



SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
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MAY 10 2012

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARIES OF THE MILITARY DEPARTMENTS
CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
UNDER SECRETARIES OF DEFENSE
COMMANDERS OF THE COMBATANT COMMANDS
CHIEF OF THE NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU
GENERAL COUNSEL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
INSPECTOR GENERAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
ASSISTANT SECRETARIES OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: Suicide Prevention for Department of Defense Personnel

In this Department, our most valuable resource is our people. As Secretary of Defense, I am committed to taking care of our people, and that includes doing everything possible to prevent suicides in the military. Since taking office, I have been deeply concerned about suicide in the military, which is one of the most complex and urgent problems facing this Department.

Suicide prevention is first and foremost a leadership responsibility. To that end, leaders throughout the chain of command must actively promote a constructive command climate that fosters cohesion and encourages individuals to reach out for help when needed. We must continue to fight to eliminate the stigma from those with post-traumatic stress and other mental-health issues. Seeking help is a sign of strength, and Department personnel, both military and civilian, must show this strength or assist those in need of help. Professional behavioral health interventions work, and we need to ensure that those seeking help, including counseling for mental health issues, can access these services effectively.

Just as importantly, commanders and supervisors cannot tolerate any actions that belittle, haze, humiliate, or ostracize any individual, especially those who require or are responsibly seeking professional services.

The Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness has established a Defense Suicide Prevention Office to serve as the focal point for suicide prevention policy, training, and programs. This office will collaborate with Military Departments to implement the recommendations of the DoD Task Force on the Prevention of Suicide and serve as the DoD lead with the Department of Veterans Affairs and non-government organizations on suicide prevention.

As leaders of the Department, ensuring the health and safety of our people is our most important responsibility. Working together, we can and will make a difference. I have asked to be updated regularly on progress and best practices.



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