



"Serving Those Who Served"

Report to the Legislature, Traumatic Brain Injury Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs



December 2022

Background

Sec. 221 of ESSB 5693 requested Washington Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) to report on how funds provided in the section were spent, including the numbers of individuals served and the types of services provided.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) is an acute public health concern. A TBI may be caused by a bump, blow, jolt to the head, or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the normal function of the brain. Not all blows or jolts to the head result in a TBI. The severity of a TBI and the resulting impacts may range from “mild” (i.e., a brief change in mental status or consciousness) to “severe” (i.e., an extended period of unconsciousness or memory loss after the injury).

Washington State is currently ranked 12th in the nation for veteran population and 7th in the nation for number of veterans reporting military related TBI. A TBI diagnosis in the general adult population encompasses a complicated spectrum of conditions with varying degrees of short-term and long-term consequences. TBI in our veteran population is often a result of injuries and trauma related to military service which adds challenges to the short-term and long-term healing and prognosis further impacting veterans experiencing military related TBI and further impacting quality of life for many veterans living with TBI. There is a well-documented association between TBI and behavioral health comorbidities, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, suicide, and substance use disorders.

Veterans with TBI are likely to face increasing challenges as they age. Veterans who have sustained all forms of TBI (mild, including concussions, moderate and severe) are at increased risk for developing early onset Alzheimer’s disease and dementia. Veterans even those with concussions without loss of consciousness face increased risk factors for developing dementia on the aging veteran population. These functional limitations from TBI can be compounded over time and require intensive support from caregivers. Given the complexity of military related TBI, treatment and resources that are targeted to the needs of our veterans and caregivers is essential.

According to the Brain Injury Association of America, “brain injury is not an event or an outcome. It is the start of a misdiagnosed, misunderstood, under-funded neurological disease is a “chronic disease process.” Brain injury affects everyone in the veteran’s social network. The individual, spouse, children, and the entire social circle are affected by a TBI. We have made incredible progress in saving lives, now we must expend and expand the same care and resources in repairing and rebuilding those lives. Our brain injury survivor’s needs must be addressed.

Program Overview

The WDVA TBI-Brain Injury and Recovery Program is available to support and represent every veteran in Washington State who is impacted by and living with Brain Injury.

WDVA's TBI-Brain Injury and Recovery Program is committed to increasing public awareness of TBI and its impact on the veteran population, public services, and communities. A key component of the program is TBI education for veterans living with TBI whether diagnosed or un-diagnosed, as well as the service providers and supportive service agencies that directly work with our veteran population. Today's veteran population is more diverse than ever and improving outcomes requires a better understanding of how Traumatic Brain Injury can affect and impact veterans' lives long term.

The economic costs associated with Traumatic Brain Injury, in general, are high. In 2019, the CDC estimated the United States economic impact related to TBI injury was \$4.2 trillion, including \$327 billion in medical care, \$69 billion in work loss, and \$3.8 trillion in value of statistical life and quality of life losses" (Peterson et al., 2021, p. 1656). In September of 2019, the total US veteran population was estimated around 19,928,795 of that 24.6 % are diagnosed with TBI. The Washington State veteran population for 2021 was estimated at 529,784. Based on nationwide statistics, it is estimated there are over 145,000 individuals living with TBI-related disabilities in Washington.

The WDVA TBI-Brain Injury and Recovery program is committed to reducing the overall impact the brain injured veteran experiences in many areas such as the justice system, mental health system, tribal systems, and state supported social services. By providing individualized training and direct support to providers, veterans, their families, caregivers, employers, and educators, our state will more effectively preserve its vital resources.

TBI can impact any individual who has served or is currently serving in our Armed Forces. The TBI Brain Injury and Recovery Program requires TBI planning coordination and service delivery must address broad needs across the program's lifespan.

Activities and Services Provided by the WDVA TBI-Brain Injury and Recovery Program

- Support and education to veterans, military connected, and family members.
- Screening tools and training in TBI/Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)/PTSD detection.
- Employer support services.
- Education and awareness training services for mental/behavioral health providers and medical providers.
- Case consultation.
- Staff training.
- Veteran support group presentations.
- Participate in and attend community outreach and resource events throughout state
- TBI/ABI peer support
- Military Cultural Engagement

Max Impact TBI Smart Phone App- Is a reliable back-pocket support system for veterans who experience challenges from traumatic brain injuries (TBI). Much like the role a service dog plays in the life of a veteran with PTSD or TBI, “Max” helps the user manage their symptoms, learn about TBI/ABI, and connect with others to share and support one another. Max Impact allows users to check in with how they are feeling and pick a current challenge they might want to work on. Max also provides and guides them to resources that fit their needs specific to individuals geographical they select. Max is a dependable companion to any veteran or caregiver living with or experiencing symptoms related to TBI/ABI.

TBI-Brain Injury and Recovery Program Serves:

- Veterans: The TBI/ABI program serves all veterans regardless of period of service.
 - One on one assistance for veterans and caregivers of veterans diagnosed with TBI/ABI (Acquired Brain Injury) or veterans undiagnosed and experiencing symptoms related to TBI/ABI.
- Military Service members: Including National Guard and Reserves
- Family members of veterans with TBI/ABI
- Mental health or medical providers caring for veterans with TBI/ABI
- Institutions of Higher Learning
- Employers of veterans with TBI/ABI
- Anyone who wants to learn more about how to help a Veteran with TBI/ABI

WDVA TBI-Brain Injury and Recovery Program has Provided:

1. Number of veterans served (1 July 2021 through 30 June 2022)
 - 80** Veterans were provided 1:1 guidance, referrals
 - 44** Family Members were provided 1:1 guidance, referrals, and support
2. WDVA Traumatic Brain Injury and Recovery Program- Educational Trainings/Conferences/Symposiums provided statewide.
 - 18** Trainings to **255** individuals trained
 - 8** Conferences/Symposiums (attended or presented representing the WDVA TBI-Brain Injury and Recovery Program)
3. **27** WDVA TBI-Brain Injury and Recovery Program provided indirect service by representing veteran TBI/ABI survivors, family members of TBI/ABI survivors in various task forces, committees, and boards such as the Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention and State Advisory Council on Homelessness, Brain Injury Alliance of Washington.

4. Current analytics for Max Impact for FY22.

20 Referrals to providers

17 WDVA contacts

253 New Users in Washington State

177 Sessions, 28-Countries (US included), 4 -US States to include California Connecticut, Minnesota, and Oklahoma resulting in 2 New Users.

The Max Impact TBI Smart Phone App was recently put through the modernization process to allow for re-release to the Apple Market in May of 2022 at the annual platform rate of \$99.00 a year. The Google Market remained available for download of the Max Impact app and is currently going through the modernization process to remain current and accessible to the TBI veteran population.

Next Steps

The TBI-Brain Injury and Recovery program and WDVA App/software development team is currently in discussion regarding design and development changes that will exceed current market standards and improve the overall user experience allowing for the users ease of use app tools and resources available for the end user.

As of Oct 10th of 2022, the TBI-Brain Injury and Recovery program is fully staffed with both a Program Specialist 5 located on the East Side of the State and Program Specialist 3 located on the west side of the state to strategically ensuring coverage throughout Washington State for ease of access.

FY2022/2023 Projected Growth:

- 160 -Veterans provided 1:1 guidance, referrals
- 80 - Family Members provided 1:1 guidance, referrals, and support
- 20 - Conferences/Symposiums (attend or presented representing the WDVA TBI-Brain Injury and Recovery Program and Veteran Population)
- 60 – WDVA TBI-Brain Injury and Recovery Program provided indirect service by representing veteran TBI/ABI survivors, family members of TBI/ABI survivors in various task forces, committees, and boards such as the Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention and State Advisory Council on Homelessness, Brain Injury Alliance of Washington.
- Increase and establish new strategic partnerships by 20%-50% with an emphasis on Mental Health professionals and increasing focusing on our rural counties in Washington State to increase access for veterans living with or experiencing symptoms related to TBI/PTSD.
- Creating new strategic partnerships within our Federal VA Health Care facilities to include rural Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC's).

- **40** – TBI- Brain Injury and Recovery Trainings offered in person and in partnership with VTSC-Veterans Training Support Center with professional development CEU’s available.
 - **March 2023 TBI Awareness Month Training Series**
 - TBI-Brain Injury and Recovery Program focusing on TBI and Brain Injury- Brain Injury and the impact on our Homeless Veteran Population.
 - TBI-Brain Injury and Recovery Program Focusing on TBI and Brain Injury and Domestic Violence/Intimate Partner Violence and the impact on our Behavioral/Mental Health and system and our Justice System.
 - TBI-Brain Injury and Recovery Program focusing on the impact to veterans in Higher Education
 - TBI-Brain Injury exploring the link between suicide and TBI
 - TBI-Brain Injury and Tribal Veterans
- Increase New Users between 20%-50% or **51-127 - New Users** and increase total user sessions by 20%-50% or **20-50- Individual User Sessions** of the Max Impact App in both Google and Apple Market for FY 2023.
- Development of the WDVA Brain Injury Toolbox- The purpose of the Brain Injury Toolbox is to provide viewers with some tools they may find useful as they travel the road to recovery from a brain injury. Some tools included in this toolbox are educational films, reading material, and resources. The journey to recovery begins at the time of injury and may continue indefinitely.

Our nation’s most recent experience with the COVID-19 Pandemic taught us to be creative and look for innovative ways to reach our target population that often our most diverse populations. The WDVA TBI-Brain Injury and Recovery Program is no different. As a program, we are very excited about the considerable opportunities that lie ahead.