

# Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Top Priority For IAVA

**NEW YORK (March 4, 2014)** – According to three new studies released in this month's edition of *Journal of the American Medical Association Psychiatry*, nearly one-in-five soldiers suffered from a mental illness before enlisting in the Army and about one-in-ten soldiers thought about taking their life prior to enlistment.

The study findings come from the Army Study to Assess Risk and Resilience in Servicemembers (Army STARRS) – a massive research initiative that spanned five years and involved almost 5,500 soldiers. Army STARRS was a partnership between the U.S. Army and the U.S. National Institute of Mental Health.

Mental health care access and suicide prevention is a top issue for the veteran community and will be a main priority for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) in 2014.

“Most Americans are unaware that 22 veterans a day take their own lives. As a nation, our challenge is to break the silence, show veterans there is no shame in getting help, and provide solid service. This research is critical to helping us understand why this is happening and how to help vets in crisis. It highlights the importance of effective screening prior to entering the military, as well as the continued need for support throughout a military career and after separation,” said IAVA CEO and Founder Paul Rieckhoff. “Many veterans and servicemembers are dealing with invisible injuries. As the war in Afghanistan draws down and more of our warriors return home, our country must recognize suicide and mental health as a top issue.”

Rieckhoff continued, “We must garner more attention and understanding through top notch research like this. We need it to better understand the risk factors that can lead to suicide and to better inform the network of support that we provide our community. You will be hearing more from IAVA on this subject in coming weeks.”

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimates that 22 veterans die by suicide a day. In January, they issued a new report that found that the suicide rate for veterans between the ages of 18-29 increased significantly in three years, up nearly 44 percent. That same report also noted that seeking help works.

IAVA has partnered with the VA's Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) to ensure that every servicemember, veteran, family member and provider knows that there is free and confidential help available 24 hours a day through phone, text and online. Veterans, or those concerned about veterans, need only call 800-273-8255 and press 1 to be directly connected to qualified responders.