



Complementary & Alternative Medicine

AMVETS advocates for the expansion and enhancement of the offering of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) to veterans receiving Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) treatment for mental health or chronic pain issues.

The most commonly used alternative treatments by VA currently are acupuncture, chiropractic manipulation, exercise, stress-reduction techniques, supplements and vitamins, therapy, and yoga. A recent survey of 141 VA facilities by VA's Healthcare Information and Analysis Group found that:

- 89% of VA facilities offered CAM and 1% were in the process of developing CAM programs.
- The top 5 uses of CAM were for, in order: stress management, anxiety disorders, PTSD, depression, and back pain.
- CAM is used as an adjunctive therapy 72% of the time, but this was not reported as specific to PTSD or other disorders.
- 65% of facilities reported offering one of more types of CAM for PTSD.
- Another recent survey of all 170 VA specialized PTSD treatment programs found (30):
- 96% of the 125 programs that responded reported offering CAM.
- 88% reported using types of CAM in addition to guided imagery, progressive muscle relaxation, and stress management/relaxation, treatments that are considered to be CAM but are used in conventional mental health care.
- The types of treatments used most often in specialized PTSD programs were: mindfulness, stress management/relaxation, progressive muscle relaxation, and guided imagery, all of which were offered more than 50% of treatment programs.

AMVETS also advocates for VA to allow its doctors to recommend and refer out for use of medical marijuana in states where it is legalized. Current VHA policy prohibits VA providers from completing forms seeking recommendations or opinions regarding a veteran's participation in a state marijuana program. But the veteran is not penalized for sharing with their VA doctor that they use medical marijuana outside of the VA system of care, which is a relatively new and good first step.

AMVETS supports the passage of H.R. 102, Expanding Care for Veterans Act, and H.R. 103, Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act.