



For God and Country

bulletin

National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission

1608 K Street, N.W. • Washington, D.C. 20006

K. Robert Lewis, Chairman - Connecticut

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PL 110-387, Veterans' Mental Health and Other Care Improvements Act of 2008

The President signed this Act on October 10, 2008. The passing of the abovementioned Act will increase efforts to improve and expand the provision of medical care to veterans and their families. These improvements involve expansion and addition of various facilities, clinics, and services throughout the Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Health Administration (VHA) to provide a more convenient access to veterans who reside in rural areas, as well as family members of all applicable veterans.

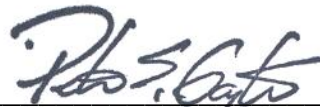
The American Legion recently provided testimony on January 17, 2008, before Congressional members stating support for provisions on quality, adequate, accessible, and additional treatment for enrolled veterans; to include families of veterans, women veterans, and veterans residing in rural and difficult to reach areas.

The following issues and provisions are congruent with various resolutions established by The American Legion; which include policies to address the changing needs of women; improvements to implement a seamless transition; establishing pilot programs to accommodate those residing in rural areas; and establishment of more Centers of Excellence programs to provide complete mental health treatment and recovery services for those suffering from mental health issues.

Issue	Provision
Improvement of Treatment	This legislation improves treatment and services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Substance Use Disorders (SUD).
Non-VA Facility Treatment	This legislation requires the Secretary of VA to reimburse a veteran for the costs of emergency treatment received in a non-VA facility prior to transfer to a VA facility.
Epilepsy	This legislation directs the Secretary of VA to establish at least six VA

Centers of Excellence	health-care facilities as locations for epilepsy centers of excellence. Additional requirements also directs (1) VA's Under Secretary for Health to establish a peer review panel to assess the scientific and clinical merit of proposals submitted for designation for the center; (2) the Secretary to track the panel's assessments in making designations, as well as designate an individual in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) as a national coordinator for VHA epilepsy programs.
Pain Care	Directs the Secretary to develop and implement a comprehensive policy on the management of pain experienced by veterans enrolled for VA health care services; and to periodically update the policy; and report annually through fiscal year (FY) 2018 to the veterans' committees.
Substance Use Disorders and Mental Health Care	This legislation directs the Secretary to ensure short-term motivational counseling, intensive outpatient or residential care, relapse prevention, ongoing aftercare and outpatient counseling, opiate substitution therapy, pharmacological treatments to reduce cravings for drugs and alcohol, and detoxification and stabilization to veterans enrolled in the VA health care system.
Providers of Substance Use Disorders and Co-morbid Mental Health Disorders	This legislation requires the Secretary to ensure that treatment for Substance Use Disorders and Co-morbid Mental Health Disorders be provided through health professionals with respective training and expertise, or by a team of experienced clinicians.
PTSD and SUD Centers of Excellence	Directs the Secretary to establish six national centers of excellence on PTSD and SUD for the provision of comprehensive inpatient or residential treatment and recovery services for veterans diagnosed with PTSD and SUD.
Mental Health facilities	This legislation requires the Secretary to conduct a review of all VHA mental health care facilities; follow up within two years after the first review; and evaluate any improvements made or problems remaining with respect to such facilities.
Mental Health Accessibility Enhancements	This legislation directs the Secretary to fulfil a three-year pilot program to assess the likelihood and advisability of providing veterans of Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF) and veterans who served in such operations as a member of the National Guard or reserves, with: peer outreach, peer support provided by licensed providers or veterans with personal experience with mental illness, and readjustment counseling and other mental health services. These services will be carried out through community mental health centers or the Indian Health Service with respect to veterans residing in rural areas or who have an insufficient means of access to such services through the VA.
Mental Health Research	This legislation directs the Secretary to carry out a program of research into comorbid PTSD and substance use disorder through the

	National Center for PTSD.
Veterans' Health Care Act of 1984	This act is amended to extend through 2012; the reporting requirement for the Special Committee on PTSD (would have expired in 2008).
Families of Veterans	Authorization of care, to include marriage and family counseling, within VA care facilities for veterans.
Non-VA entity care	This legislation directs the Secretary to carry out a three-year pilot program (authorized one-year extensions) to assess the feasibility and advisability of providing readjustment and transition assistance to veterans and their families in cooperation with ten Vet Centers.*
Counseling Services	This legislation revises provisions to establish a demonstration program of referral and counseling services for at-risk veterans transitioning from institutional living to require the program to be carried out in at least 12 (currently six) locations; and extend the program through FY2012.
Women Veterans	Requires the Secretary to ensure that VA domiciliary care programs are adequate, with respect to capacity and safety, to meet the needs of women veterans.



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