Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation Awards $3.28 Million in Grants to Support Mental Health Needs of U.S. Military Service Members Returning from Afghanistan and Iraq

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NEW YORK--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Soldiers returning from active duty in Afghanistan and Iraq can face a range of mental health issues that may affect their quality of life and their families, including severe depression, post-traumatic stress (PTSD) and substance abuse. They also face a rising suicide rate. However, fewer than half of the 2 million military personnel who served in those countries seek treatment for their serious mental illness.

Since it was launched in 2011, the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation's Mental Health & Well-Being initiative has recognized the importance of supporting efforts that address the mental health needs of United States military service personnel returning from active duty and their families. This year, the Foundation is awarding 10 grants totaling $3.28 million to fund innovative programs that will establish sustainable community-based support systems for veterans and their families.

"With the conflict in Iraq now over and the conflict in Afghanistan winding down, the stakes could not be higher for service members, veterans and their families returning to garrison and civilian life," says John Damonti, president, Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation. "We know the need for integrated community support will continue to escalate as more troops return home and the country continues to downsize its military.

"Hundreds of thousands of veterans struggle with the challenges of re-integration – unemployment and marital stress, as well as the invisible wounds of PTSD and traumatic brain injury," Damonti adds. "The Foundation's commitment to its partners will not only implement novel models of support for veterans and their families, but also provide much-needed evidence from scientific evaluations to help influence informed decisions for policy change."

The Foundation's 2013 Mental Health and Well-Being grant recipients are:

- **New York Legal Assistance Group** and **Connecticut Veterans Legal Clinic** will receive two-year grants of $330,700 and $365,980, respectively, to partner with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to study the Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP) model in VA settings. This study, the first of its kind, will examine how civil legal services impact mental health and quality of life outcomes for veterans treated in VA mental health and homeless programs. MLPs are designed to help patients address legal problems that may negatively impact their health. According to annual needs surveys of homeless VA service providers, homeless veterans may be particularly in need of legal assistance. VA researchers participating in the partnership will evaluate the integration of free legal assistance and VA health care as it relates to veterans' mental health and quality of life. The study will be conducted at two VA settings in New York and two in Connecticut.

- **Points of Light, National Council for Behavioral Health** and **Massachusetts General Hospital** will each receive two-year grants totaling $967,790 to partner with Outside the Wire on its Theater of War performances to military and civilian audiences in 25 U.S. cities. Outside the Wire is a social impact company that uses theater to address a number of pressing public health issues, including the psychological impact of serving in war on veterans and their families. Theater of War has been hailed as a revolutionary public health campaign that uses performances of ancient Greek plays as a catalyst for town hall discussions about the physical and mental wounds of war. The performance events will increase the visibility of service members and their families and engage civilians in discussions about the lasting impact of war and a community's civic responsibility to help veterans and their families reintegrate and heal. A smartphone app will be developed to evaluate the program and to provide links to resources for service members and their families.

- **Minnesota Veterans Medical Research and Education Foundation** will receive a two-year, $601,597 grant for a new program called Building Spiritual Strength that will use pastoral counselors to address the issues of moral injury - killing or wounding others - among combat trauma survivors. Research shows that soldiers and combat veterans are more likely to seek spiritual support from chaplains than from traditional mental health providers and that moral injury causes veterans more distress than threats to their own lives or physical well-being. The project will be centered in the Greater Minneapolis-St. Paul area in Minnesota and will include 150 veterans who have PTSD. The project will develop support and provide education within the faith-based community and provide outreach to veterans who will not access conventional mental health care.

- **Rush University Medical Center Department of Behavioral Sciences** will receive a one-year, $175,000 grant to complete an efficacy trial of the mental health services provided by Vets Prevail and recruit and enroll more than 6,200 additional veterans into the program, which received funding from the Foundation last year. Vets Prevail is an innovative online behavioral health option for veterans who are reluctant to seek care in traditional care settings and
who are at risk of falling through the cracks. The program is the result of collaboration among Prevail Health Solutions, Rush University Medical Center and the Veterans Health Administration. Vets Prevail intends to become integrated within the VA’s suite of other mental health offerings.

- **Boston University School of Public Health** will receive a two-year, $1.05 million grant to transform a pilot version of a self-directed, web-based intervention that focuses on self-management to control alcohol consumption as a critical approach to managing PTSD into a consumer-ready version. VetChange is the first national program of its kind. It helps soldiers returning from combat reduce unhealthy drinking and PTSD symptoms by allowing users to assess and measure progress of their own drinking and PTSD symptoms; develop a personalized coping plan to deal with alcohol triggers; review and receive tailored support messages and, in partner communities, get additional help from trained peer volunteers and professional counselors.

- **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)** received a three-year matching grant of $750,000 to adapt the evidence-based NAMI Family-to-Family Education Program to the unique needs of families of active duty military personnel and veterans. “NAMI Homefront” will provide six free sessions of peer-led instruction on coping with mental illness and issues specific to military and veteran communities, such as post-deployment and post-discharge transitions. Instructors are trained family members and the program will offer an option for on-line attendance. NAMI Homefront is also being funded by the Cigna Foundation, Janssen Research and Development, Universal Health Services and the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation.

- **Carter Center** received $95,118 to conduct the **Mental Health & Well-Being** Grantees Summit in Atlanta, Georgia, in June 2013. The Summit convened the grantees together with other leading experts in the field to share learnings and lessons learned.

**About the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation**

The mission of the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation is to promote health equity and improve the health outcomes of populations disproportionately affected by serious diseases and health conditions. The Foundation’s **Mental Health & Well-Being** initiative in the U.S. focuses funding on addressing the mental health and reintegration needs of returning service members, veterans and their families. For more information about the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation, please visit [www.bms.com/foundation](http://www.bms.com/foundation) or follow us on Twitter at [http://twitter.com/bmsnews](http://twitter.com/bmsnews).