

# THE COMMANDER JOHN SCOTT HANNON VETERANS MENTAL HEALTH CARE IMPROVEMENT ACT



Following a decorated 23-year career in the Navy SEALs, Commander John Scott Hannon retired to his family home in Helena, Montana, where he received treatment from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for PTSD, traumatic brain injury (TBI), depression, and bipolar disorder. Scott found solace and recovery in many local organizations that allowed him to give back to his fellow veterans and his community, including the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI), animal rescue and rehabilitation, working with at-risk youth, and helping veterans access the outdoors. Scott died by suicide on February 25, 2018.

## *Improves Access to Mental Health Care*

- Expands rural veterans' access to VA tele-mental health care.
- Requires all VA hospitals to employ at least one Suicide Prevention Coordinator.
- Bolsters VA's mental health workforce to serve more veterans by creating a scholarship program for mental health professionals to work at Vet Centers.
- Establishes new Clinical Practice Guidelines for the treatment of serious mental illnesses at DOD and VA.

## *Builds Upon Innovative Suicide Prevention Measures*

- Creates a VA pilot program to provide alternative treatment and therapy options such as animal, agricultural, and outdoor sports therapy.
- Requires VA to conduct a study on the feasibility of offering yoga, meditation, acupuncture, and chiropractic care at all VA facilities.
- Reviews the staffing levels of mental health professionals at VA facilities, and assesses the Department's hiring practices.
- Requires VA to evaluate the effectiveness of the Department's mental health outreach campaigns, including reaching veterans of diverse backgrounds.

## *Helps Servicemembers Transition*

- Directs VA to submit a plan for giving every service member transitioning from active duty to veteran status a full year of VA health care.
- Studies the records of each servicemember who died by suicide within one year following their separation from DOD.
- Requires VA and DOD to report on mental health programming and opportunities for improving coordinated care.

## *Bolsters VA's Research Efforts*

- Establishes a study examining whether living at a high altitude puts veterans at higher suicide risk.
- Invests in VA precision medicine research into identifying and treating mental illness, particularly PTSD, TBI, depression, and anxiety.

## *Increases VA Accountability*

- Evaluates Vet Centers' mental health care treatment offerings, outreach conducted, use of telehealth, and barriers to care.
- Examines how VA identifies high-risk patients and how VA monitors and follows up with these individuals.
- Studies the effectiveness of VA's efforts integrating mental health care into the primary care setting.

### **The Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act is supported by:**

Veterans of Foreign Wars, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Wounded Warrior Project, American Legion, Blinded Veterans Association, National Alliance on Mental Illness, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists, American Chiropractic Association, California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists, Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Fleet Reserve Association, and National Board of Certified Counselors.

**This legislation became law on October 17, 2020, after being passed unanimously by both the House and Senate.**