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On July 12 President Obama and Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki announced new regulations that will make it significantly easier for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to get the help they need. This was welcome news for the hundreds of thousands of veterans across the country who suffer from PTSD and other combat-related mental health diseases.

Under previous law, veterans with PTSD had to prove the events that led to their symptoms. This process was burdensome, painstaking and unfair, since documenting a precise stressor is often almost impossible. As a result, the VA denied many veterans the help they needed.

Now, veterans who served in a war zone and are diagnosed with PTSD are given the benefit of the doubt, and the VA presumes that their disability is a result of their service. They no longer have to return from combat and fight another with the VA to prove the cause of their invisible scars.

Lifting this burden is a good step toward ensuring that our veterans with invisible wounds, including many here in Charlotte County, get the treatment they need and deserve. However, we still need to a better job of identifying and assisting troops and veterans who are at-risk for mental health disease.

That is why Congress must take the next step to assist afflicted veterans by passing a bipartisan bill that I introduced with Rep. Michael McMahon (D-NY), the "Veterans' Mental Health Assessments and Screenings Act." Our bill would expand mental health screenings for returning war-fighters and require returning service members to participate in confidential, one-to-one screenings with licensed mental health professionals.

Mandatory, confidential screenings will help ensure that the men and women who put their lives on the line in service to our country can get the help they need and deserve.

Currently, the Department of Defense requires service members to fill out a mental health assessment before returning home. This subjective paper test only indicates risk for PTSD, traumatic brain injury or depression if it is filled out honestly. If the test shows indicators of these disorders, the service member may be prevented from returning home in order to ensure treatment of the mental condition. The delay in returning home, along with the stigma associated with reaching out for help to treat a mental injury, prevents many soldiers from being honest in their assessments.

By mandating post-deployment screenings for all service members returning from active duty, we hope to defeat the stigma of seeking help for "invisible injuries." Widespread screenings with certified mental health professionals will also improve the ability of the Armed Services to identify and assist returning soldiers who are at-risk for mental health disease.

Our bill also makes provisions to allow service members to return home despite their answers on the post-deployment re-assessment. And we ensure that these critical mental health screenings remain confidential.

By some estimates, twenty percent of the more than two million men and women who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from PTSD, and the Armed Services and veteran communities are reporting the highest number of suicides in decades. We owe it to our troops and veterans to take action quickly and solve this growing problem. The new VA regulations are a good start, and improving the screening process is the necessary next step.

U.S. Rep. Tom Rooney, FL-16