

## Update: Mental healthcare for OTH vets

In my Veterans Corner article of March 2017, I reported the Secretary of Veterans Affairs announced his intention to expand provisions for urgent mental health care needs to former service members with other-than-honorable (OTH) administrative discharges. On June 27, 2017 Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released finalized plans that lay the framework for providing the aforementioned care.

This is the first time a VA Secretary has implemented an initiative specifically focused on this group of former service members who are in mental health distress.

“Suicide prevention is my top clinical priority,” said Secretary Shulkin, also a physician. “We want these former service members to know there is someplace they can turn if they are facing a mental health emergency — whether it means urgent care at a VA emergency department, a Vet Center or through the Veterans Crisis Line.”

Effective July 5, all Veterans Health Administration (VHA) medical centers, such as the one located in Fresno, CA, will be prepared to offer emergency stabilization care for former service members who present at the facility with an emergent mental health need. Under this initiative, former service members with an OTH administrative discharge may receive care for their mental health emergency for an initial period of up to 90 days, which can include inpatient, residential or outpatient care.

During this time, VHA and the Veterans Benefits Administration will work together to determine if the mental health condition is a result of a service-related injury, making the service member eligible for ongoing coverage for that condition.

The Kings County Veterans Service Office can complete the DMV Veteran Status Verification Form for the new California Veteran Designation on your driver's license and also issues Veteran I.D. cards to honorably discharged veterans. Contact Scott Holwell if you would like to receive periodic veteran's information by email. There are many state and federal benefits and programs available to veterans and their dependents. To determine if you are eligible for any of these benefits, call or visit our office. We can and will assist you in completing all required application forms. You can get information on the Web from the Kings County Veterans Service Office webpage at [www.countyofkings.com/vets](http://www.countyofkings.com/vets).

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