

117TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 5181

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to make certain improvements relating to mental health and suicide prevention outreach to minority veterans and American Indian and Alaska Native veterans, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

DECEMBER 5, 2022

Mr. TESTER (for himself and Mr. MORAN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to make certain improvements relating to mental health and suicide prevention outreach to minority veterans and American Indian and Alaska Native veterans, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “American Indian and
5 Alaska Native Veterans Mental Health Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION OUT-**
2 **REACH TO MINORITY VETERANS AND AMER-**
3 **ICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE VET-**
4 **ERANS.**

5 (a) STAFFING REQUIREMENT.—Beginning not later
6 than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act,
7 the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall ensure that each
8 medical center of the Department of Veterans Affairs has
9 not fewer than one full-time employee whose responsibility
10 is serving as a minority veteran coordinator.

11 (b) TRAINING.—Not later than 180 days after the
12 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary, in con-
13 sultation with the Director of the Indian Health Service
14 and the Director of the Office of Mental Health and Sui-
15 cide Prevention of the Department of Veterans Affairs,
16 shall ensure that all minority veteran coordinators receive
17 training in delivery of mental health and suicide preven-
18 tion services culturally appropriate for American Indian
19 and Alaska Native veterans, especially with respect to the
20 populations and Indian Tribes identified within the
21 catchment area served by each such coordinator.

22 (c) COORDINATION WITH SUICIDE PREVENTION CO-
23 ORDINATORS.—

24 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days
25 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
26 retary, in consultation with the Director of the Of-

1 fice of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention of the
2 Department, shall ensure that the suicide prevention
3 coordinator and minority veteran coordinator of each
4 medical center of the Department have developed
5 and disseminated to the director of the medical cen-
6 ter a written plan for conducting mental health and
7 suicide prevention outreach to all Indian Tribes and
8 Urban Indian organizations within the catchment
9 area of the medical center.

10 (2) ELEMENTS OF PLAN.—Each plan required
11 under paragraph (1) shall include for each Indian
12 Tribe covered by the plan—

13 (A) contact information for leadership of
14 the Indian Tribe and the Tribal health facility
15 or facility of the Indian Health Service serving
16 the Indian Tribe;

17 (B) a schedule for and list of outreach
18 plans (including plans addressing any barriers
19 to accessing mental health care from the De-
20 partment);

21 (C) documentation of any conversation
22 with leaders of the Indian Tribe that may guide
23 culturally appropriate delivery of mental health
24 care to American Indian or Alaska Native vet-
25 erans;

(D) documentation of any progress in incorporating traditional healing practices into mental health and suicide prevention protocols and options available for veterans who are members of such Indian Tribe; and

(E) documentation of any coordination among the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Indian Health Service, Urban Indian organizations, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the Department of Health and Human Services for the purpose of improving suicide prevention efforts tailored to veterans who are members of such Indian Tribe and the provision of culturally competent mental health care to such veterans.

(d) REPORT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives a report on outreach efforts to minority veterans and American Indian and Alaska Native veterans.

(2) ELEMENTS.—The report required under paragraph (1) shall include each of the following:

1 (A) The number of minority veteran coor-
2 dinators within the Department of Veterans Af-
3 fairs.

4 (B) The number and percentage of minor-
5 ity veteran coordinators who are women.

6 (C) The number and percentage of minor-
7 ity veteran coordinators who are persons of
8 color.

9 (D) The number and percentage of medical
10 centers of the Department with a minority vet-
11 eran coordinator.

12 (E) The number and percentage of mental
13 health providers of the Department who are en-
14 rolled members of an Indian Tribe or self-iden-
15 tify as Native American.

16 (F) The number and percentage of mental
17 health providers of the Department who speak
18 a second language.

19 (G) A review of the outreach plans devel-
20 oped and submitted to all medical centers of the
21 Department for outreach to American Indian
22 and Alaska Native veterans.

23 (H) An annual review of mental health
24 care provided by the Department to American
25 Indian and Alaska Native veterans during the

1 three-year period preceding the date of the re-
2 port, including the number of appointments for
3 such care and an assessment of any barriers to
4 providing such care.

5 (e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

6 (1) INDIAN TRIBE.—The term “Indian Tribe”
7 has the meaning given that term in section 4(e) of
8 the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assist-
9 ance Act (25 U.S.C. 5304(e)).

10 (2) URBAN INDIAN ORGANIZATION.—The term
11 “Urban Indian organization” has the meaning given
12 that term in section 4 of the Indian Health Care Im-
13 provement Act (25 U.S.C. 1603).

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