



DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
1010 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1010

RECEIVED

02 JUL 23 PM 2:58

SPEAKER'S ROOMS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPS.

JUL 2 2002

AC  
FT  
T 08430

The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert  
Speaker of the House of Representatives  
Washington, DC, 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

The enclosed report responds to the requirements prescribed by Section 731 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2001. Section 731 requires the Secretary of Defense to report to the defense committees on the plan to carry out the demonstration project for expanded access to mental health counselors.

The enclosed plan includes a description of the TRICARE Region in which the project will be conducted, the estimated funds required to carry out the project, the criteria for determining which professional mental health counselors will be authorized to participate under the demonstration project, and the plan of action, including principal milestone dates.

Thank you for your continued interest in the Military Health System.

Sincerely,

Enclosure:  
As stated



# **Report to Congress**



## **Mental Health Counselors Demonstration Project**

**Required by:**

**Section 731, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2001**

## **REPORT TO CONGRESS: MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELORS DEMONSTRATION PROJECT**

**Background:** Currently, licensed professional mental health counselors are the only mental health providers required under TRICARE to have their patients referred to them by a physician, and a physician is required to have oversight over the counselor's patient care. Section 731 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2001 directs the Department to conduct a demonstration project under which licensed and certified professional mental health counselors who meet eligibility requirements for participation as providers under the TRICARE program may provide services to covered beneficiaries without referral by physicians or adherence to supervision requirements. The provision also calls for a comparison study of the treatment outcomes of covered beneficiaries receiving services from mental health counselors, other non-physician mental health providers, and physicians.

**Selected TRICARE Region:** The Mental Health Counselor Demonstration Project will be carried out in the TRICARE Central Region, in the Denver/Colorado Springs service areas. This location was selected because it has the highest utilization by TRICARE beneficiaries of mental health counselors in the nation.<sup>1</sup> There is also the necessary concentration of other mental health providers for comparison purposes.<sup>2</sup>

**Criteria:** Many counselors are currently providing care to TRICARE beneficiaries and therefore are currently licensed to do so in the state of Colorado. Thus, the criteria for mental health counselors to participate in the demonstration are as follows:

- Currently a Licensed Professional Counselor in the state of Colorado
- Currently a TRICARE provider or eligible to become a TRICARE provider
- Willing to accept random assignment into treatment groups that may or may not authorize independent provision of services during the demonstration

**Plan of action:** The proposed plan allows for collection of self-report outcomes data from beneficiaries 18 or older receiving clinical services from among the various treatment groups as described in the legislative language. A contractor will be sought who is experienced in clinical outcomes research. Their tasks will be to determine appropriate metrics for the required comparison, develop an appropriate data collection methodology, and to work with the mental health subcontractor in Central Region to coordinate activities. A DoD Institutional Review Board (IRB) will ensure patient informed consent and compliance with 32 CFR Part 219. Estimated costs for the Demonstration are \$700,000.

An addendum to this report, which includes the complete plan, will be forwarded once it has been fully developed.

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: Health Planning, Analysis and Evaluation Directorate, TRICARE Management Activity

<sup>2</sup> Source: Health Planning, Analysis and Evaluation Directorate, TRICARE Management Activity