



University of Kansas Researcher Awarded \$4.2 Million Grant from Department of Defense to Address Eating Disorders in Active-Duty Members of the Military

WASHINGTON, D.C (June 15, 2023)- The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy, & Action (EDC) celebrates Kelsie Forbush, PhD, LP, FAED, Professor, University of Kansas (KU), Dr. Alesha Doan, Dr. Yiyang Chen, and Mr. Mike Denning for receiving a \$4.2 million dollar *Expansion Award* grant from the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD)—the sole eating-disorder grant funded by the federal agency this year. Other team members include Dr. Karen Mitchell (VA Boston), Dr. Mary Oehlert (Leavenworth VA), Dr. Kara Christensen (University Nevada, Las Vegas), David Watson (University of Notre Dame), Dr. Chelsea Song (Indiana University), Dr. Alcia Wendler (Topeka VA), and Dr. Joanna Weise (Psychologist with the 20th Medical Group). Eating disorder research funding under the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP) within DoD is a result of EDC’s continued work with Senators Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Mike Rounds (R-SD) to ensure eating disorders remain an eligible topic area of research under CDMRP and facilitate opportunities to uplift the work of our eating disorders research community.

In 2019, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigated the scope and impact of eating disorders in the military and found that the military’s eating disorder screening does not accurately identify servicemembers with an eating disorder.¹ “Studies show that eating disorders have increased in the military as much as 44% between 2013 and 2016, suggesting an urgent unmet military healthcare need,” **said Kelsie Forbush, PhD, LP, FAED, Professor, University of Kansas.** “However, most studies that have looked at the prevalence of eating disorders in the military only included a limited number of eating disorders. As a result, there is almost no information on some of the most common forms of eating disorders, such as ‘other specified feeding or eating disorders.’ Our study is important because not only will it result in improved eating-disorder screening tools, but it will also contribute to improved information on the full scope and impact of eating disorders in the military.”

The GAO report indicated that no existing screening tools for eating disorders were developed or tested in military-relevant populations.² Yet, the report mentioned Dr. Forbush’s creation of the Brief Assessment of Stress and Eating (BASE) could fill a critical need for DoD eating disorder screening. The BASE is the first ever eating disorder screening for use in veterans. With the current award announcement, Dr. Forbush and her team are now poised to take the next step toward

¹ Silas, Sharon. (August 7,2020). Department of Defense: Eating Disorders in the Military. Retrieved from <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-611r.pdf>.

² Ibid.

implementation within the DoD and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) through additional testing in active duty servicemembers.

In addition to testing the BASE in a military population, the grant will provide Dr. Forbush and her team with additional opportunities to expand the scope of research into military populations by:

1. Testing the ability of the BASE to identify military service members who may have an eating, mood, anxiety, or trauma-related disorder compared to existing screeners.
2. Identifying factors that predict (or protect from) the development of an eating disorder in military service members in their first three years of service.
3. Assessing relationships between eating disorders and other related mental-health conditions, such as depression, anxiety, and harmful substance use to help disentangle what occurs first and how these issues influence each other over time.

Forbush said that she believes “early identification and treatment of eating disorders will enhance military readiness as servicemembers will have improved physical and psychological health following treatment.” Dr. Forbush’s research will provide data to support the implementation of the first military-specific eating disorder screening tool in DoD and VA healthcare settings so that military members who have mental health issues can be more easily identified and referred to appropriate treatment.

“We are thrilled that Dr. Forbush and her team have received a grant for their critical research from the Department of Defense,” **said Jillian Lampert, PhD, RD, LD, MPH, FAED, EDC Board Member and Chief Strategy Officer of Accanto Health, the parent company of Veritas Collaborative and The Emily Program.** “This research is desperately needed given the degree to which eating disorders are underrecognized and undertreated in the military. Care for individuals with eating disorders is critical to the health and readiness of our military, and most importantly to the health and well-being of our servicemembers as they struggle with these tenacious but treatable illnesses.”

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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