death for people ages 10-14 and 20-34.

Suicidal thoughts, persistent sadness, social withdrawal, lack of energy, loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed, anxiety, and substance abuse are signals that need to be taken just as seriously and promptly as one would chest pain, slurred speech, or weakness on one side of the body.

Multiple studies show that asking at-risk people if they are suicidal does not increase suicidal thought or the risk of suicide. Find more information on suicide prevention at <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention>.

## Self-help resources

Military One Source offers some great materials for self-help, resilience, and health personal and family lifestyle at [www.militaryonesource.mil/resources/mobile-apps/](http://www.militaryonesource.mil/resources/mobile-apps/). These include:

- *Breath2Relax (B2R)*, a mobile app teaching belly breathing techniques for relaxation and
- *Virtual Hope Box*, a mobile app designed for patients and their providers as an accessory to treatment. The Virtual Hope Box contains simple tools for relaxation, distraction and positive thinking using personalized audio, video, pictures, games, mindfulness exercises, activity planning, inspirational quotes and coping statements.

## TRICARE benefits

Treating mental health is not something you need to do on your own. TRICARE covers a wide range of mental health services such as:

- Outpatient psychotherapy, including intensive outpatient psychotherapy, and partial hospitalization (day treatment)
- Acute inpatient substance use treatment and residential substance use rehabilitation treatment
- Residential psychiatric treatment for children up to age 21

Most outpatient mental health care services do not require referral, but there are exceptions. Find details at [www.tricare.mil/mentalhealth](http://www.tricare.mil/mentalhealth).

## Finding providers

The Department of Defense has embedded mental health care providers in [military primary care clinics](#) and operational military units, and Health Net Federal Services offers a full range of mental health care providers in our network. Find our online directory at [www.tricare-west.com/go/directory](http://www.tricare-west.com/go/directory).

Routine appointments often can be scheduled within the current 10-12 day average for psychiatrists, psychologists, and masters-level mental health care providers, which include clinical social workers, marriage/family therapists, and mental health counselors.

Masters-level mental health care providers generally offer many of the same services as psychologists. Given this group is larger in number, they often have shorter wait times.

## Telemental health care

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the way mental health care is delivered. The percent of mental health care delivered virtually for TRICARE beneficiaries has increased from 1-3% to a peak of 68% during April 2020. Today, 30-40% of TRICARE beneficiaries in the West Region access mental health care via telehealth. Learn more about available telehealth options at [www.tricare-west.com/go/telehealth](http://www.tricare-west.com/go/telehealth).

Your mind and your body together are you. Make plans to maintain and care regularly for both.

