

**Written Testimony
Representative Kim Schrier (WA-08)**

**Member Day
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
December 4, 2025**

Thank you, Chairman Bost and Ranking Member Takano, for the opportunity to testify before you here today.

I first want to thank the more than 40 thousand Veterans I represent in Washington's Eighth District and all of those who have sacrificed their lives in service to this country. Serving our country is an extraordinary commitment that impacts Veterans and their families for their entire lives, and it's important that we show up for them in the same way that they've shown up for us.

As we are all aware, our country continues to face a worsening Veteran mental health crisis. The transition to civilian life after service can be incredibly challenging, especially for those that have served their entire adult lives, and these challenges are even more pronounced in rural areas, like those I represent. My district spans more than ten thousand square miles, and there are multiple Veteran communities – hours apart from one other – that each have unique needs to be met.

For the past several years, the community in Wenatchee, WA has faced numerous Veteran mental health crises due in part to our failure to meet their mental health needs. The closest Vet Center that provides full mental health services is two hours away, and closer VA mental health services have failed to provide sufficient staffing for more than two years. I recognize and appreciate the work the VA has done to close this gap in care and increase access to tele-mental health services, but we must also ensure Veterans have access to continuous care without further delay. Time and time again, we have witnessed tragedy while Veterans wait to access care.

I also want to emphasize that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the Veteran mental health crisis. Expanding tele-mental health services is a great immediate step we can take to give more Veterans more access. We must simultaneously maintain and increase access to in-person mental health services so that our senior Veteran population and those that prefer face-to-face connection can continue to receive care. I also want to voice my support for the *PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Program Act*, which would provide grant funding for peer-to-peer Veteran mental health programs, and the *Innovative Therapies Centers of Excellence Act*, which would support research on alternative treatments at Vet Centers. The traditional therapy setting may not be the best option for many of our Veterans, and we should be open to innovation and research in mental health care.

Similarly, we need to start focusing on a proactive approach to Veteran mental health care. The crisis facing our Veteran population is not a new one, and we cannot continue to just react – we need to look upstream to best understand and address this issue. I look forward to working with the committee on proposals to reach our service members during service and before they leave the military and ensure that they are set up for a lifetime of success after service.

Lastly, I want to bring attention to ongoing issues with the VA's reportedly improved Electronic Medical Record System. Updates to this system were first launched at the Mann-Grandstaff Medical Center in Spokane, WA in 2020, which is the closest Medical Center to Veterans residing in the eastern portion of my district. Despite improvements, VA providers continue to find that the system is fraught with errors, leading to significant delays in care, providers seeing fewer patients, and some patients being denied care altogether. As the system is rolled out across the country, the VA must ensure that it will not exacerbate existing issues with the VA health care system, and I urge the Committee to provide careful oversight of this process.

I appreciate the bipartisan work the Committee has done to support Veterans, and I ask that you continue to prioritize the expansion of Veteran mental health services. Thank you for your time.