



EDC Celebrates the Reintroduction of the SERVE Act in the United States House of Representatives

WASHINGTON, D.C. (February 24, 2021) — The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action (EDC) is excited to announce to the eating disorders community and general public that the bipartisan Supporting Eating Disorders Recovery Through Vital Expansion (SERVE) Act was reintroduced today in the United States House of Representatives, by Representatives Seth Moulton (D-MA), John Katko (R-NY), and Veronica Escobar (D-TX). The Senate version of the SERVE Act was [reintroduced](#) earlier this month by Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Thom Tillis (R-NC).

The SERVE Act seeks to improve access to care for family member TRICARE beneficiaries affected by eating disorders. Currently, spouse or child TRICARE beneficiaries who are 21 years old or above are not covered to receive residential eating disorders care. The SERVE Act would alter this rule and allow military family members access to needed residential eating disorders care as long as they are below the Medicare eligibility age of 65 years old.

Additionally, the SERVE Act would improve the quality of eating disorders care for active duty servicemembers through a provision instructing the Secretary of Defense to take steps to identify, treat, and rehabilitate military personnel affected by eating disorders. The bill would also require both the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to create official clinical practice guidelines for eating disorders care. Neither of these steps is unprecedented; the Secretary of Defense has taken similar steps to improve the quality of substance use disorder care in the military, and clinical practice guidelines are already codified by the DoD and VA for a number of mental health conditions.

“Servicemembers and their families deserve the best possible health care, and it’s up to Congress to make that happen,” **said Rep. Seth Moulton (D-MA)**. “It is hard to talk about eating disorders and mental health, and especially hard within the military community. We hope leadership from Congress on the SERVE Act starts a broader conversation that helps people seek and receive help.”

“In recognition of National Eating Disorders Awareness Week, I’m partnering with Congressman Seth Moulton and Congresswoman Veronica Escobar to introduce the SERVE Act,” **said Rep. John Katko (R-NY)**. “According to a recent study published by the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, at least 28.8 million Americans will suffer from an eating disorder in their lifetime. These disorders affect individuals from all backgrounds. But for servicemembers and their families, some are not eligible to receive higher level eating disorders care under TRICARE due to their age. Our bipartisan bill extends the age limit for beneficiaries to the Medicare eligibility age for TRICARE coverage of eating disorders care, ensuring those who serve our nation and their families have access to the support they deserve.”

“Eating disorders are serious mental illnesses that affect over 28 million Americans over the course of their lifetime and studies indicate that servicemembers and their families have higher rates of eating disorders than the civilian population,” **said Rep. Veronica Escobar (D-TX)**. “This National Eating Disorder Awareness Week, I am proud to partner with Congressmen Moulton and Katko to introduce the SERVE Act and increase identification and access for lifesaving treatment under TRICARE for our servicemembers and their families.”

Servicemembers are faced with risk factors that make them substantially more likely than the general population to be affected by eating disorders. These include rigid targets for weight and size, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), combat exposure, and military sexual trauma. As a result of these risk factors, elevated rates of disordered eating among military personnel are not uncommon. For example, 16 percent of female veterans are affected by an eating disorder. Additionally, children and spouses of servicemembers are also confronted with predisposing factors, such as long separation periods and repeated relocation, that make them three times more likely to be affected by an eating disorder than their civilian peers.

"Our military and military families serve their country and communities selflessly and without complaint. Accessible and comprehensive treatment for the many servicemembers and dependents who silently struggle with eating disorders

is both a potentially lifesaving measure, and a small way that we can repay these individuals for their sacrifices,” **said Chandler Rand, Former Marine & Current Military Spouse**. “The SERVE Act will afford servicemembers and dependents the chance for full recovery that they deserve.”

Eating disorders are mental health conditions that are widespread, deadly, and costly. 28.8 million Americans, or around 9 percent of the population, are affected or will be affected by an eating disorder in their lifetime. One person dies every 52 minutes in the United States as the direct result of an eating disorder due to the serious comorbidities associated with this mental illness. Individuals with eating disorders have an elevated risk of suicide, as the suicide rate for those affected by eating disorders is 23 times higher than the expected rate. Eating disorders also end up costing the U.S. economy \$64.7 billion each year, with \$23.5 billion shouldered by families and individuals without access and coverage for treatment.

“The EDC is highly pleased to see the SERVE Act reintroduced today in the House of Representatives,” **said EDC Board President Chase Bannister, MDIV, MSW, LCSW, CEDS**. “The SERVE Act would expand access to eating disorders care for the family members of servicemembers and take steps to improve the overall quality of eating disorders care in the military. The EDC looks forward to rallying its advocacy base and doing everything it can to get this important piece of legislation signed into law.”

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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