

May 06, 2010 - Topic: Mental Health Funding

Obama Signs Bill To Expand Veterans' Care, Boost Caregiver Support

President Obama on Wednesday signed legislation (**S 1963**) that expands veterans' health services and provides assistance to caregivers of veterans, the *Washington Posts* "44" reports.

Obama said the bill, called the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act, expands mental health and counseling services to veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, including to members of the National Guards and reservists. According to "44," among other measures the bill:

- Allows Veterans Affairs to use hospitals outside of its network to treat more returning soldiers with brain injuries;
- Eliminates co-payments for "catastrophically disabled" veterans; and
- Increases housing and transportation assistance for veterans living far from care facilities.
- Establishes a pilot child care program for veterans receiving intensive medical care; and
- Expands support for homeless veterans.

For caregivers of veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the legislation will provide a stipend and other assistance, including providing lodging for those who must travel for treatment, according to Obama. It also will provide to such caregivers specialized training, counseling, health insurance and a break from caring for the veteran for up to 30 days.

Obama said the bill represents a "major step forward in America's commitment to families and caregivers who tend to our wounded warriors every day."

Bill Expands Services for Female Veterans

The legislation also expands health services for female veterans, including care for newborns of women receiving maternity care, "44" reports (Wilson, "44," *Washington Post*, 5/5). It also mandates a comprehensive assessment of unique barriers to care that women face.

In addition, the bill requires VA to train mental health professionals in caring for military women who have survived sexual trauma.

According to *Time*, one in five military women experience sexual trauma, which increases their risk of mental health issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, by almost 60%.

The bill also calls for research on the physical, mental and reproductive health effects on military women of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Fitzpatrick, *Time*, 5/5).