

Veterans Make ‘Immediate Connections’ at Vet Centers

More than 300 Vet Centers nationwide offer confidential help for readjustment following combat operations and service-related trauma

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Support for veterans seeking readjustment counseling and other psychological services is offered in a free, confidential setting at more than 300 Vet Centers. The centers are located throughout the country and are considered part of the VA health care system, but also are separate from VA organizational sites to ensure confidentiality.

“Vet Centers provide counseling, community engagement and referral services,” said Jessica Schiefer, Vet Center communications officer. “We offer individual, group, marriage and family counseling in addition to connection to other VA, Department of Defense (DoD) and community resources. We work to increase access to these services by reducing barriers to care and offer these confidential services in areas close to a veteran’s or service member’s home.”

In addition to the Vet Center sites, services are offered at 80 Mobile Vet Centers, numerous satellite locations as well as virtual appointments, Schiefer added.

According to Schiefer, Vet Center teams work together to support veterans through: counseling; non-traditional therapies such as gardening, hiking, music or yoga; and referrals to other VA community resources.

The centers emphasize each veteran’s individual growth while easing the transition from military service or following specific traumatic experiences.

The Vet Center teams do not diagnose individuals but rather focus on symptoms commonly associated with PTSD, depression, grief, anger or trauma.

“Our records cannot be accessed by other VA, Department of Defense, military or

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community networks and providers without the veteran or service member's permission, or unless to avert a life-threatening situation," Schiefer said. "We understand that the experiences endured by the veterans and service members are traumatic enough and want to make seeking care as seamless as possible. These services also are provided regardless of the nature of the veteran's discharge."

A number of the counselors and staff members at the Vet Centers are veterans themselves.

"Veterans often make an immediate connection with each other and can understand or relate to certain experiences," Shiefer said. "This adds to the comfort level that veterans, service members and their families experience when seeking supportive services with us."

The Vet Centers seek to assist people who served in combat operations, areas of hostility and stateside deployments, as well as veterans who endured military service-related trauma, Schiefer added.

"We also serve their families to support the growth and goals of the veteran or service member," she said. "Eligibility varies based on individual military experience, including those with service in the National Guard, Reserves and Coast Guard. We look for reasons and means to qualify individuals rather than turn them away. If someone is found to not meet our eligibility, we will work with them to find available community resources that may be more suitable for that individual."

During fiscal year 2022, nearly 287,000 veterans, service members and their families received readjustment counseling at the VA's Vet Centers.

For more information about accessing care through the centers, visit www.vetcenter.va.gov. Also available is an around-the-clock confidential call center for combat veterans and their families at 1-877-WARVETS.

This article is featured in the 2023 April issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by Janice Phelan. Phelan is a freelance writer based in Lee's Summit, Missouri.