

Treating Invisible Wounds

Ensuring that Airmen are mentally fit for duty is an important part of securing the future readiness of our nation's military. About one-third of the nearly three million post-9/11



service members have sustained an invisible wound due to one or more of the following: prolonged exposure to combat, stress over multiple deployments, traumatic events (pre, post, or unrelated to military service), and more. Unlike physical wounds, invisible wounds are often unseen by the eye, remaining invisible to other Airmen, family members, and society in general. Invisible wounds are

classified as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); traumatic brain injury (TBI); or other cognitive, emotional, or behavioral disorders associated with trauma experienced by an individual, and can interfere with an Airman's normal day-to-day life if he or she does not receive appropriate treatment.

Traditional Treatment for Invisible Wounds

There are numerous effective treatment methods for invisible wounds and many factors to consider (e.g., access to services, availability, safety, patient preferences) when selecting the right treatment plan. It is important that Airmen work with their mental health providers to understand the different types of treatments available and determine which one will work best for individual experiences and circumstances.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):

A structured, time-limited, present-focused approach to psychotherapy that helps patients develop strategies to modify dysfunctional thinking patterns or cognitions, and maladaptive emotions and behaviors to assist them in resolving current problems.

Prolonged Exposure Therapy:

Through this collaborative therapy, the patient is safely and gradually exposed to trauma-related memories and situations that have been avoided. The goal is to alter the patient's relationship with and reaction to the traumatic event so it no longer affects their quality of life and ability to do their job.

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR):

A form of psychotherapy in which the patient pays attention to a back-and-forth movement or sound while recollecting his or her traumatic experience. The patient will do this until the memory shifts and becomes less distressing.

Cognitive Rehabilitation Therapy (CRT):

Individual treatment strategies designed to help patients improve problems with memory, attention, perception, learning, planning and judgment brought about by brain injury, neurological disorders or other illnesses. The goal of many of these strategies is to improve functions of memory, attention processing, social communications, problem-solving and the regulation of emotions.

Alternative Treatment Options for Invisible Wounds

Recovering from an invisible wound often requires working through undigested memories until they no longer cause symptoms. While common treatments such as CBT aim to modify patients thinking patterns and behavior through talking and expressing feelings about the traumatic event, this may not be enough. Alternative treatment such as art therapy and integrative medicine approaches (e.g., yoga, meditation, acupuncture) provide an outlet for patients when words fail.

The [Creative Forces: National Endowment for the Arts \(NEA\) Military Healing Arts Network](#) is a partnership between the Department of Veterans Affairs, NEA, and state arts agencies that use art to serve the special needs of military patients and families, veterans, and caregivers who have been diagnosed with TBI and psychological health conditions. Airmen seeking alternative types of treatment should consult with their doctor to determine the best treatment option for their invisible wound.

INVICTUS GAMES

Founded by Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, in 2014, the Invictus Games is an international sporting event for wounded, ill, and injured veterans and active service personnel that highlights the power of sport to inspire recovery, support rehabilitation, and generate awareness, understanding of, and respect for those who serve their nation's armed forces.



The 2018 Invictus Games will be held from 20 – 27 October in Sydney, Australia. U.S. athletes who qualified in the DoD Warrior Games will be selected to compete in the Invictus Games. Learn more about the [countries](#) participating in this year's games and the various sporting [events](#) that will be held.

EGLIN CLINIC OPENING

Eglin Air Force Base's Invisible Wounds Center will open for business at the ribbon cutting ceremony on 30 August, with Lt Gen Hogg (AF/SG) serving as the guest speaker. Although, the Center staff have been accepting and seeing TBI patients since February, the ribbon cutting will hallmark the Center's initial operating capability with more services available in-house. The Invisible Wounds Center expects to have capability to accept referrals from outside the area and staffing for an intensive outpatient program in early 2019.