

City to expand mental health services for veterans

Mayor Bill de Blasio and James Hendon, commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services, on Monday announced an expansion of mental health outreach and treatment programs for veterans.

The expansion is meant to "revamp" the city's mental health efforts for veterans, the mayor's office said, and includes training for mental health professionals as well as peer support and legal services.

"Too many of the tragedies that befall our veterans after coming home—whether it's a struggle with addiction or the crisis of veteran homelessness—are linked to the lack of appropriate tools to address their mental health challenges," Hendon said in a statement.

One tool the city will offer is a mentorship program to help veterans and AmeriCorps alumni find careers as civil servants.

The expansion of mental health programs will involve recruiting vetted mental health partners for the VetConnectNYC referral service, including for a community- and peer-based approach, the mayor's office said. The city will provide grants to legal services organizations to help veterans challenge their discharge status, including LGBTQ veterans who have been given a less than honorable discharge because of their orientation or gender identity.

For post-traumatic stress disorder treatment, the city plans to collaborate with the Research & Recognition Project for training in how to help reframe traumatic memories. It will use public-private partnerships to support holistic treatments, such as service animals, yoga and meditation, as well as a \$300,000 state grant to create a peer-to-peer program for veterans with PTSD and traumatic brain injury.

Finally, the city will join a new mental health advisory council through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the mayor's office said. The council will include local, state, federal and private partners.