

Helping our veterans transition back into normal life

About 18 to 22 veterans died — each day — from suicide in the past 12 years, according to the U.S. Department of Defense.

This is a tragic loss to our community and our nation. These alarming numbers pressed President Obama and the First Lady to outline key elements to promote coalition building and assist service members' transition into civilian life, including to:

» Expand the veterans' crisis line by 50 percent to ensure veterans have timely access to medical and mental-illness help via telephone, text and online services.

» Increase and provide the best mental health and substance-abuse education, outreach and support to servicemen and their families.

» Increase Department of Veterans Affairs' mental-health providers.

» Increase understanding of post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries.

A U.S. military study suggests that about one in five new veterans experience symptoms of PTSD or major depression, with 28 percent of Iraq War-era veterans reporting a service-connected disability.

The unemployment rate for veterans who served in the military at any time since September 2001 was 9.9 percent in 2012, higher than the national unemployment rate of 7.8 percent, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Magellan Health Services, which manages the Maricopa County Regional Behavioral Health Authority and its provider organizations offer integrated physical and behavioral-health care to central Arizona's veteran population. Magellan's successful suicide-preven-

tion initiative has lowered suicide rates among people with serious mental illness by more than 50 percent.

Knowing that health care continues as one of the largest and fastest-growing industries in the country, Magellan launched Hero Health Hire to bring to the forefront veterans' need for employment and the mental-health challenges many of them face.

This program brings together health-care companies to employ, train and support wounded warriors — veterans with an injury or illness resulting from their military service. It is estimated more than 40,000 service members have been injured in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

While military health-care providers can make a natural transition into the civilian health-care industry after leaving the service, there also are a number of non-provider health-care roles in information technology, customer ser-

vice, accounting, project management and other disciplines that require the excellent teamwork, leadership and critical-thinking skills that many veterans possess.

Magellan invited other health-care organizations to join them in employing veterans, and as of this month, more than 40 organizations have joined the cause and have made a commitment to hire veterans — in particular, wounded warriors. If you would like more information about Hero Health Hire visit herohealthhire.com.

Our veterans have given so much to protect our freedom. Please consider doing your part to help the veterans who make it possible for us to celebrate.

Dale Villani is the chief operating officer of Magellan Health Services of Arizona and a U.S. Air Force veteran.



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Dale Villani

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