



INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE  
OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES

# Treatment of PTSD in VA Facilities and Programs

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**Tuesday, January 16, 2007**  
**The National Academy of Sciences Building**  
**2100 C St. N.W**  
**Washington, DC**  
**Lecture Room**



## Vet Center Statement of Purpose

*We are the people in VA who welcome home war Veterans with honor by providing readjustment counseling in a caring manner. Vet Centers understand and appreciate Veterans' war experiences while assisting them and their family members toward a successful post-war adjustment in or near their community.*



## Readjustment Counseling Service Vet Center History

The Vet Center program was the first in VA, or anywhere, to systematically address the psychological traumas of war in combat veterans, and this a full year before the publication of American Psychiatric Association's definition of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the Third Edition of its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual in 1980.



## Readjustment Counseling Service

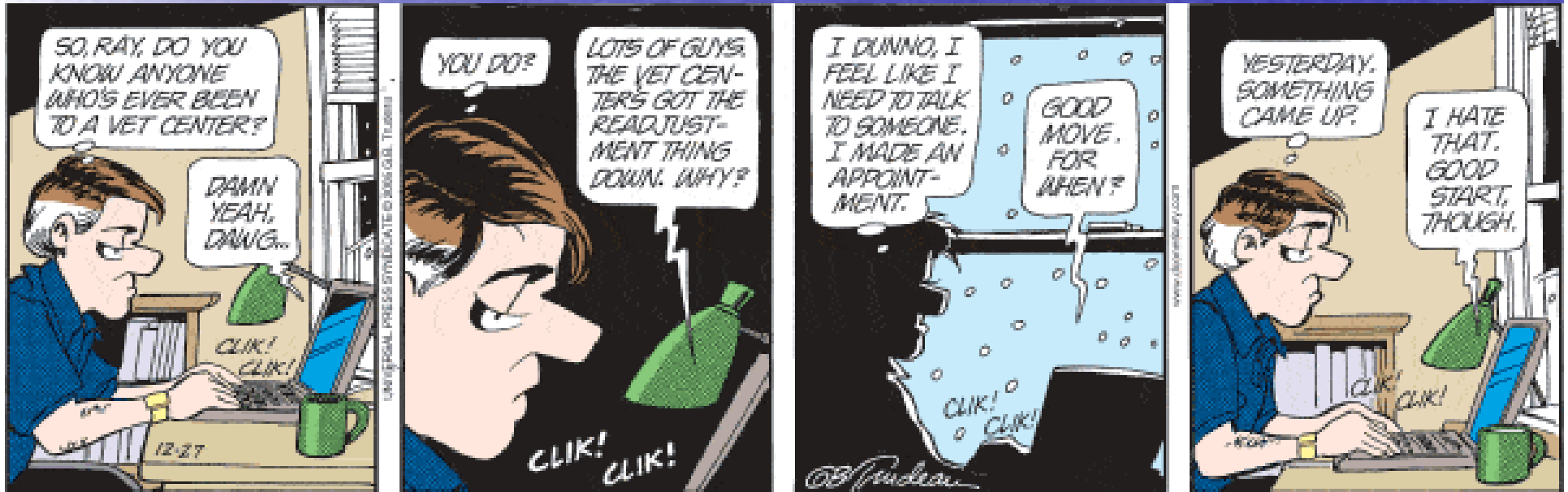
# Unique Features

### *Overcoming Stigma*

- Vet Centers are staffed by small teams composed of a mix of professional mental health counselors and counselors from other disciplines.
- Vet Centers promote rapport and trust among veterans through a culture of understanding and appreciating the combat experience by hiring combat veterans.
- Vet Centers guarantee confidentiality and informed consent to avoid the effects of stigma on war zone and sexually traumatized veterans.
- Most, if not all, of the recent recommendations of the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health were actualized 26 years ago with the advent of the Vet Center program.



# Readjustment Counseling Service Doonesbury

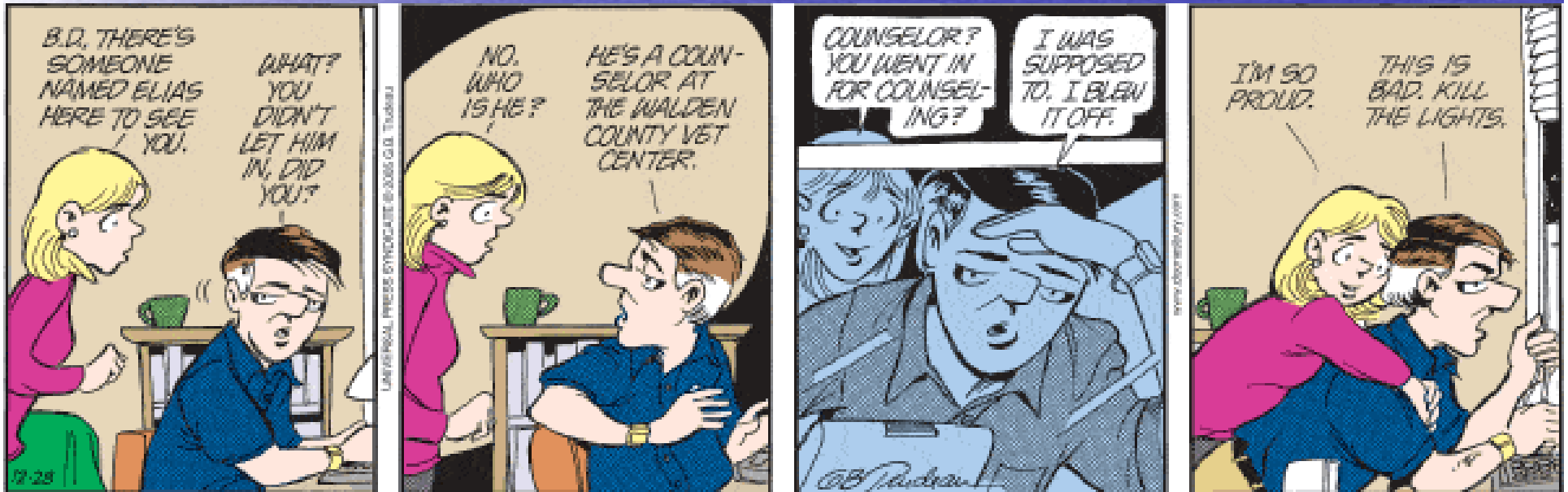


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Reluctance..... Stigma.....



# Readjustment Counseling Service Doonesbury



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## Stigma.....

Reference: Combat Duty in Iraq & Afghanistan, Mental Health Problems, and Barriers to Care, NEJM 2004, Hoge, Charles W., et. al.



## Readjustment Counseling Service Individual Vet Center Services

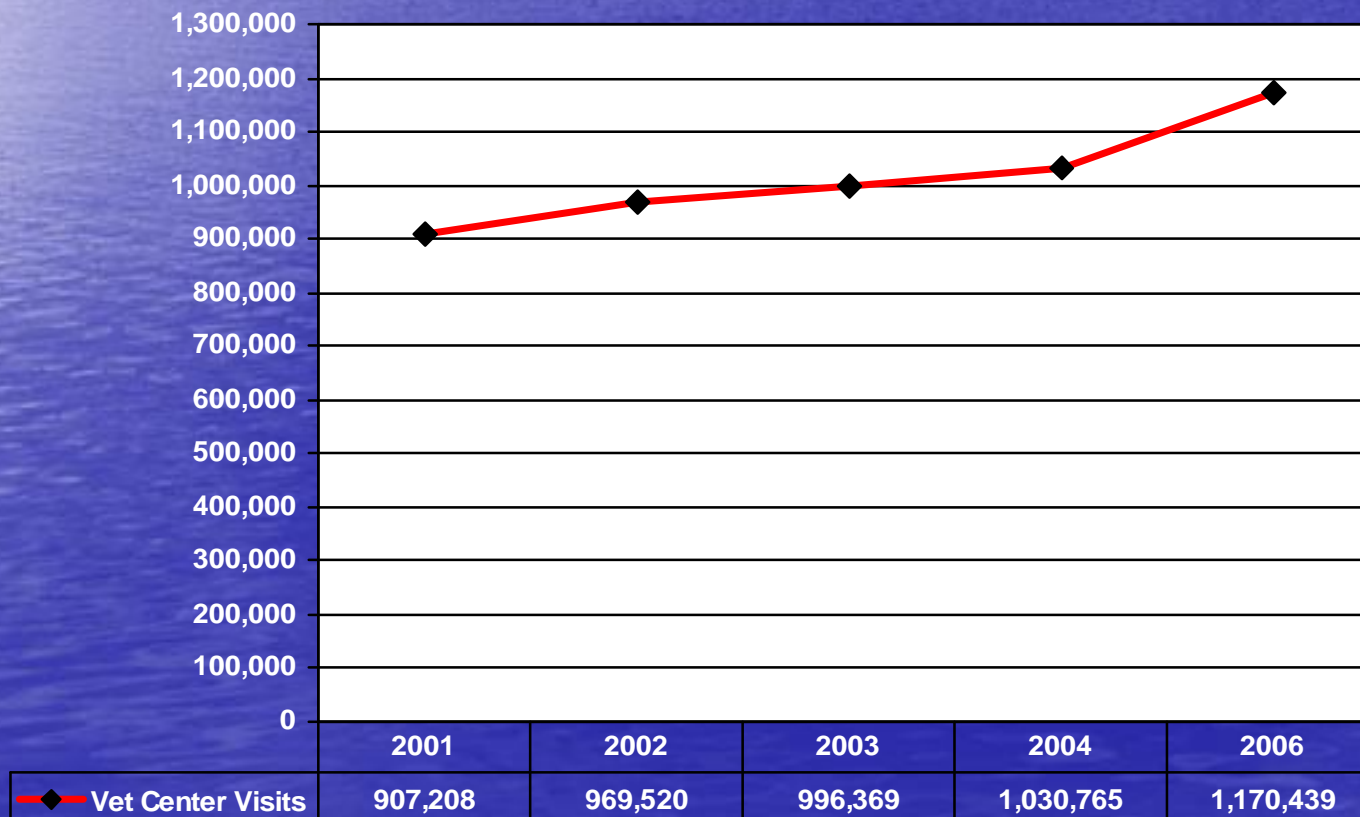
Readjustment counseling is a wide range of services offered to eligible veterans in the effort to make a successful transition from military to civilian life. Services offered at the 209 Vet Centers nationwide include:

- Individual and group counseling
- Marital and family counseling
- Bereavement counseling
- Military sexual trauma counseling and referral
- Community outreach and education
- Substance abuse assessments
- Medical referral
- Assistance with VA benefits
- Employment counseling, guidance and referral
- Information and referral to community resources



# Readjustment Counseling Service FY 2006

- In FY 2006 the Vet Center program provided 1,170,439 visits to 228,612 veterans and their families.





## Readjustment Counseling Service OEF/OIF Eligibility



On April 1, 2003 the VA Secretary extended Vet Center eligibility to veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom.

On June 25, 2003 the VA Secretary extended Vet Center eligibility to veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom.





# Readjustment Counseling Service GWOT Outreach Program



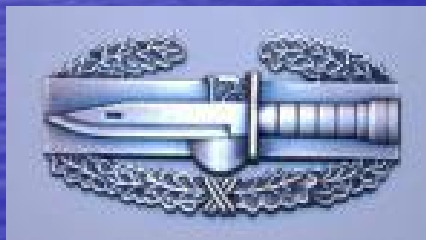
Global War on Terrorism  
Expeditionary Medal



Afghanistan Campaign Medal



Iraq Campaign Medal



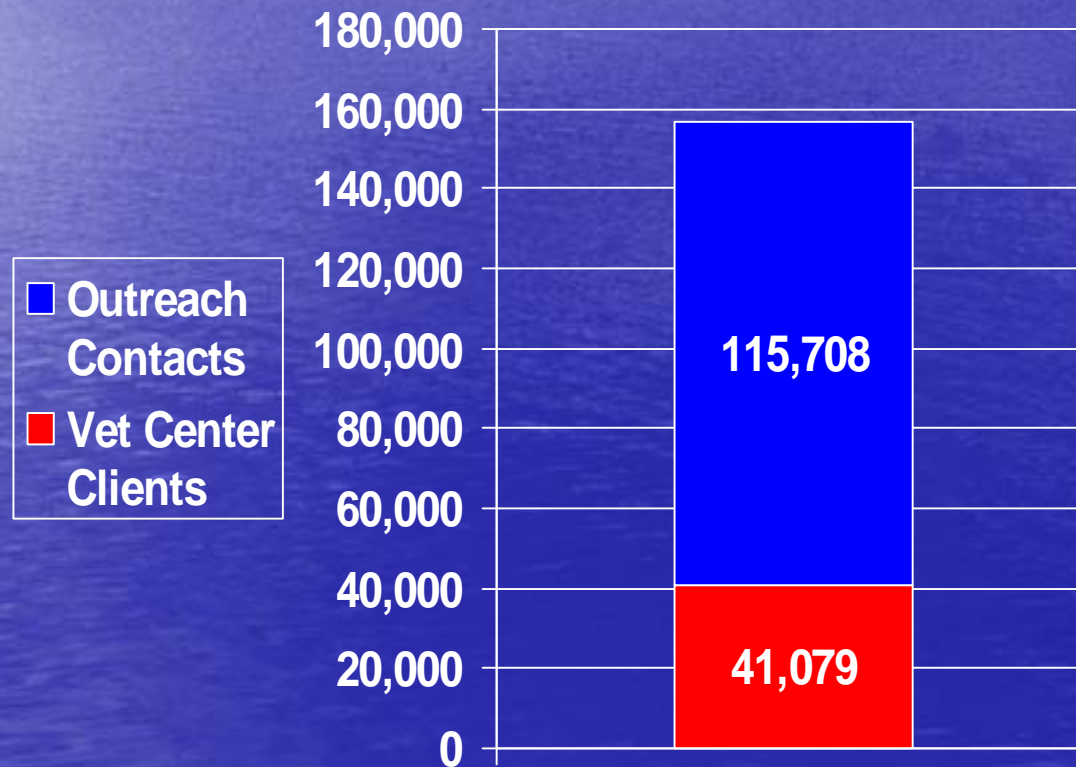
Combat Action Badge

On February 3, 2004 the VA Under Secretary for Health authorized the Vet Center program to hire fifty (50) OEF/OIF veterans to conduct outreach to their fellow Global War on Terrorism veterans. Due to the success of the initial 50 Outreach Specialists an additional 50 positions were authorized by Under Secretary Perlin in April 2005. These positions are located in all fifty states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.



# Readjustment Counseling Service 156,787 OEF / OIF Veterans Provided Vet Center Services

## Workload through FY 2006



Accumulative since the beginning of the War  
Documentation of outreach contacts began June 2005



## Readjustment Counseling Service

# 41,079 Vet Center OEF/OIF Clients

{In Center}

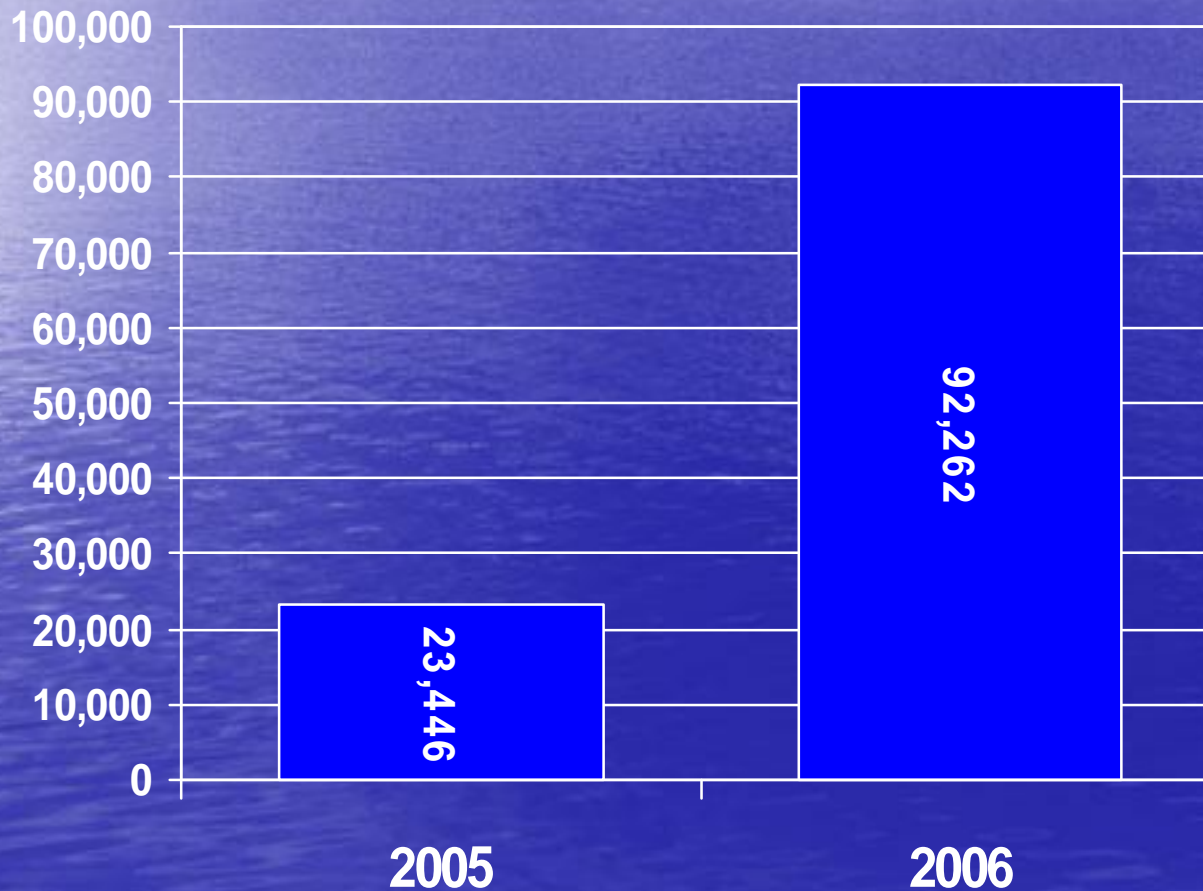


24.5% increase from 2005 to 2006



# Readjustment Counseling Service 115,708 Outreach Contacts

Documentation of outreach contacts began June 2005



**Represents 18% of  
All Separated OEF/  
OIF Service Members**

# Readjustment Counseling Service Vet Center Bereavement Services



On August 5, 2003 VA Secretary Anthony J. Principi authorized Vet Centers to furnish bereavement counseling services to surviving parents, spouses, children and siblings of service members who die while on active duty, to include federally activated Reserve and National Guard personnel.



## Readjustment Counseling Service Vet Center Bereavement Services

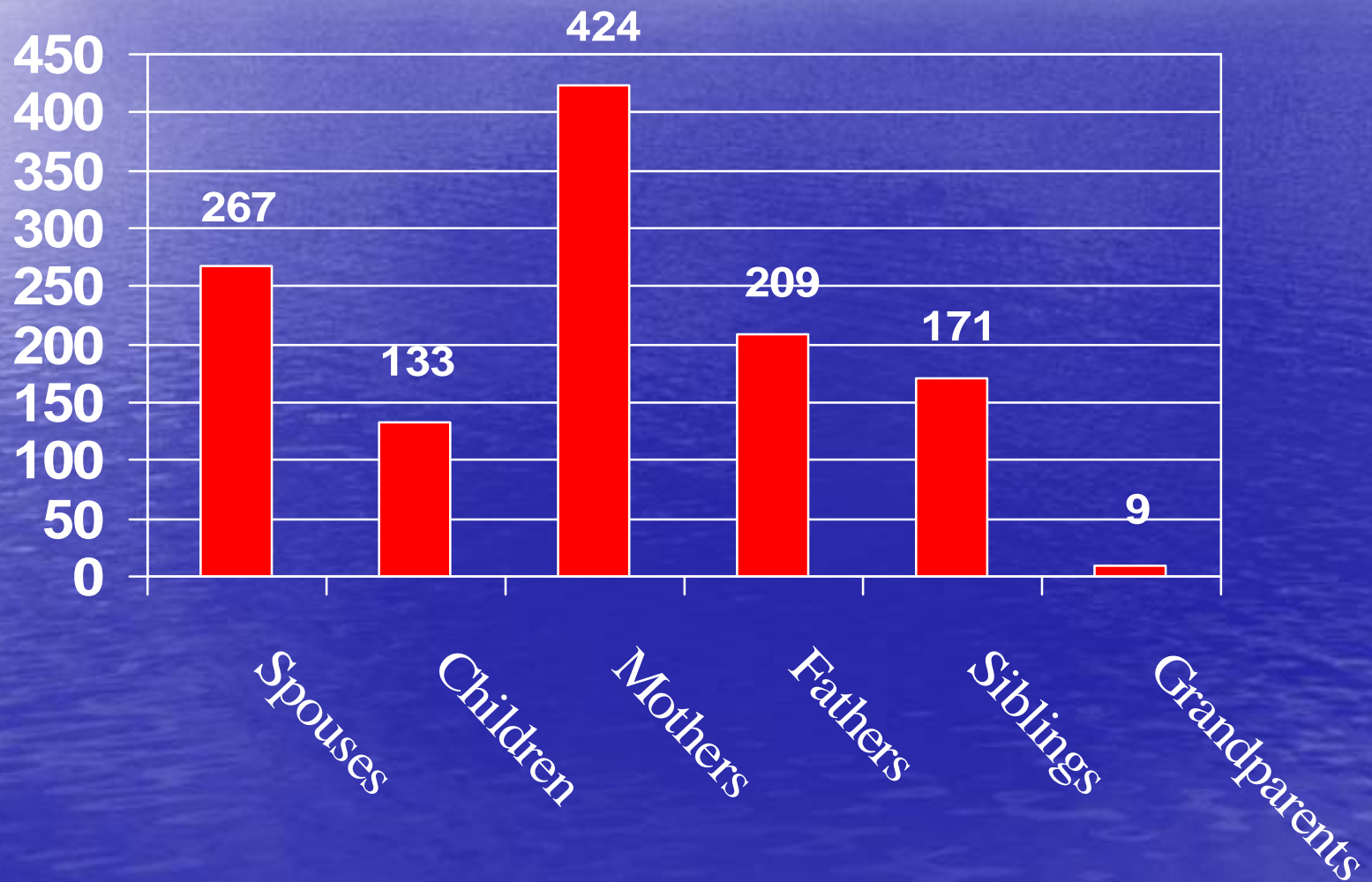


Through FY 2006 the Vet Centers have assisted the families of 800 fallen Service Members, 580 (73%) were in-theater casualties in Iraq or Afghanistan.

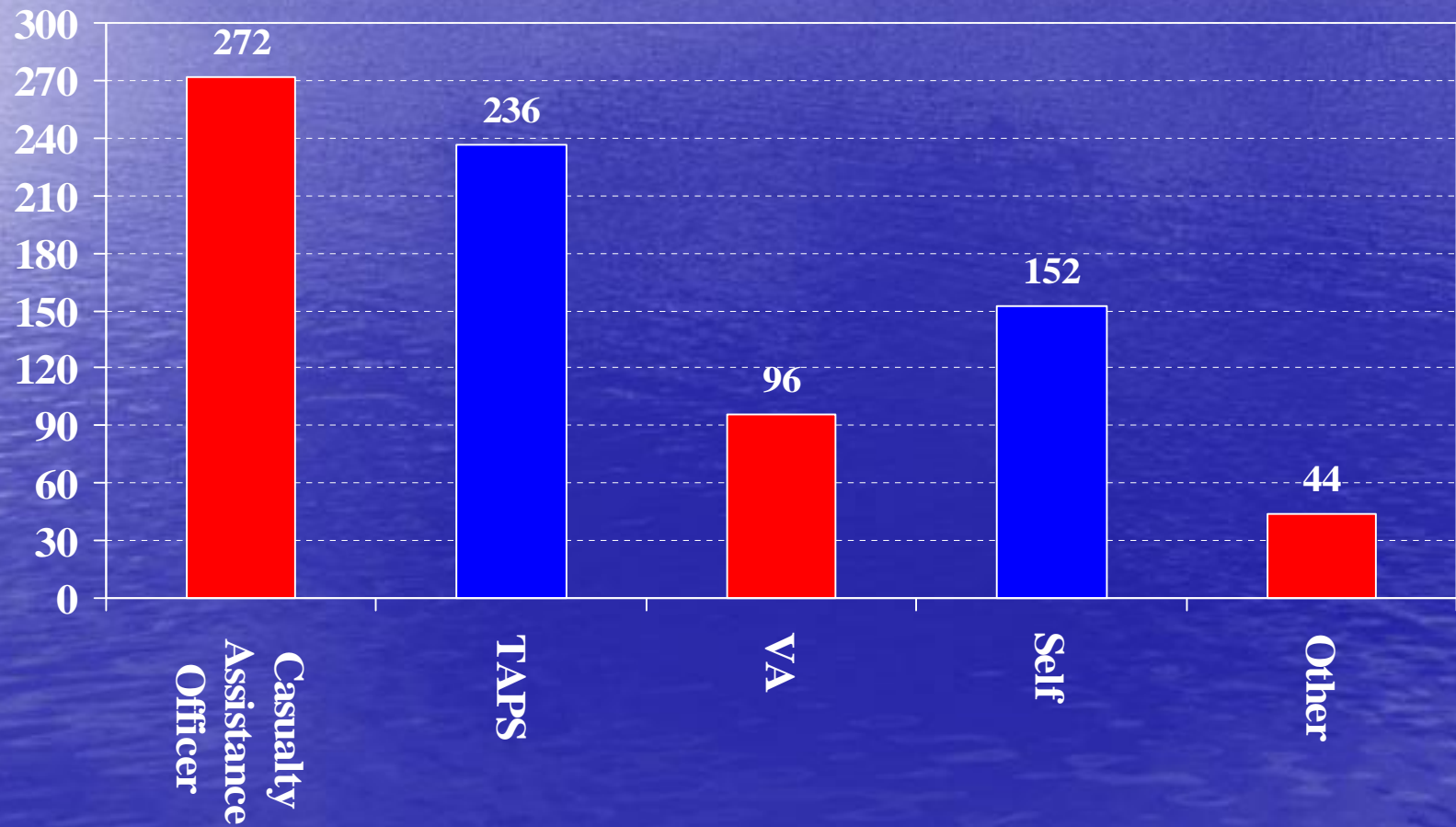
Over 5,858 bereavement visits have been provided by Vet Center staff, many times in the family's home. This is an average of 7.3 visits per family.



Readjustment Counseling Service  
Vet Center Bereavement Services  
1,213 Family Members



# Readjustment Counseling Service Vet Center Bereavement Services Referral Sources





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# Treatment of PTSD in VA Facilities and Programs

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# Orientation to Care

- For veterans newly presenting with possible PTSD or Adjustment Reactions:
  - Health promotion, preventive care
  - Avoid over-pathologizing, teach coping skills
  - Assess for
    - PTSD
    - Depression
    - SUD
    - suicide/ (domestic) violence risk

- Rehabilitation/ recovery approach to those with definite PTSD
  - Involve family
  - Provide evidence-based psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy
  - Emphasize
    - return to functional roles in relationships, work, and the community
    - as well as reduction in symptoms

# Treatment of PTSD in VA Medical Centers

- VA offers a comprehensive array of specialized programs for the treatment of PTSD including
  - inpatient and residential care
  - outpatient PTSD Clinical Teams
  - PTSD specialists
- In FY 06, VAMC programs served over 346,000 veterans with PTSD in specialized outpatient programs and general mental health clinics

# By the end of FY 06:

- Over 200 specialized PTSD programs across the country and available in every state
- 67 new or expanded PTSD programs funded, including
  - PTSD Clinical Teams (PCTs)
  - Day Hospitals
  - Women's programs
  - Military Sexual Trauma programs.
  - Programs for veterans with both PTSD and substance use disorders
  - Telemental health in CBOCs and other rural support PTSD programs
- 3 Congressionally mandated Centers of Excellence: Canandaigua, Waco, San Diego

# Program Types: Outpatient

- PTSD Clinical Teams 152
- PTSD Day Hosp. 11
- Womens/ MST 17
- Substance Use Trt. 10

# Program Types: Inpatient/ Residential

- Evaluation/ Brief Trt. PTSD Units 4
- Specialized Inpat. PTSD Un. 5
- PTSD Resid. Rehab. Prog. 14
- PTSD Domiciliary 8
- Womens Therapeutic Resid. Prog. 2

# Additional Treatment Resources

- National Center for PTSD clinical tools (<http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/>):
  - The Iraq War Clinician Guide, 2nd Edition
  - [Returning from the War Zone: A Guide for Families](#)
  - [Returning from the War Zone: A Guide for Military Personnel](#)
  - A Brief Primer on the Mental Health Impact of the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq: A National Center for PTSD Fact Sheet
  - NEW Revised [Psychological First Aid Manual](#)
  - Video: [Women Who Served in Our Military](#)

# Programs Under Development in FY 07 and Beyond

- Primary Care/Mental Health integration in Medical Facilities and CBOCs
- Evidence Based Practice dissemination
  - Cognitive Processing Therapy
  - Prolonged Exposure
- Assess residential care needs
- Increase comprehensive care (e.g. SUD)
- Disaster Preparedness ( Facility Disaster POCs)
- MyHealthVet MH component, with PTSD as initial content
- Responding to end-of-life issues in vets who have experienced trauma