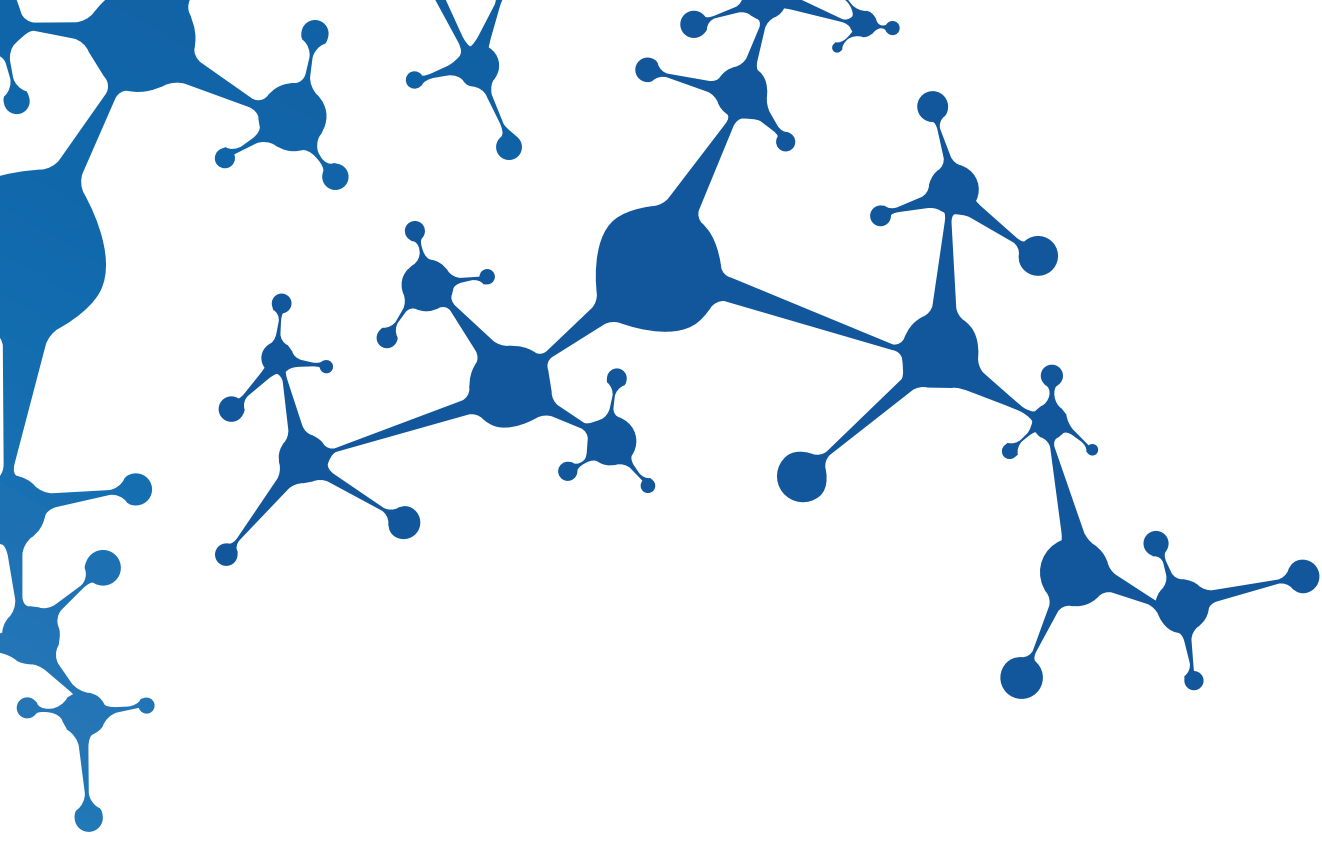


POLYTRAUMA/TBI
SYSTEM OF CARE
HELPING VETERANS
GET BACK TO LIVING



VA
HEALTH
CARE | Defining
EXCELLENCE
in the 21st Century





Recovering from a traumatic brain injury is a long journey, both physically and emotionally. It is one that involves hope, fear, courage, and the support of many.

Thanks to improvements and innovations in battlefield medicine and protective gear, America's Servicemembers injured in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere are surviving at higher rates than ever before.

While many of them are facing challenges from their injuries, including Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is meeting these challenges with specialized treatments, extended care, and advances in rehabilitation treatments.

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

Seeing it, Treating it, Understanding it

“Polytrauma” describes injuries to multiple body parts and organs, often occurring as a result of blast-related exposures. The use of improvised explosive devices (IED) and other weapons has been a major cause of polytrauma injuries.

TBI is the signature injury of polytrauma. It often occurs in combination with other conditions, such as amputation, auditory and visual impairments, spinal cord injury, musculoskeletal injury, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Due to the severity and complexity of their injuries, Veterans and Servicemembers with polytrauma benefit from the coordinated and integrated clinical and support services that the VA Polytrauma System of Care offers.





While TBI wounds are often invisible, the treatments may be complex, and the effects far-reaching. Difficulties after a TBI can persist long after the physical injuries appear to be healed.

VA POLYTRAUMA SYSTEM OF CARE

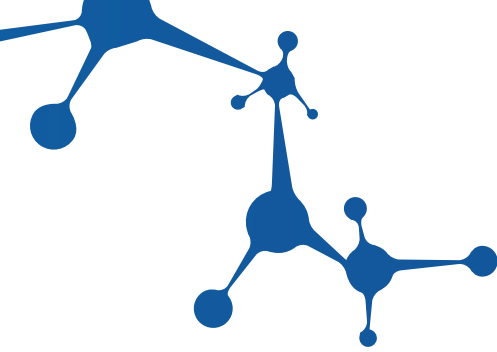
A Network of Specialists and Resources

VA's Polytrauma System of Care is for Veterans and Servicemembers with multiple injuries that result in physical, cognitive, and/or psychological impairments and functional disability. This state-of-the-art system of care provides comprehensive, compassionate, high-quality, and inter-disciplinary care to patients and their families. Teams of clinicians from a range of fields develop and implement an individually-tailored rehabilitation plan to foster recovery as quickly and as completely as possible.

VA provides assistance to Veterans and Servicemembers through its integrated Polytrauma Rehabilitation Centers, Polytrauma Transitional Rehabilitation Programs, Polytrauma Network Sites, Polytrauma Support Clinic Teams, and Polytrauma Points of Contact located throughout the nation.



Each patient responds differently to rehabilitation, because each polytrauma injury is unique. Some patients treated in the polytrauma programs are able to return to work or active duty, while others will continue to need VA's supportive services and care.



TBI IS AS SERIOUS AS ANY BATTLEFIELD INJURY

A TBI occurs when the head is exposed to a significant external force. This could happen when the head hits a windshield during a car accident. It could happen when a piece of shrapnel enters the brain. Or, it could happen when the body is exposed to the explosion of an IED.

When a TBI occurs, the initial severity of injury can range from mild (the person experiences a brief change in mental status or consciousness) to severe (the person has an extended period of unconsciousness or memory loss after the injury). Regardless of the initial severity, the effects of TBI and polytrauma can be significant and long lasting. Rehabilitation services delivered across the Polytrauma System of Care can help to improve the effects of TBI and polytrauma and begin the process of returning individuals back to full functioning.

Though it weighs barely three pounds, the brain has the enormous job of controlling our entire body. It regulates all of our physical movement and sensation, our ability to think, how we act and feel, and allows us to communicate.

KNOW THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Individuals who sustain a TBI may experience a variety of effects, most of which are visible just after the injury, but some that take days or weeks to fully appear. For most people, these will generally fade as time goes by.

- ▶ *Physical effects* may include fractures, weakness, difficulty eating, trouble speaking, limited vision, fatigue, a loss of hearing, and walking or balance difficulties.
- ▶ *Behavioral effects* may include irritability, low frustration tolerance, anxiety, depression, and inappropriate or disinhibited behaviors.
- ▶ *Cognitive effects* may include difficulties with attention and concentration, memory loss, thinking problems, and social skills deficits.

Whether a TBI is mild, moderate, or severe, persistent symptoms can have a profound impact on the injured survivor and those who serve as caregivers.

WHO SHOULD BE SCREENED?

VA offers TBI screenings to all Veterans who served in the combat theaters of Iraq or Afghanistan since September 11, 2001. The screenings help determine whether a Veteran should have a follow-up comprehensive evaluation to establish medical diagnoses and to initiate appropriate treatments as soon as possible.

For many reasons, it may be difficult for a Veteran to know when to seek care following an injury to the brain (e.g., confusion, amnesia for the events surrounding the injury). Generally, if someone you know who has been injured or isn't acting like themselves, a medical evaluation is advised.

If you believe that you may have a TBI or know someone who does, contact your local VA and ask for the polytrauma/TBI point of contact. Visit www.polytrauma.va.gov for a full listing of facilities and contacts in the Polytrauma System of Care.

Those at particular risk for a TBI are those who were involved in a:

- ▶ Blast or explosion (e.g., IED, RPG, land mines, grenades)
- ▶ Vehicular accident/crash
- ▶ Fragment wound above the shoulder
- ▶ Fall

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

Rehabilitation

Each TBI is unique and each person responds differently to rehabilitation. Some persons have lengthy stays in an inpatient program, while others receive their care through outpatient services. Some persons treated in the polytrauma programs are able to return to active duty, pursue school, or return to work, while others will continue to need supportive services and care for longer periods of time. VA's Polytrauma System of Care provides an integrated system of specialized rehabilitation programs, including:

- ▶ Brain Injury Rehabilitation
- ▶ Emerging Consciousness Program
- ▶ Blind and Low Vision Rehabilitation
- ▶ Amputation Rehabilitation
- ▶ Mental Health and Psychological Support
- ▶ Substance Abuse Services
- ▶ Driver Rehabilitation Program
- ▶ Assistive Technology Rehabilitation
- ▶ Pain Management
- ▶ Community Reintegration Services
- ▶ Vocational Rehabilitation
- ▶ Residential Transitional Rehabilitation Program





“The Polytrauma System of Care is individualized and tailored to meet each patient’s needs. It’s not a single pill, medication, or exercise. It’s about learning who the patient is and helping them find a new normal for themselves and their loved ones.”

– Dr. Shane McNamee
Chief, PM&R Services
McGuire VA Medical Center

FINDING A NEW NORMAL

How Best to Support those You Love

VA's Polytrauma System of Care strongly advocates family involvement throughout the rehabilitation process. VA strives to ensure that patients and their families receive all the necessary support services to enhance the rehabilitation process, while minimizing the inherent stress associated with recovery from polytrauma and TBI.

VA offers multiple levels of clinical and logistical support for patients and their families. VA assigns a dedicated case manager to each patient and family at a Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center. The ratio of case managers to patients at these centers is approximately 1:6, so that they can provide individualized, hands-on care for their patients.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Polytrauma System of Care Website provides extensive information and background on TBI, related benefits and services, and treatment facilities and rehabilitation programs. It also offers multimedia materials including videos and imagery, as well as links to key partners and resources.

LEARN MORE at www.polytrauma.va.gov



