

Wounded Warrior Project Statement on VA Secretary Shinseki's Testimony before Senate Veterans Affairs Committee

Washington, D.C., May 15, 2014 – With a generation of veterans with war-related injuries and illnesses reliant on the VA's health care system, Wounded Warrior Project® is further disheartened by growing reports of systemic problems affecting the timeliness of care at many VA facilities.

Yesterday's Senate Veterans Affairs Committee hearing marked a welcome step – with Senators demanding answers, and a bipartisan call for continuing Committee oversight. We remain troubled that VA's Under Secretary for Health – long aware of timeliness issues and of patterns of false reporting to mask performance issues – had no ready answers beyond a commitment to dig deeper.

VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki's commitment to the system-wide auditing of VHA's adherence to timeliness requirements and to assessing whether the problems reported at many facilities are due to workforce shortages is an important step forward. However, as WWP has long highlighted, these are not new issues, and veterans continue to encounter delays in accessing mental health care at many facilities. We urge the VA to act quickly to solve what appear to be systemic problems and urge further hearings by appropriate congressional committees.

While the spotlight is currently on VHA, the questions raised at today's hearing regarding transparency and trust have relevance to the Veterans Benefits Administration as well. VA's challenges in reducing its claims backlog raise the question whether local VA offices may be masking the true volume of pending claims or "gaming" backlog numbers by only partially adjudicating claims to change them from "pending" status.

In addition to the 20 programs and services that we provide this generation of injured veterans, WWP has a history of advocating on behalf of our alumni and caregivers including our instrumental leadership in the writing and ultimate passage of the groundbreaking Traumatic Service members Group Life Insurance (TSGLI) and Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010. We will continue to work closely with Congress and the VA to propose solutions that serve the best interests of our Nation's veterans and caregivers. We once again call on Secretary Shinseki to exercise strong leadership to ensure that the VA meets the needs of all veterans and provides high-quality care to those who have served our Nation with honor and distinction.

About Wounded Warrior Project

Wounded Warrior Project is recognizing its ten-year anniversary, reflecting on a decade of service and reaffirming its commitment to serving injured veterans for their lifetime. The mission of Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) is to honor and empower Wounded Warriors. WWP currently serves 50,000 warriors and nearly 7,000 family members through its unique 20 programs and services. WWP's purpose is to raise awareness and to enlist the public's aid for the needs of injured service members, to help injured servicemen and women aid and assist each other, and to provide unique, direct programs and services to meet their needs. WWP is a national organization headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida. To get involved and learn more, visit woundedwarriorproject.org.