



## USAMRMC STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PLAN

# DEFENSE CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH AND TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY (DCoE)

## MISSION

The Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury's collective mission is to improve the lives of our nation's service members, families, and veterans by advancing excellence in psychological health and traumatic brain injury prevention and care.

## BACKGROUND

DCoE headquarters (HQ) and its three operational centers—the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center (DVBIC), the Deployment Health Clinical Center (DHCC), and the National Center for Telehealth and Technology (T2)—are responsible for creating, evaluating, and integrating psychological health and traumatic brain injury (TBI) practices and policies across the services.

This is achieved through collaborative and concerted efforts to identify priorities and gaps in policy, practice, and research; create clinical tools and recommendations; promote evidence-based care practices; and to communicate these standards of care across the military health care system to improve care.

DCoE has a rich history spanning more than two decades. DVBIC is the TBI operational arm of DCoE and was founded in 1992, largely in response to the first Persian Gulf War, under the name Defense and Veterans Head Injury Program. Twenty-plus years later, they have a network of 16 centers operating out of 11 military treatment facilities (MTFs), and 5 Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) polytrauma hospitals, which carry out their primary mission to educate, treat, and track service members, veterans, and their families with TBI.

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*Today, as a Department of Defense (DoD) Executive Agent aligned under USAMRMC, DCoE impacts the lives of service members, veterans, and their families by accelerating improvements in psychological health and TBI outcomes and policies.*

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DHHC is the psychological health operational arm of DCoE, and was stood up in 1994 under the name Gulf War Health Center to address Gulf War Syndrome. DHCC has since grown to focus on addressing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other psychological health conditions through health systems research, program evaluation, and program implementation support at MTFs and throughout the Military Health System (MHS).

T2 was established in 2008 to develop telehealth and technology solutions for psychological health and TBI that support clinicians and patients in achieving better outcomes. It focuses on expanding access to care through telehealth opportunities and by improving the interface between the patient and technology in a scientific, evidence-based way.

**DCoE HQ was established by Sections 1621 and 1622 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 to focus on:**

- The “prevention, diagnosis, mitigation, treatment, and rehabilitation of traumatic brain injury, including mild, moderate, and severe traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health conditions.”
- “To collaborate to the maximum extent practicable with the Department of Veterans Affairs, institutions of higher education, and other appropriate public and private entities (including international entities)” and share resources and knowledge with “Defense Department mental health and neurological health professionals, military medical treatment facilities and members of the Armed Forces and their family members.”

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## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

**Q** *What are some of DCoE's most recent accomplishments?*

**A** As part of a program effectiveness initiative, DCoE completed an initial information collection and assessment report of 141 psychological health programs. The long term goal of the program effectiveness initiative is to support the improvement

## KEY THEMES AND MESSAGES

Identify priorities and gaps in policy, practice, and research.

Create clinical tools and recommendations that translate research into practice.

Provide clinical research, educational tools, and technological solutions that promote evidence-based care practices and care standards.

Provide a thorough, robust program evaluation and effectiveness capability to support MHS and service-level psychological health and TBI programs.

Take a collaborative approach toward evaluation, analysis, and standardization of psychological health and TBI information.

Work with partner organizations to identify gaps, eliminate redundancies, and prioritize needs in psychological health and TBI research.



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of quality and outcomes of psychological health and TBI programs by conducting program evaluation studies and providing training and tools as part of an integrated effort to enhance the culture of effectiveness.

DCoE began work on a psychological health metrics dashboard to display, monitor and analyze enterprise-wide data measures to support the MHS quadruple aim objectives for readiness, population health, experience of care and cost.

DCoE continues to develop and update state-of-the-science clinical guidance and tools to help providers who treat warriors with psychological health and TBI concerns. In 2013, DCoE developed and disseminated 14 clinical support tools to address PTSD, substance use disorder, opioid therapy for pain management, vestibular and visual dysfunction following mild traumatic brain injury, and neuroimaging in mild TBI. These tools are designed to inform health care providers of evidence-based practices in order to standardize and improve health care delivery.

T2 co-authored a new clinical practice guideline for telemental health which is improving telemental health practice standards in the military and civilian medical community.

**Q** *What types of emerging or already-developed technologies does DCoE have to offer?*

**A** DCoE is in the process of developing the “Virtual Hope Box” mobile application, which will provide coping tools and resources for service members and veterans experiencing depression. It will be designed to help those in crisis by redirecting attention to personal photos, inspirational messaging, and other cherished memories.

Already in existence are a multitude of mobile applications to assist health care providers, service members, veterans, and family members. These mobile applications range from tools to aid in stress management, tips for health care providers to guard against burnout and compassion fatigue, a tracker that allows users to monitor and track emotional health, and an application to support providers and patients in therapy for PTSD. To learn about all of the mobile applications and technology solutions T2 has to offer, please visit [t2.health.mil](http://t2.health.mil).

**Q** *What is DCoE doing to address TBI in the DoD?*

**A** DVBIC is conducting a 15-year longitudinal study on the effects of TBI incurred by service members who served in Operations Enduring or Iraqi Freedom, to include the effects on their families.

The last several years brought about a much broader understanding of TBI and led to significant advances in the way TBI is treated and the variety of available resources. One such resource is “Back to School: A Guide to Academic Success After Traumatic Brain Injury.” The guide assists service members and veterans with TBI with pursuing educational opportunities by offering resources to help navigate campus life, manage ongoing symptoms, and learn strategies for success.

Additionally, DVBIC is working to translate promising clinical research findings into clinical practice and has developed numerous resources designed to assist health care providers in delivering standardized and evidence-based care.



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**Examples include:**

- “The Mild TBI Pocket Guide and Mobile Application”
- “Assessment and Management of Dizziness Associated with Mild TBI Clinical Support Tools”
- “Assessment and Management of Visual Dysfunction Associated with Mild TBI Clinical Support Tools”
- “Neuroimaging in Mild TBI Clinical Recommendation”

For more in-depth information, please visit [dvbic.dcoe.mil](http://dvbic.dcoe.mil).

**Q** *What type of research does DCoE conduct?*

**A** DCoE currently has more than 75 active research protocols underway. It’s through this innovative clinical research that DCoE is able to promote evidence-based care practices and care standards to advance psychological health and TBI prevention and care. These targeted actions help patients, health care providers, and policymakers take action and make informed decisions.

**Examples include:**

- “**Stepped Enhancements of PTSD Services Using Primary care (STEPS UP)**”: A randomized effectiveness trial designed to evaluate a system of care that integrates care management with evidence-based pharmacological, web, telephone and in-person therapies to treat PTSD and depression in the military primary care setting.
- **Virtual Reality Exposure Study**: DCoE just completed this study that compared virtual reality exposure to prolonged exposure therapy for patients with PTSD.
- “**Study of Cognitive Rehabilitation Effectiveness in Mild TBI (SCORE!)**”: Aims to evaluate the effectiveness of integrated cognitive rehabilitation treatments, including computer treatments geared to improve brain fitness, in veterans of Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom with a history of mild TBI.

**Q** *What efforts is DCoE focusing on in the future?*

**A** Looking ahead, DCoE is focused on several initiatives that will support the improvement of quality and outcomes of psychological health and TBI programs, and enhance the culture of effectiveness across the MHS to help patients, health care providers, and policymakers take action and make informed decisions.

**Examples of these initiatives include:**

- The **Program Effectiveness Initiative** is an effort to assess the effectiveness of psychological health and TBI programs in DoD by examining program elements, such as need, structure, process, outcomes and finance, in order to provide feedback and training to enhance program effectiveness.
- The **Psychological Health Metrics Dashboard** will be a system to display, monitor, and analyze enterprise-wide psychological health measures.



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- The development of a PTSD Care Pathway to monitor and implement compliance with clinical practice guidelines in the MHS.
- The mTBI Outcomes initiative will develop a system to capture enterprise-wide mild TBI outcome measures to track treatment efficacy.
- A TBI awareness, education and prevention initiative is being developed to highlight prevention strategies, promote safety and heighten awareness and understanding of the signs and symptoms of concussion.

**Q** *What are some examples of DCoE resources?*

**A** DCoE created the Real Warriors Campaign, a multimedia public education effort to combat the stigma associated with seeking psychological health care. The campaign encourages help-seeking behavior among service members and veterans with mental health concerns, and increases their awareness and use of available resources. Please visit [realwarriors.net](http://realwarriors.net) to learn more about the campaign.

Another valuable resource is the inTransition program, which assists service members receiving mental health services with their transition between health care systems or providers, and offers a bridge of support to service members relocating to another assignment, returning from deployment or transitioning from active-duty to reserve, reserve to active-duty, or returning to civilian life. The program also provides voluntary one-on-one coaching.

Today's military kids grow up in a world where they may experience multiple deployments of important family members. They need a unique set of skills to draw on in order to get through long and often difficult separations and situations. MilitaryKidsConnect (MKC) is an online community for military kids that provides access to age-appropriate resources that support children from pre-deployment to a parent's or caregiver's return.

**Q** *What opportunities exist to stay informed of the work DCoE is doing?*

**A** DCoE has an active online presence. The website, [dcoe.mil](http://dcoe.mil), is a one-stop source for a variety of resources, from blog posts for family members to clinical practice guidelines for providers. It contains valuable information across the spectrum of psychological health and TBI for service members, families and providers, including a newsroom, blog, fact sheets, training events and links to social media pages on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Health care providers can benefit from the bi-monthly webinar series, which provides training on a variety of psychological health and TBI topics.