

COMPREHENSIVE ADDICTION AND RECOVERY ACT OF 2016

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Subtitle C—Complementary and Integrative Health

SEC. 931. EXPANSION OF RESEARCH AND EDUCATION ON AND DELIVERY OF COMPLEMENTARY AND INTEGRATIVE HEALTH TO VETERANS.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is established a commission to be known as the “Creating Options for Veterans’ Expedited Recovery” or the “COVER Commission” (in this section referred to as the “Commission”). The Commission shall examine the evidence-based therapy treatment model used by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for treating mental health conditions of veterans and the potential benefits of incorporating complementary and integrative health treatments available in non-Department facilities (as defined in section 1701 of title 38, United States Code).

(b) DUTIES. —The Commission shall perform the following duties:

(1) Examine the efficacy of the evidence-based therapy model used by the Secretary for treating mental health illnesses of veterans and identify areas to improve wellness-based outcomes.

(2) Conduct a patient-centered survey within each of the Veterans Integrated Service Networks to examine—

(A) the experience of veterans with the Department of Veterans Affairs when seeking medical assistance for mental health issues through the health care system of the Department;

(B) the experience of veterans with non-Department facilities and health professionals for treating mental health issues;

(C) the preference of veterans regarding available treatment for mental health issues and which methods the veterans believe to be most effective;

(D) the experience, if any, of veterans with respect to the complementary and integrative health treatment therapies described in paragraph (3);

(E) the prevalence of prescribing prescription medication among veterans seeking treatment through the health care system of the Department as remedies for addressing mental health issues; and

(F) the outreach efforts of the Secretary regarding the availability of benefits and treatments for veterans for addressing mental health issues, including by identifying ways to reduce barriers to gaps in such benefits and treatments.

(3) Examine available research on complementary and integrative health treatment therapies for mental health issues and identify what benefits could be made with the inclusion of such treatments for veterans, including with respect to—

- (A) music therapy;
- (B) equine therapy;
- (C) training and caring for service dogs;
- (D) yoga therapy;
- (E) acupuncture therapy;
- (F) meditation therapy;
- (G) outdoor sports therapy;
- (H) hyperbaric oxygen therapy;
- (I) accelerated resolution therapy;
- (J) art therapy;
- (K) magnetic resonance therapy; and
- (L) other therapies the Commission determines appropriate.

(4) Study the sufficiency of the resources of the Department to ensure the delivery of quality health care for mental health issues among veterans seeking treatment within the Department.

(5) Study the current treatments and resources available within the Department and assess—

- (A) the effectiveness of such treatments and resources in decreasing the number of suicides per day by veterans;
- (B) the number of veterans who have been diagnosed with mental health issues;
- (C) the percentage of veterans using the resources of the Department who have been diagnosed with mental health issues;
- (D) the percentage of veterans who have completed counseling sessions offered by the Department; and
- (E) the efforts of the Department to expand complementary and integrative health treatments viable to the recovery of veterans with mental health issues as determined by the Secretary to improve the effectiveness of treatments offered by the Department.

(c) MEMBERSHIP.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Commission shall be composed of 10 members, appointed as follows:

(A) Two members appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, at least one of whom shall be a veteran.

(B) Two members appointed by the minority leader of the House of Representatives, at least one of whom shall be a veteran.

(C) Two members appointed by the majority leader of the Senate, at least one of whom shall be a veteran.

(D) Two members appointed by the minority leader of the Senate, at least one of whom shall be a veteran.

(E) Two members appointed by the President, at least one of whom shall be a veteran.

(2) QUALIFICATIONS.—Members of the Commission shall be individuals who—

(A) are of recognized standing and distinction within the medical community with a background in treating mental health;

(B) have experience working with the military and veteran population; and

(C) do not have a financial interest in any of the complementary and integrative health treatments reviewed by the Commission.

(3) CHAIRMAN.—The President shall designate a member of the Commission to be the Chairman.

(4) PERIOD OF APPOINTMENT.—Members of the Commission shall be appointed for the life of the Commission.

(5) VACANCY.—A vacancy in the Commission shall be filled in the manner in which the original appointment was made.

(6) APPOINTMENT DEADLINE.—The appointment of members of the Commission in this section shall be made not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

(d) POWERS OF COMMISSION.—

(1) MEETINGS.—

(A) INITIAL MEETING.—The Commission shall hold its first meeting not later than 30 days after a majority of members are appointed to the Commission.

(B) MEETING.—The Commission shall regularly meet at the call of the Chairman. Such meetings may be carried out through the use of telephonic or other

appropriate telecommunication technology if the Commission determines that such technology will allow the members to communicate simultaneously.

(2) HEARINGS.—The Commission may hold such hearings, sit and act at such times and places, take such testimony, and receive evidence as the Commission considers advisable to carry out the responsibilities of the Commission.

(3) INFORMATION FROM FEDERAL AGENCIES.—The Commission may secure directly from any department or agency of the Federal Government such information as the Commission considers necessary to carry out the duties of the Commission.

(4) INFORMATION FROM NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS.—In carrying out its duties, the Commission may seek guidance through consultation with foundations, veteran service organizations, nonprofit groups, faith-based organizations, private and public institutions of higher education, and other organizations as the Commission determines appropriate.

(5) COMMISSION RECORDS.—The Commission shall keep an accurate and complete record of the actions and meetings of the Commission. Such record shall be made available for public inspection and the Comptroller General of the United States may audit and examine such record.

(6) PERSONNEL RECORDS.—The Commission shall keep an accurate and complete record of the actions and meetings of the Commission. Such record shall be made available for public inspection and the Comptroller General of the United States may audit and examine such records.

(7) COMPENSATION OF MEMBERS; TRAVEL EXPENSES.—Each member shall serve without pay but shall receive travel expenses to perform the duties of the Commission, including per diem in lieu of substances, at rates authorized under subchapter I of [chapter 57](#) of title 5, United States Code.

(8) STAFF.—The Chairman, in accordance with rules agreed upon the Commission, may appoint and fix the compensation of a staff director and such other personnel as may be necessary to enable the Commission to carry out its functions, without regard to the provisions of title 5, United States Code, governing appointments in the competitive service, without regard to the provision of chapter 51 and subchapter III of chapter 53 of such title relating to classification and General Schedule pay rates, except that no rate of pay fixed under this paragraph may exceed the equivalent of that payable for a position at level IV of the Executive Schedule under section 5315 of title 5, United States Code.

(9) PERSONNEL AS FEDERAL EMPLOYEES.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The executive director and any personnel of the Commission are employees under section 2105 of title 5, United States Code, for purpose of chapters 63, 81, 83, 84, 85, 87, 89, and 90 of such title.

(B) MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION.—Subparagraph (A) shall not be construed to apply to members of the Commission.

(10) CONTRACTING.—The Commission may, to such extent and in such amounts as are provided in appropriations Acts, enter into contracts to enable the Commission to discharge the duties of the Commission under this Act.

(11) EXPERT AND CONSULTANT SERVICE.—The Commission may procure the services of experts and consultants in accordance with section 3109 of title 5, United States Code, at rates not to exceed the daily rate paid to a person occupying a position at level IV of the Executive Schedule under section 5315 of title 5, United States Code.

(12) POSTAL SERVICE.—The Commission may use the United States mails in the same manner and under the same conditions as departments and agencies of the United States.

(13) PHYSICAL FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT.—Upon the request of the Commission, the Administrator of General Services shall provide to the Commission, on a reimbursable basis, the administrative support services necessary for the Commission to carry out its responsibilities under this Act. These administrative services may include human resource management, budget, leasing accounting, and payroll services.

(e) REPORT.—

(1) INTERIM REPORTS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 60 days after the date on which the Commission first meets, and each 30-day period thereafter ending on the date on which the Commission submits the final report under paragraph (2), the Commission shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate and the President a report detailing the level of cooperation the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (and the heads of other departments or agencies of the Federal Government) has provided to the Commission.

(B) OTHER REPORTS.—In carrying out its duties, at times that the Commission determines appropriate, the Commission shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate and any other appropriate entities an interim report with respect to the findings identified by the Commission.

(2) FINAL REPORT.—Not later than 18 months after the first meeting of the Commission, the Commission shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate, the President, and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs a final report on the findings of the Commission. Such report shall include the following:

(A) Recommendations to implement in a feasible, timely, and cost-efficient manner the solutions and remedies identified within the findings of the Commission pursuant to subsection (b).

(B) An analysis of the evidence-based therapy model used by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for treating veterans with mental health care issues, and an examination of the prevalence and efficacy of prescription drugs as a means for treatment.

(C) The findings of the patient-centered survey conducted within each of the Veterans Integrated Service Networks pursuant to subsection (b)(2).

(D) An examination of complementary and integrative health treatments described in subsection (b)(3) and the potential benefits of incorporating such treatments in the therapy models used by the Secretary for treating veterans with mental health issues.

(3) PLAN.—Not later than 90 days after the date on which the Commission submits the final report under paragraph (2), the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a report on the following:

(A) An action plan for implementing the recommendations established by the Commission on such solutions and remedies for improving wellness-based outcomes for veterans with mental health care issues.

(B) A feasible timeframe on when the complementary and integrative health treatments described in subsection (b)(3) can be implemented Department-wide.

(C) With respect to each recommendation established by the Commission, including any complementary and integrative health treatment, that the Secretary determines is not appropriate or feasible to implement, a justification for such determination and an alternative solution to improve the efficacy of the therapy models used by the Secretary for treating veterans with mental health issues.

(f) TERMINATION OF COMMISSION.—The Commission shall terminate 30 days after the Commission submits the final report under subsection (e)(2).