In August 2018, the John McCain National Defense Authorization Act was signed into law, effective fiscal year 2019. The Act includes a provision that requires the Department of Defense (DoD) to screen members of the Armed Forces for gambling disorder.1 Prior to this law, the National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) used a variety of studies by the DoD on active personnel, as well as studies on veterans, to conservatively estimate that 56,000 active duty personnel suffer from gambling problems.2

According to a 2017 report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the DoD has a total of 3,141 slot machines on overseas U.S. military installations, with the largest concentrations on bases in Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Germany. These slot machines, intended to be a form of on-base recreation, generate roughly $100 million in revenue per year that funds other recreational activities.3

But for some service members, the urge to gamble may become impossible to control. Gambling addiction within the military can also present serious national security concerns.

Veterans, who already face a multitude of other challenges upon returning to civilian life, are at a significantly higher risk for developing gambling disorder.

When Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is also a factor, the risk is compounded. According to the Mayo Clinic, PTSD symptoms generally fall into four categories: intrusive memories, avoidance, negative changes in mood, and changes in physical and emotional reactions.4 As many members of the military experience depression and battle with mental health and other issues, it is easy to understand how they can fall prey to a gambling disorder, to escape the stresses of daily life, the physical challenges, and to change other negative emotions.

Problem gambling can wreak havoc on the lives of veterans and their families. From financial, relationship, career, legal, and mental health troubles to a high rate of suicidal ideation and attempts, spreading word about available help and hope is something we owe to our heroes.
References:


