



# **OP-ED: Opioid crisis impacts veterans, military families**

by John Markley

November 8 2017 10:44 AM



Long after active duty ends, U.S. service members and military families face a different battle—the opioid overdose epidemic. Opioid overuse kills nearly 100 people in America every day, and last year 1,826 Illinois citizens died from opioid overdoses. This is a 70% increase over the number of such deaths in 2013, according to the Illinois Department of Human Services. Further, a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) study shows Veterans are twice as likely to die from overdose as civilians.

Between 2010 and 2015, the number of Veterans addicted to opioids rose 55 percent to roughly 68,000 individuals. That figure represents about 13 percent of all Veterans currently prescribed opioids. More than 63 percent of Veterans receiving chronic opioid treatment for pain also have a mental health diagnosis.

What's more daunting is that many Veterans haven't received adequate treatment due to numerous barriers. Those include the stigma associated with seeking help, lack of access to a variety of treatment options and not enough understanding about the complexity of mental health and addiction, especially as it relates to service members' experience.

Last month, joined by almost 1,000 advocates, Centerstone leaders attended the National Council for Behavioral Health's annual Hill Day in Washington D.C. to discuss why it's important for all Americans to have access to quality behavioral health services. As a mental health provider, Centerstone uses evidence-based methods to help individuals working to overcome opioid addiction, from medication-assisted treatment (MAT) and intensive outpatient services to clinical case management, peer support services and counseling. In Illinois, those services are offered in Alton, Carbondale and Marion.

Centerstone is committed to delivering care that changes people's lives, including the lives of our service members and Veterans. Centerstone Military Services helped more than 11,000 people across the United States in 2015-16.

Help is available, and recovery is possible. One of the most crucial steps is asking for help. Numerous treatments, facilities and rehabilitation options are in place to help our service members, Veterans and their loved ones. In addition to behavioral health services, Centerstone offers online support groups to the entire family, because we know addiction has a ripple effect on individuals, families and communities.



This November, in acknowledgment of Veterans Day, we show our gratitude to military families and honor those who have served and made sacrifices for our country. While we can't fully repay our service members or their families for their patriotism, we can thank our heroes every day and support them in finding and accessing the services they need to thrive.

We invite individuals and corporations to join us in supporting our heroes through charitable gifts and partnerships. To learn more, visit [centerstone.org/militaryservices](https://centerstone.org/militaryservices).