



EDC Applauds the Reintroduction of the SERVE Act in the United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. (February 4, 2021) — The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action (EDC) is pleased to announce that the bipartisan Supporting Eating Disorders Recovery Through Vital Expansion (SERVE) Act was reintroduced today in the United States Senate by Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Thom Tillis (R-NC). Senators Mazie Hirono (D-HI) and Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) supported the legislation as original co-sponsors.

The SERVE Act seeks to support members of the military and their family members who are affected by eating disorders in two key ways. First, under existing rules, military family member beneficiaries who are over the age of 20 are barred from receiving residential eating disorders treatment through TRICARE, the health insurance program for active duty servicemembers and their families. This prevents spouses and children of servicemembers 21 years of age and older from receiving the care they need and deserve. The SERVE Act would extend the age limit for TRICARE beneficiaries receiving residential eating disorders care from 20 years of age to the Medicare-eligibility age of 65.

Second, the Department of Defense (DoD) is falling short when it comes to eating disorders identification and treatment, as the EDC helped demonstrate in a [statement](#) issued in October 2020. Additionally, a recent Defense Health Board [report](#) found that active duty servicewomen experience eating disorders at a disproportionate rate, which has a direct negative impact on their health and readiness. The SERVE Act would require the Secretary of Defense to take measures to identify, treat, and rehabilitate members of the military affected by eating disorders, as is already done for servicemembers facing substance use disorder. The bill would also require DoD and the Department of Veterans Affairs to establish official clinical practice guidelines for eating disorders treatment, similar to those that already exist for many other medical and mental health conditions.

“Our servicemembers deserve the highest quality health care to help heal both physical and mental wounds,” said **Senator Shaheen**. “I’m proud to reintroduce legislation that recognizes our servicemembers’ mental health matters just as much as physical health by expanding TRICARE coverage of eating disorder treatments for servicemembers, retirees and their dependents. We owe a great debt to our military for the sacrifices that come with service, and offering them the assistance they need to stay healthy must be our top priority.”

“The prevalence of eating disorders among servicemembers and their families is unacceptable,” said **Senator Tillis**. “Congress must provide our men and women in uniform with the right tools to combat eating disorders, and I’m proud to reintroduce the SERVE Act with Senator Shaheen to improve access and care for those affected.”

Today’s reintroduction of the bipartisan SERVE Act affirms the need to improve the accessibility and quality of eating disorders care for servicemembers and their military families. Members of the armed forces experience higher prevalence rates of eating disorders compared to their civilian counterparts due to unique risk factors those in the military face such as strict weight and physical fitness requirements, combat exposure, PTSD, and military sexual trauma. Diagnoses of eating disorders among military personnel rose 26% from 2013-2016. The spouses and children of servicemembers are also more likely to be affected by eating disorders than the general population, with 26% of spouses of servicemembers and 21% of children of servicemembers symptomatic for an eating disorder, rates 3 times higher than their civilian peers.

“We know that servicemembers, their partners, and their children are at increased risk of developing eating disorders. Ensuring coverage for treatment at all levels of care has direct relevance for readiness and for the health and well-being of family members whose support is essential for those who serve,” said **Dr. Cynthia M. Bulik, PhD, FAED, Army Parent and Founding Director of the University of North Carolina Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders**. “The SERVE Act will ensure that our military families receive the treatment necessary to overcome these life-impairing conditions.”

Eating disorders are mental health conditions with serious and widespread effects. In the United States, 10,200 people die from an eating disorder every year, equivalent to one death every 52 minutes. Those affected by eating disorders

also experience a higher rate of suicide than unaffected persons; people with eating disorders are 23% more likely to die by suicide.

“The EDC is thrilled to see the Senate version of the Supporting Eating Disorders Recovery Through Vital Expansion (SERVE) Act introduced today in the United States Senate,” said **EDC Board President Chase Bannister, MDiv, MSW, LCSW, CEDS**. “This legislation will help military family members access the eating disorders care they need and deserve, and require the Secretary of Defense, DoD, and VA to take steps to improve the identification and treatment of servicemembers affected by eating disorders.”

If you are interested in learning more about eating disorders in the military and the surrounding policy issues from experts and those with lived experience, please [register](#) for our upcoming Virtual Congressional Policy Briefing on February 25th from 12:30-1:30PM EST, co-sponsored by the EDC, REDC Consortium, and the National Military Families Association (NMFA).

The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action (EDC) is a Washington, DC-based, federal advocacy organization comprised of advocacy organizations, academics, treatment providers, family/loved ones of children with eating disorders and people experiencing eating disorders nationwide. The EDC advances the recognition of eating disorders as a public health priority throughout the United States. Additional resources can also be found at eatingdisorderscoalition.org.

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