



## Air Force officials discuss mental health options, confidentiality

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Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs

6/17/2010 - **WASHINGTON (AFNS)** -- Airmen in need of psychological intervention or counseling have myriad options available through a number of Air Force programs, officials said here June 16.

Although psychological screening occurs throughout an Airman's career by way of annual preventive health assessments and post-deployment assessments, assistance is readily accessible anytime in multiple medical and non-medical venues such as primary care and mental health clinics, the chaplain's office, Military OneSource, and Military and Family Life Consultants, said Col. (Dr.) John Forbes, Psychological Health deputy director.

"These yearly health screenings are one of many opportunities that allow Airmen to share with their healthcare providers concerns they have about common psychological symptoms and promote early detection and management," Doctor Forbes said. "No matter the manner or depth of treatment, it's critical that we continue to minimize the stigma that seeking help from our mental health professionals, counselors or chaplains will negatively affect an Airman's career. When Airmen seek help early, they prevent problems that can affect work performance."

During this year's Caring for People Forum and Community Action Information Board, Air Force leaders said psychological and spiritual health is just as critical as physical health in mission readiness.

"Now is the time to open all doors to Airmen and eliminate the perception that seeing a mental health provider automatically damages a career or jeopardizes a security clearance," said Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force James A. Roy. "One in eight Airmen believes that mental health care will adversely affect their career. However, we know that 89 percent of mental health self-referrals never involve supervisors or commanders."

Department of Defense and Air Force leaders recognize the need for servicemembers to be confident that their personal information will not be shared with others, and new guidance has been published by DOD and the Air Force, clarifying the confidentiality of mental health visits, said Lt. Col. Michael Kindt, the Air Force Suicide Prevention Program manager.

"Everyone needs help at some point in their life, and seeking help early to address any of life's problems, from mental health to relationships or spiritual and financial problems is a sign of good judgment and reliability," Colonel Kindt said. "Unfortunately, many Airmen end up getting in trouble for behavioral problems, and having serious career implications, because they are worried about the consequences of seeking help."

Colonel Kindt said a fundamental part of the Air Force's wingman philosophy involves Airmen taking care of each other and themselves.

"We all have an obligation to take care of ourselves and ensure that we are ready to perform our best at work and in personal lives," Colonel Kindt said. "We can't take care of the mission or our fellow Airmen if we are not taking good care of ourselves."

Air Force officials have partnered with the Defense Center of Excellence of Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury to help combat the stigma associated with seeking help.

The Real Warriors Campaign website combats the stigma associated with seeking psychological health care and treatment and encourages servicemembers to increase their awareness and use of these resources.

"The website contains examples of real people who were struggling, sought help, were fully supported by leadership and went on to greater success in their careers," Colonel Kindt said.

For more information, visit [www.realwarriors.net](http://www.realwarriors.net).

