

January 11, 2024

Chairman Mike Bost
House Veterans Affairs Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

Subject: Expanding Access to Mental Health Care for Rural Veterans through Digital Solutions

Dear Chairman Bost,

I write to you in the context of the upcoming committee hearing, grateful for the opportunity to contribute to such a crucial discussion. As the CEO and co-founder of NeuroFlow, my experience as a U.S. Army Combat Veteran and a beneficiary of the Veterans Health Administration's services gives me a unique perspective on the mental health challenges faced by our Veterans, particularly in rural areas.

While acknowledging the strides made by the VA in collaborating with private entities to innovate and improve care access, there remain significant gaps in providing effective mental health services to our Veterans, especially in rural areas of the nation. These challenges are exacerbated by limited local healthcare options and the difficulties associated with distance, often leaving rural Veterans underserved. Recent studies indicate that approximately 4.4 million U.S. Veterans, which is nearly 24% of the total Veteran population, reside in rural areas. Among these, a significant portion faces barriers to accessing mental health care due to geographical isolation, with many living over 40 miles away from the nearest VA healthcare facility.

The general solution to these challenges lies in embracing digital health platforms. These innovative tools, which span a wide range from telepsychiatry services to mobile health apps and remote patient monitoring systems, can effectively bridge the distance, providing remote, real-time monitoring and proactive support systems. Despite the existence of numerous digital health solutions that hold the promise of enhancing access in rural areas, there is an underlying structural challenge that hinders their full potential. This challenge primarily stems from the complexities and limitations inherent in the VA's current contracting processes with digital health providers. These processes can be cumbersome and disjointed, often resulting in delayed or restricted access to these vital services for Veterans. By streamlining and optimizing these contractual relationships, we can unlock the full potential of digital health solutions, ensuring that Veterans in rural areas receive the timely and effective mental health care they deserve.

In this light, it's pertinent to mention NeuroFlow's work in this area. Our digital health platform, particularly our Behavioral Health Lab (BHL) and BHL Touch, has demonstrated considerable success in providing accessible mental health care in rural settings. Our experience and insights could be valuable in shaping broader strategies to address the mental health needs of our

Veterans. **During 2023, over 55% of the total depression and anxiety measures captured within the VA were collected using BHL and BHL Touch.**

However, our efforts, like those of many others in this field, are often hampered by fragmented contractual processes within the VA. A more unified and cohesive approach to these agreements would not only streamline administrative processes but also enable more effective deployment of resources for the benefit of Veterans' mental health.

We believe that consolidating contracts related to mental health initiatives, while maintaining the focus on innovative, cost-effective solutions, is a vital step towards delivering comprehensive and efficient care to our Veterans, regardless of their location.

We appreciate the Committee's commitment to addressing these critical issues and stand ready to assist in any way possible. Our aim is to support the Committee's efforts in improving mental health services for all Veterans and to participate in further discussions or inquiries regarding this initiative.

Sincerely,

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