

# Press Release



## Advancing Support: SEA WAVES Included in Military OneSource for Eating Disorder Support

In collaboration with the Eating Disorders Coalition and REDC, advocating for federal support and comprehensive eating disorder care.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 08AUG2024  
BY LEAH STILES, SEA WAVES FOUNDER / CEO

**Orlando, FL – Aug 6, 2024** – SEA WAVES, the pioneering nonprofit organization dedicated to addressing eating disorders within the military community, is proud to announce its inclusion in Military OneSource’s community resource finder. As the sole veteran service organization focusing on eating disorder support within the military, SEA WAVES is honored to expand its reach and impact.

Leah Stiles, Founder and CEO of SEA WAVES, was inspired to create the organization through her own battle with eating disorders.

“My journey with eating disorders was a long and arduous battle, one that I fought mostly in silence. The limited resources and awareness available to me nearly cost me my life on more than one occasion, but it also fueled my determination to create change,” said Leah.

“Alarming, about one-third of women and one-fifth of men in the military report symptoms consistent with an eating disorder diagnosis. Additionally, 21% of adolescent military dependents meet eating disorder screening criteria, nearly three times the rate of their civilian peers. These statistics reveal a widespread issue that demands our attention and action. Founding SEA WAVES has been a deeply personal mission for me, to ensure that no service member has to face this struggle alone.”

Leah and the SEA WAVES team are thrilled about this development, as Leah has recommended Military OneSource as a vital comprehensive resource throughout her 20-year Navy career. This inclusion marks a significant step forward in addressing the gap in resources for eating disorders within the military community. SEA WAVES is excited to see Military OneSource leading the charge in recognizing this underestimated invisible epidemic and looks forward to this action catalyzing change throughout all military branches. This collaboration will provide accessible, specialized care and resources to those who serve our country.

However, significant barriers to eating disorders care and support for the military community still exist. In 2021, the President signed into law the bipartisan National Defense Authorization Act, allowing the Department of Defense and Defense Health Agency to expand coverage of life-saving eating disorders care for military dependents under TRICARE. This legislation indicates training for command leadership and establishes procedures for military providers to screen, treat, and rehabilitate service members with eating disorders. Although it has yet to be implemented, we are hopeful that being listed as a resource by Military OneSource will act as a pivotal step, highlighting the pressing need for its execution and encouraging the necessary authorities to prioritize its swift implementation.

With this collaboration, we take a significant step toward comprehensive care and support for those who serve our country. This partnership strengthens our resolve to ensure every service member and their family receives the help they need.

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## About SEA WAVES

SEA WAVES, which stands for Support, Education, Awareness, Wellness, and Validation for Eating Disorders and Self-Care, was founded by Leah Stiles, a retired Navy Senior Chief. The organization is dedicated to creating a military community equipped with the knowledge and support to recognize and address eating disorders effectively. SEA WAVES offers resources, referrals, advocacy for legislative changes in TRICARE coverage, and specialized training for command leadership and medical providers.

## About Military OneSource

Military OneSource is a comprehensive program that offers a range of support and resources for active-duty, National Guard, and Reserve members, as well as their families. From confidential non-medical counseling to financial and legal assistance, Military OneSource provides essential services to enhance the well-being and readiness of the military community.

## Impact on the Military Community

Eating disorders are a significant but often overlooked issue within the military community. However, \*approximately one-third of women and one-fifth of men report symptoms consistent with the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), eating disorder diagnosis. These high prevalence estimates across genders, and associated mental health concerns, suggest an urgent need to better understand and address eating disorders in military and veteran populations.

“In recent years, we have seen a sharp increase in eating disorders among those serving in the military. The unique demands and challenges of military life, including physical and psychological stresses, can contribute to the prevalence of these disorders among service members. SEA WAVES is an exceptional resource dedicated to the prevention and treatment of eating disorders among military personnel,” said Anita Federici, Ph.D., C.Psych.

Additionally, military spouses and children are diagnosed with eating disorders at rates three times higher than their peers, which underscores the broader impact on military families. A 2019\*\* study found a connection between the stress of parental deployment and disordered eating, indicating that military families should be considered at high risk for disordered eating and eating disorders. Waasdorp and colleagues found that 21% of adolescent military dependents met eating disorder screening criteria, a proportion nearly three times greater than their civilian peers (7-9%).

\*Mallinson, A. L., Pinkus, R. T., Labrecque, J. A., Pauls, R. N., & Albery, J. P. (2020). Disordered eating behaviors and food addiction in fitness club users: The role of self-esteem, problematic use of social media and body satisfaction. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 53(6), 861-870. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.23501>

\*\*Higgins Nevland MK, Shank LM, Burke NL, Schvev NA, Pine A, Quattlebaum M, Leu W, Gillmore D, Morettini A, Willfey DE, Stephens M, Sbrocco T, Yanovski JA, Jorgensen S, Klein DA, Olsen CH, Quinlan J, Tanofsky-Kraff M. Parental deployment and distress, and adolescent disordered eating in prevention-seeking military dependents. *Int J Eat Disord*. 2020 Feb;53(2):201-209. doi: 10.1002/eat.23180. Epub 2019 Oct 8. PMID: 31593352; PMCID: PMC7028444.