

[Mental Health Services are Vital for Veterans](#)

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Created on Friday, 23 December 2011 11:46

“With ongoing hostility in Iran and Afghanistan, soldiers are experiencing major trauma, both during and after their active-duty service. The toll of these experiences on their mental health and other aspects of their lives has been devastating for many. If every person in the military had unimpeded access to mental health services, the risk of committing suicide could be greatly decreased and, as a result, the potential for improved health, well being and success in life would be tremendously increased. There have been success stories, which clearly demonstrate the value and effectiveness of services and illustrate the vital need for these services to always be available and adequately funded,” said Debra L. Wentz, Ph.D., CEO of the New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc. (NJAMHAA).

NJAMHAA members serve individuals of all ages through a variety of outpatient, inpatient and other types of programs, as well as providing other services that entail proactive outreach to people in the community.

For example, after three years of service in the U.S. Army Signal Corps, John Leming found himself without direction, abusing drugs and alcohol and living on the streets. However, today, Leming has reconnected with his family and is staying sober, as a result of support he received at Community Hope’s Hope for Veterans Program in Bernards Township. Services include transitional housing, health services and job opportunities. In fact, Leming is working as a resident assistant at the program, which provides him with the great satisfaction of giving back. He sees himself making the transition to more independent living in another year, exploring educational and career opportunities and working to re-establish other lost family connections.

“The Department of Veterans Affairs is very sensitive to this issue and they’re working very aggressively to better serve our veterans,” said J. Michael Armstrong, MA, MBA, Chief Executive Officer of Community Hope. “We are proud to partner with the VA by complementing the Department’s services through programs like Hope for Veterans. More and more veterans, as well as active-duty soldiers, throughout New Jersey and the nation will need mental health care and other support services, and both governmental and community-based programs are essential to meeting these needs.”

For members of the New Jersey National Guard, the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ) operates a Veterans Helpline (1-866-VETS-NJ-4). “Since this program was begun five years ago, not a single suicide has occurred among returning New Jersey National Guard members,” according to Christopher Kosseff, MS, President & CEO of UMDNJ-University Behavioral HealthCare. If Sgt. Bean were a member of the New Jersey National Guard, he would have been directed to this helpline and would have received psychological counseling. “But as a member of the Individual Ready Reserve, a group of soldiers not permanently assigned to army units, he was not guided to seek similar support,” Kosseff said.

The helpline and Hope for Veterans are two of many examples of services available throughout New Jersey, where many more successes have been or are being achieved.