

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 10, 2024

The Honorable Jon Tester  
Chair, Subcommittee on Defense  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Defense  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Tester and Ranking Member Collins,

As you begin work on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 appropriations bill for the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), we respectfully ask that you ensure eating disorders are included as an eligible research topic under the FY 2025 Defense Peer Reviewed Medical Research Program (PRMRP) and provide strong funding for the treatment and research of eating disorders. We appreciate the Subcommittee's commitment since FY 2017 to military eating disorder research under the PRMRP in the Defense appropriations bill and urge you to continue this support.

Eating disorders are a serious mental health issue that impact over 30 million Americans each year. Service members are affected by eating disorders at higher rates than civilians due to risk factors unique to their military experience.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the Defense Health Board released a report, stating that active-duty service women are disproportionately affected by eating disorders.<sup>2</sup> Among Iraq and Afghanistan war era veterans, approximately 20 percent of women and eight percent of men reported symptoms of an eating disorder.<sup>3</sup>

The most recent data by the DOD reveals that from 2017 to 2021 the rate of eating disorders increased from 2.8 per 10,000 persons per year to five cases per 10,000 persons per year. Female service members with combat-specific occupations were found to have the highest occupational incidences of eating disorders. The highest rate of eating disorders was amongst servicemembers under the age of 30. However, due to career concerns leading to underreporting, prevalence of eating disorders in active-duty populations may be higher than recent studies suggest.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, military spouses and children are also affected at higher rates than the general population; 21 percent of children of service members and 26 percent of spouses of service members are symptomatic for an eating disorder,<sup>5</sup> rates 3 times higher than their civilian peers.<sup>6</sup> Data provided by the DOD show that 19,468 service member dependents received an eating

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<sup>1</sup> Bartlett, B. and Mitchell, K., 2015. Eating disorders in military and veteran men and women: A systematic review. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 48(8), pp.1057-1069.

<sup>2</sup> Parkinson, M., 2021. Decision Brief: Active Duty Women's Health Care Services. *Health.mil*.

<sup>3</sup> Masheb, RM, Ramsey, CM, Marsh, AG, et al. DSM-5 eating disorder prevalence, gender differences, and mental health associations in United States military veterans. *Int J Eat Disord*. 2021; 54: 1171– 1180. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.23501>


<sup>4</sup> Danielle A Touma, BS, USN, Meghan E Quinn, MD, USN, Vanessa E Freeman, MD, USA, Eric G Meyer, MD, PhD, USAF, Eating Disorders in U.S. Active Duty Military Members and Veterans: A Systematic Review, *Military Medicine*, 2022;usac180, <https://doi.org/10.1093/milmed/usac180>

<sup>5</sup> Waasdorp, C. E., Caboot, J. B., Robinson, C. A., Abraham, A. A., & Adelman, W. P. (2007). Screening Military Dependent Adolescent Females for Disordered Eating. *Military Medicine*, 172(9), 962-967. doi:10.7205/milmed.172.9.962.


disorder diagnosis from FY 2014 through FY 2018,<sup>7</sup> demonstrating the need for continued support and research to ensure military members and their families have adequate support when facing an eating disorder.


Since FY 2017, the PRMRP has identified an overwhelming number of research applications on military and military family eating disorders, demonstrating the significant need to continue efforts to provide research funding for this issue. We believe that maintaining the eligibility of eating disorders under the PRMRP in FY 2025 is important to advancing research that would improve care for our service members and their families. We urge you to include this request in the FY 2025 funding bill.


Sincerely,

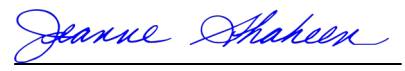
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

  
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Mike Rounds  
United States Senator

  
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Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

  
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Alex Padilla  
United States Senator

  
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Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator

  
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Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator

<sup>6</sup> 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>.

<sup>7</sup> Armed Forces Health Surveillance Branch, *Diagnoses of Eating Disorders, Active Component Service Members, U.S. Armed Forces, 2013-2017, Medical Surveillance Monthly Report*, (Silver Spring, MD: June 2018), p. 18.



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



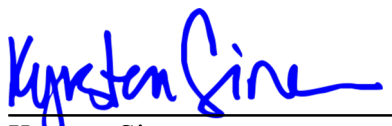
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United States Senator



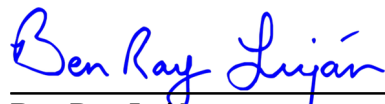
Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



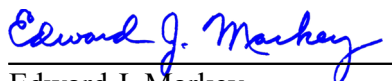
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United States Senator