

Cigna Introduces 24/7/365 National Support Line for Veterans, Families, Caregivers And Mindfulness for Vets Sessions

BLOOMFIELD, Conn., 30 October, 2017 - Studies show that veterans face a range of challenges and often struggle with chronic pain, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and other health conditions, as well as the challenges of transitioning back to civilian life. To show appreciation for their sacrifices and help veterans combat opioid addiction, Cigna has introduced a free national **Veteran Support Line** available 24/7/365 days a year. The new support line – **1.855.244.6211** – is for **all veterans, their families and caregivers** – whether or not the veteran is a Cigna customer.

The Veteran Support Line will help veterans with services and resources for pain management, substance use counseling and treatment, financial issues, food, clothing, housing, safety, transportation, parenting and child care, aging services, health insurance, legal assistance and more.

In addition, to provide access to alternative therapies such as mindfulness, Cigna is now offering a weekly **Mindfulness for Vets** session, exclusively for veterans. Mindfulness is an evidence-based therapy proven to have a positive impact on depression, stress, anxiety, performance, sleep, addiction, PTSD and more.

“America’s veterans made many sacrifices for us and put their lives on the line to secure our freedom. Now it’s our responsibility to help them achieve the security they’re seeking in their own lives,” said Karen Cierzan, vice president of clinical operations for Cigna’s behavioral health business.

Cierzan said that Cigna is also offering an interactive mindfulness program exclusively for veterans, because many veterans find that mindfulness and meditation can help them manage stress and pain more effectively, an issue that affects veterans more than the general population. The number of veterans living with opioid issues grew 55 percent between 2010 and 2015.¹ With higher rates of chronic pain² and a 270 percent spike in opioid prescriptions over a 12-year period,³ veterans are twice as likely to die from an accidental opioid overdose than non-veterans.⁴

The **Mindfulness for Vets** program will be available every Tuesday at 4 p.m. central time by calling **1.866.205.5379 (passcode 113 29 178)**. According to Cierzan, this mindfulness group is designed exclusively for veterans to be “interactional, instructional and experiential.” At the end of the group session, if a participant would like to talk further with a coach, a direct number will be provided.

“Mindfulness for Vets will provide training in mindful stress management, acceptance and compassion. The group will encourage veterans to observe their thoughts, feelings and sensations in the present moment without judgment, and cultivate self-care,” Cierzan said.

All veterans, their caregivers and families also are invited to participate in Cigna’s **Mindfulness Drop-In** sessions that take place every Monday and Thursday at 5 p.m. central time and every Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. central time by calling **1.866.205.5379 (passcode 113 01 992)**.

“These groups are designed to offer a space where people can practice mindfulness, so there is no sharing of personal information during these groups. Each session will provide a simple introduction to basic relaxation and mindfulness practice and is suitable for anyone at any level of experience with mindfulness. The remainder of the session is a rotation of techniques, such as breath work, progressive muscle relaxation, guided visualization, positive affirmation, attention and compassion exercises. The group will wrap up with tips for continuing personal practice and group discussion about applying these skills to daily life,” Cierzan said.

As a leader in the U.S. health care system, and a top employer of veterans, Cigna is committed to helping veterans overcome opioid misuse as well as other life challenges. Through extensive research with veterans organizations earlier this year, Cigna learned that some veterans fall through the cracks of the health system, and that connecting with other veterans provides them with a level of comfort and trust. This led to Cigna's development of the free support line for all veterans and their families/caregivers, as well as the mindfulness groups exclusively for veterans.

These resources are another example of Cigna's commitment to the veteran community. In July, the Cigna Foundation gave a \$300,000 grant to the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) to help expand its Rapid Response Referral Program, a community effort to help veterans meet their life goals through connections to education, medical and legal resources and benefits.

For more information on how opioids affect veterans, go to <http://tacklingopioids.eiu.com/>. To read more about how Cigna is supporting the veteran community, go to <http://www.rollcall.com/sponsored-content/finding-consensus-on-opioid-misuse-is-critical/>.

About Cigna

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¹ <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/veterans-face-greater-risks-amid-opioid-crisis/>

² <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/veterans-face-greater-risks-amid-opioid-crisis/>

³ <http://cironline.org/node/5261>

⁴ <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/veterans-face-greater-risks-amid-opioid-crisis/>