Help Military Clients Transitioning to Civilian Life

When service members leave the military, the transition to civilian life can be very stressful. They have to make decisions about where to live, how to care for their families, whether to seek employment or go to school, and where to receive health care. They also have to navigate a very complex bureaucracy; the [Transition Assistance Program (TAP)](https://www.taonline.com/TAPOffice/) process alone potentially involves over 280 steps.

Service members who want to receive benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) also have to contend with complex eligibility rules, and multiple offices and programs. It’s therefore not surprising that transitioning service members are at high risk of poor health and social outcomes, as well as for falling through the cracks of the service system. According to a [2011 Pew Research Center survey](http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/12/08/the-difficult-transition-from-military-to-civilian-life/) of 1,853 veterans, 27 percent said re-entry was difficult for them — a proportion that increased to 44 percent among veterans who served in the ten years since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Health care providers can play a critical role in making this process more manageable for service members by helping them access resources to transition successfully. However, when I’ve spoken with military providers, they often feel confused by the transition process themselves or are unsure where to send service members for help and resources.

A good place to start is with these great transition resources:

[**InTransition**:](http://www.pdhealth.mil/resource-center/intransition/) This free Defense Department program provides behavioral health care support to service members and veterans as they move between health care systems or providers. Personal coaches provide resources and tools to help service members during the transition period, empower them to make healthy life choices, and facilitate the connection to a new behavioral health care provider. Service members can call 24/7 to self-enroll.

[**Hiring Our Heroes**](https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/hiring-our-heroes)(link is external): This non-profit organization founded by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation connects service members and their partners with employers. They sponsor career fairs nationwide and offer a variety of online tools to help the military community with job searches.

[**Disabled American Veterans (DAV)**:](https://www.dav.org/) This non-profit outreach and advocacy organization for veterans with service-related disabilities offers a variety of resources and services. They provide assistance with [**accessing medical care**](https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/) **(including rides to appointments), filing benefits claims with the VA, and more.**

**The Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF)**: This interdisciplinary academic institute based at Syracuse University sponsors a variety of programs that help service members, veterans and their families start their own business, gain employment, access higher education or navigate the service system. One of IVMF’s particularly innovative programs is [AmericaServes](https://americaserves.org/), which helps transitioning service members and veterans access any service they need during the transition process.

Here’s an example of how AmericaServes works: John is a veteran who wants help writing his resume for job interviews; he also needs behavioral health services. John goes to an organization like Hiring Our Heroes for resume assistance, and lets an employee know that he also needs behavioral health services. Although Hiring Our Heroes does not directly provide those services, the employee is able to access the AmericaServes’ Unite Us software to look up trusted providers in the community who do, select a service from the list and send them a referral. The provider will then call John to schedule a behavioral health appointment. This service saves John the time it would have taken him to research services, decide on a provider and make the appointment himself.

In addition, there is a coordinating center that:

• Makes sure all the listed providers are reputable.

• Monitors all the referrals being made to make sure that people get called back in a timely manner.

• Troubleshoots if someone isn’t able to get the service they need on the first try.

AmericaServes has community programs in New York, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, South Carolina and Washington. For more information about IVMF and the AmericaServes program, visit: <https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/about-us/>.

These resources are just an example of those available for service members, veterans and their families. As a health care provider, you can learn about additional resources for your transitioning clients by contacting the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury Outreach Center or the [National Resource Director.](https://nrd.gov/)