

# Study Commission on PTSD and TBI in Returning Veterans of the of the Iraq/Afghanistan Conflicts

By Julia Freeman-Woolpert, MEd, Disabilities Rights Center

Traumatic brain injury has been called the signature injury of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many New Hampshire service members are returning with significant disabilities due to TBI and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). New Hampshire needs to ensure that these veterans and their families have the supports and services they need to recover and move on with their lives. For those whose disabilities are lifelong, adequate ongoing supports and services need to be available.

During its 2008 session, the New Hampshire Legislature established a Study Commission on the effects of posttraumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury suffered by New Hampshire soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Since its first meeting in August 2008, the Commission has heard from a wide variety of presenters on the effects of these traumas and New Hampshire's available to provide the necessary treatment and supports for its veterans who have TBI and PTSD.

In her testimony to the Commission Col. Deborah Carter, NH National Guard Joint Chief of Staff, reported that members in the Guard and Reserves and other military personnel who return home unattached to a military base, are at the highest risk for post-deployment problems. In New Hampshire, over 5,000 service members fall into this high risk category.

Several veterans and active duty personnel shared with the Commission their personal experiences with PTSD and TBI, and their difficulties with making the transition back to civilian life. The hidden injuries of combat, including posttraumatic stress disorder, and traumatic brain injury, can be severe and lifelong, and require a comprehensive, coordinated, and funded system of services and supports. While there are promising new and existing programs to assist veterans with TBI and PTSD and their families, in general the system is fragmented. Veterans don't know about, and have trouble accessing, treatment and services, and many veterans fall through the cracks.

The Commission will continue to meet through 2009. Priorities for the Commission include consideration of how to meet the need for a coordinated system of treatment and services for veterans and how to provide education, awareness, and training for service members, families, and the community on the effects of TBI and PTSD. The Commission also will look at how to improve coordination between the military, National Guard, and state and community services to better support the needs of our veterans.

The Commission is seeking public input and recommendations. Please contact Jo Moncher, DHHS Bureau Chief of Community-Based Military programs, [JAMoncher@dhhs.state.nh.us](mailto:JAMoncher@dhhs.state.nh.us), for

a schedule of Commission meetings and to be included on the Commission's email distribution list.

*This article first appeared in Headway, the newsletter of the Brain Association of NH.*

The Brain Injury Association of New Hampshire does not support, endorse, or recommend any product, method of treatment, or program for persons with brain injury. We endeavor to inform and believe that you have the right to know what help is available. Information within these pages consists of items that may be of interest to our community.