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Editorial: VA does the right thing

The Department of Veterans Affairs is taking the right steps in looking to simplify the process for many veterans by linking post-traumatic stress disorder to their military service, whether in a war zone or not.

The new process will make it easier for veterans to get better mental health treatment and qualify for disability benefits they deserve for their dedicated service and sacrifice.

Under the proposed change, Veterans Affairs would eliminate a requirement that in order to be approved for disability benefits for PTSD, veterans must provide evidence to prove they witnessed or experienced a traumatic event linked to their military service, to include eyewitness corroboration and other documentation.

For too long the opinion of the Veterans Affairs seemed to have been that veterans complaining of mental problems relating to military service were either malingerers trying to take advantage of benefits, or weak-minded individuals trying to get something from the government for nothing.

The new policy rightly would accept a veteran's own testimony, which means the VA could pay benefits more efficiently and faster to the veterans and their families.

It's good news that the proposed changes will be aimed in large measure at the many troops in the current wars whose jobs do not involve combat with the enemy but nonetheless may experience events that lead to PTSD, such as combat support personnel and health care providers.

Some studies estimate that as many as 20 percent of service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan have PTSD or symptoms of the disorder. Post-traumatic stress disorder is an emotional illness that develops as a result of a terribly frightening, life-threatening, or highly unsafe experience.

In many cases, service men and women may have a diagnosis of PTSD but don't always have the evidence such as combat wounds, citations or missing limbs.

The new rules hopefully will resolve many pending disability claims for PTSD and help reduce VA's large backlog of benefit claims.

Military veterans who suffer from PTSD sacrificed and suffered for their country, and they deserve the care, treatment and disability benefits just as much as those who were physically injured in combat.
