Researchers at the National Center for PTSD and New England MIRECC found that age and the number of other mental health problems experienced by returning Veterans with PTSD limit their engagement in PTSD treatment.

Researchers compared VA mental health service use of Afghanistan and Iraq Veterans with that of Vietnam-era Veterans. Using data from over 200,000 VA PTSD patients, they found that returning Veterans were more likely to leave mental health treatment for PTSD. Only 38% stayed in care compared with 46% of Vietnam-era Veterans. Likewise, returning Veterans had fewer PTSD mental health visits than did their Vietnam-era counterparts (8 versus 13). However, this was not the entire story. Being younger and having more mental health problems helped explain this higher drop-out rate. In fact, when age and other mental health problems were factored in, returning Veterans were actually less likely to leave PTSD treatment than were Vietnam-era Veterans. However, being older and having additional mental health conditions were related to receiving more PTSD mental health visits. It seems that their younger age and increased number of mental health conditions explained why returning Veterans are less engaged in care better than the fact that they served in Iraq or Afghanistan. These important findings point to the urgent need to find ways to engage Veterans with PTSD who are younger and more severely affected by mental health problems. For the complete story, see: Harpaz-Rotem, I. & Rosenheck, R.A. (2011). Serving those who served: Retention of newly returning Veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan in mental health treatment. Psychiatric Services, 62, 22-27.

The online trainings teach providers how to best identify, assess, and treat mental health problems that may occur as a result of war experiences.
doctors, case workers, and mental health providers. These trainings help community providers understand the culture of Veterans and their families. They also teach providers how to best identify, assess, and treat mental health problems that may occur as a result of war experiences. The trainings include the following workshops: Treating the Invisible Wounds of War (English and Spanish Versions), Treating the Invisible Wounds of War: A Primary Care Approach, Issues of Women Returning from Combat, and Recognizing the Signs of TBI During Routine Eye Examinations. These workshops are available for free online (www.ahecconnect.com/citizensoldier). Click on “Courses” to access the workshops.

Problem Solving Training targets Veterans who are struggling but are not yet in need of mental health treatment. How they tackle these problems can determine how well they adjust in this transition. If difficulties are not successfully managed, more lasting problems may develop, including chronic mental health conditions. Recently, the MIRECCs and COEs joined forces to pilot a program to help Veterans successfully navigate this often rocky period. The program, Moving Forward: A Problem Solving Approach to Achieving Life’s Goals teaches VA care providers to deliver Problem Solving Training or PST. PST targets Veterans who are struggling but are not yet in need of mental health treatment. Veterans attend a four-session class and learn a step-by-step process to address their problems. Program director Dr. Wendy Tenhula noted that the program is showing promise across a number of outcomes. Dr. Tenhula said that PST is a good fit with Veterans because their military training gave them very similar problem solving skills. It is often just a matter of using what they already know rather than training them from scratch. She also noted that PST was helpful to Veterans with and without mental health diagnoses. After completing PST, a number of Veterans with mental health diagnoses who had previously declined mental health care realized that they could benefit from professional help and agreed to give it a try. MIRECC and COE staffs are now involved in developing a web-based program and a mobile app for Veterans. They are also developing a web-based training to teach VA providers about PST for Veterans.

Recent Veterans face many challenges returning to the civilian world

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