



EDC Celebrates the Passage of the SERVE Act into Federal Law

WASHINGTON, D.C. (December 15, 2021) — The Eating Disorder Coalition for Research, Policy & Action (EDC) applauds the House and Senate for passing a bipartisan provision based on the Supporting Eating Disorders Recovery through Vital Expansion (SERVE) Act ([S.194/H.R. 1309](#)) within the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022 (NDAA). We extend immense gratitude to Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Thom Tillis (R-NC) in the Senate and Representatives Seth Moulton (D-MA-06), John Katko (R-NY-24), Veronica Escobar (D-TX-16), and Vicky Hartzler (R-MO-04) in the House for their leadership of the standalone SERVE Act and the critical eating disorders provisions in the NDAA. The NDAA now advances to President Biden for his signature.

The passage of the FY22 NDAA with these eating disorders provisions included is a momentous win for the eating disorders community. The EDC is proud to have supported this initiative led by the REDC Consortium as we work to support access to eating disorders care for all. Currently, military family members over the age of 20 years old do not receive coverage for higher levels of eating disorders care. However, the NDAA will close this gap by raising the age limit for military families to receive eating disorders coverage from 20-years-old to the Medicare-eligible age of 64-years-old. Additionally, the bill includes language encouraging the Department of Defense to implement eating disorders early identification processes within the Armed Forces.

“Ensuring the health and safety of our service members requires that we provide them the full scope of quality health care,” **said Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH)**. “That includes treating the wounds we cannot see, which is why I pushed for the annual defense bill to include a provision based on my bipartisan legislation to expand TRICARE coverage for eating disorders. It’s important that the Department of Defense is equipped to identify, treat and rehabilitate those affected by eating disorders so we can live by our pledge to take care of service members. This is an important step forward to end the stigma surrounding eating disorders and ensure our service members and their dependents have access to the care they need. It is past time that we provide the same quality of care to treat eating disorders impacting our service members and their families as the civilians they’re sworn to protect.”

“I am extremely pleased to see the inclusion of the SERVE Act in the final NDAA,” **said Senator Thom Tillis (R-NC)**. “Granting our men and women in uniform with the resources and assistance necessary to combat eating disorders will enhance military readiness and provide struggling servicemembers access to the care they need.”

“Today is a huge victory for service members and their families who are managing eating disorders,” **said Representative Seth Moulton (D-MA-16)**. “With this piece of legislation, we can finally make sure they are given the critical support and quality health care they deserve. I look forward to continuing to work with organizations like the Eating Disorders Coalition and my colleagues in Congress to advance eating disorders as a public health priority.”

“I am proud to have voted to pass a strong, bipartisan National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022 to keep America safe, defend our servicemembers and their families and advance our nation’s leadership in the world,” **said Representative Veronica Escobar (D-TX-16)**. “This defense bill incorporates the key provisions of my SERVE Act which increases access to eating disorder treatment under TRICARE for our men and women in uniform and their families. I want to thank Congressmen Moulton and Katko for their leadership and partnership in introducing this legislation and to the Eating Disorders Coalition for their strong support and advocacy.”

Military members and their families experience higher prevalence rates of eating disorders than the civilian population, with an estimated 7-8% of servicemembers affected by this serious mental illness. Research shows that 21% of servicemembers' children and 26% of spouses show symptoms of an eating disorder, rates that are three times higher than that of civilians.¹ Additionally, 34% of female active-duty military members have screened as at-risk for an eating disorder, and 16% of female veterans are affected by an eating disorder today.² Body dysmorphic disorder, characterized by obsessive thinking about a flaw that is usually imagined or hardly noticeable to others and muscular dysmorphia, marked by a negative body image and obsessive desire to have a muscular physique, affects 13% of male servicemembers.³ The strong link between post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), military sexual trauma, and eating disorders among servicemembers and their families, along with the fact that eating disorders have the second-highest mortality rate of any psychiatric condition, demonstrates a need to ensure early intervention and access to treatment for this life-threatening illness.

“We are grateful for our champions in the House and Senate, our partner organizations, and our community advocates who all helped push for the inclusion of these two eating disorders provisions in the NDAA”, **said Chase Bannister, MDiv, MSW, LCSW, CEDS, Board President of the EDC.** “The EDC is excited that the NDAA will soon be signed into law by President Biden and servicemembers and their families can finally receive the eating disorders treatment they need and deserve.”

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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¹ Higgins Neyland MK, Shank LM, Burke NL, et al. Parental deployment and distress, and adolescent disordered eating in prevention-seeking military dependents. *Int J Eat Disord.* 2019;1– 9. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.231806>.

² Silas, Sharon. (August 7,2020). Department of Defense: Eating Disorders in the Military. Retrieved from <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-611r.pdf>.

³ Campagna, J. D., & Bowsher, B. (2016). Prevalence of body dysmorphic disorder and muscle dysmorphia among entry-level military personnel. *Military medicine*, 181(5), 494-501.