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TECHNICAL REPORT

Assessment of the Content, Design, and Dissemination of the Real Warriors Campaign

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Prepared for the Office of the Secretary of Defense

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Summary

Over the past decade, increasing concerns about the mental health and psychological well-being of U.S. service personnel have been well documented. Research has suggested that, as of October 2007, between 25 and 30 percent of veterans from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF) have reported symptoms of a mental health problem (Seal, Bertenthal, et al., 2007; Tanielian and Jaycox, 2008), and a 2011 study found that 37 percent of veterans reported suffering from post-traumatic stress (Pew Research Center, 2011). Recognizing that barriers to mental health care were a critical issue in need of further exploration, the Department of Defense (DoD) convened several task forces to assess the mental health of servicemembers and to examine the delivery of mental health care. In response to the work of these task forces, the DoD implemented numerous programs designed to address issues related to mental health, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and psychological well-being among servicemembers and for their families.

One ongoing challenge for the DoD has been to identify and characterize the scope, nature, and effectiveness of these various and continuously evolving activities. At the request of the DoD, the RAND Corporation conducted a systematic cataloguing of all DoD-funded programs designed to address issues related to mental health, psychological well-being, and traumatic brain injury among servicemembers and their families (Weinick, Beckjord, et al., 2011). As an additional phase of this project, RAND is undertaking a limited number of evaluations of programs that hold promise for addressing the mental health needs of servicemembers and their families. The Real Warriors Campaign (RWC), a large-scale multimedia program designed to promote resilience, facilitate recovery, and support the reintegration of returning servicemembers, veterans, and their families, was selected as one such program. The RWC is operated by the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (DCoE) via a contract with Booz Allen Hamilton.

Purpose of the Report

This report summarizes RAND's independent assessment of the design, content, and dissemination of the RWC, which was conducted between January and August 2011. The RWC is a relatively new effort, launched in 2009. This assessment was designed to do the following:

1. Document the design (goals, target populations, and core messages) and content of the RWC and how the content is disseminated to target populations.

2. Identify the strengths of the design, content, and dissemination strategies used by the RWC and which aspects of the campaign adhere to best practices for health communication campaigns.
3. Identify where DoD should target future investments or quality improvement efforts related to the RWC.

This study was designed as a preliminary assessment because the campaign itself is fairly new. Further, at the time our assessment was conducted, the contract to manage the campaign was being re-competed. Given the possibility of changes to the content or dissemination of the RWC due to the new contract, further evaluation activities would be more valuable after any potential changes to the campaign were made. Once the campaign has time to further mature in its outreach efforts and the issues we identify have been addressed, the RWC may benefit from a full-scale program evaluation. Such future evaluations should include an assessment of campaign penetration rates and detailed feedback from the target population.

Rationale for the Real Warriors Campaign

Despite efforts by both the DoD and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to enhance mental health services, many servicemembers are still not regularly seeking needed care when they have mental health problems. Without appropriate treatment, these mental health problems can have a wide-ranging and negative impact on the quality of life and social, emotional, and cognitive functioning of affected servicemembers. Untreated mental health problems can also compound the costs of engaging in combat by increasing both the medical costs of treating servicemembers who delay getting treatment and the direct costs of replacing servicemembers who leave or are compelled to leave service before completing their contracts.

In 2007, a congressionally mandated task force on mental health issued several recommendations about how to improve access to and delivery of mental health care. The RWC was developed in response to Recommendation 5.1.1.1 of the 2007 Department of Defense Mental Health Task Force report (Defense Health Board Task Force on Mental Health, 2007), which stated: "The Department of Defense should implement an anti-stigma public education campaign, using evidence based techniques to provide factual information about mental disorders."

Design, Content, and Dissemination of the Real Warriors Campaign

Using the Health Belief Model (HBM)[1] as the campaign framework, RWC staff conducted literature reviews, focus groups, and in-depth interviews, as well as market analysis, to identify the threats perceived by servicemembers experiencing mental health concerns, the perceived and real motivators to taking action, the benefits and barriers to reaching out for care that exist within the military community, and the tactics that would influence behavior change. RWC staff used this information to develop and identify the target populations, campaign goals, core messages, and dissemination strategies for the campaign.

[1] The HBM is a widely used model that identifies key influences (e.g., perceptions of individual susceptibility to a health problem) that predict whether an individual will take action to address a health issue.

This research led to the identification of five relevant target populations for the campaign: active duty servicemembers, members of the Reserve and National Guard, veterans, families, and health professionals. Additionally, the RWC developed four campaign goals that map to the four constructs in the HBM:

- raising awareness about the signs and symptoms of mental health concerns
- raising awareness about the relative costs of inaction compared with action in seeking help for mental health concerns
- raising expectations for positive outcomes for seeking support or treatment
- raising awareness about the resources and services available for support and treatment.

The campaign's core messages were designed to reinforce these goals by helping servicemembers, veterans, and their families understand that they are not alone in experiencing and dealing with mental health concerns and that resources for care and treatment are available and effective.

The campaign reaches servicemembers, veterans, members of the National Guard and Reserve, families, and health care professionals through a variety of communication channels. These include the RWC website, social media, partnership activities, and conferences and events.

RAND's Independent Assessment of the Real Warriors Campaign

Methods

To conduct the assessment of the design, content, and dissemination of the RWC, we utilized six complementary methods:

1. a search of the peer-reviewed literature to identify best practices and the empirically defined characteristics and qualities of effective behavioral health media campaigns
2. an expert panel to determine the extent to which the campaign reflects current best practices in health communication campaigns
3. telephone discussions with RWC partner organizations to assess how the campaign has been disseminated and to determine partner organizations' perceptions of the campaign and its materials
4. a content analysis of the website to determine its relevance to the target populations; alignment with campaign goals; function within the campaign (e.g., educational information, resources to promote help-seeking, promotion of the RWC); and whether the content provided connections to services, additional information, or support
5. an analysis of communication measures collected by the RWC to triangulate findings from the partner discussions and expert panel
6. a document review and informal discussions with RWC staff to gather information about how the RWC was designed.

Our assessment focused primarily on campaign activities, including the development of goals, target populations, and core messages; content development; and dissemination of the content. These activities were designed by the RWC staff to influence the four constructs in

the Health Belief Model (perceived susceptibility, perceived consequences, perceived benefits, and perceived barriers).

Results

Table S.1 shows the key findings from our assessment for each campaign activity.

Table S.1
Findings from the Assessment of the Real Warriors Campaign

Campaign Activity	Findings
Campaign design: Development of goals, target population, and core messages	Campaign goals were clear to experts and partner organizations but are not stated on the website or in the campaign materials. The goals of the campaign did not align as well with health professionals as with other target audiences. There are important differences within the campaign's target audiences (e.g., varying ages and races) that should be considered throughout the development of the campaign messages, materials, and dissemination strategies. The core messages of the campaign were relevant and constituted the right messages for the campaign; however, as with the campaign goals, the core messages of the campaign are not stated clearly anywhere on the website.
Content development	The video profiles containing personal stories of servicemembers struggling with mental health problems were the "heart" of the campaign and were consistently described as "compelling" by both the expert panelists and partner organizations. Partners and expert panelists indicated that there was too much content on the website, describing it as "overly dense" and causing "information overload," and remarked that the long lists of links, resources, and materials did not provide enough direction to users on how to prioritize the information. Much of the website content and many of the most frequently viewed articles were not directly relevant to any of the campaign goals. Coverage across target populations was uneven, with more of the website and materials focusing on the active duty population. Several of the links to resources and other materials were not working and some of the expert panelists expressed concern that the content of the website was quickly becoming outdated.
Dissemination of content	While the RWC website is a potentially helpful tool for reaching the campaign's target audiences, panelists felt that key components of the site should be better highlighted and suggested technological solutions to increase website navigability and interactivity. Although most of the campaign's social media tools are viewed as useful by its partners and are growing in popularity among target audiences, utilization is still limited and some of these dissemination channels appear to be more useful than others. Although not all partner organizations are actively engaged in disseminating the campaign, 59 percent disseminate campaign information materials and resources through articles, news briefs, e-blasts, e-newsletters, social media, or blogs, or at venues such as conferences, events, offices, or clinics. Approximately two-thirds of the partners we spoke with made suggestions for improvement of the campaign's partnership program.
Use of research and ongoing monitoring	RWC staff reported using both research and stakeholder analysis as the basis for developing campaign messages and tactics. Although the campaign collects and reports a range of communication metrics, the information from these metrics was not being used to help guide strategic decisions about the campaign. Beyond the communication metrics described above, the RWC does not conduct any ongoing process or outcome evaluation. Both partner organizations and the expert panelists suggested that the RWC needs to regularly seek feedback on its website and materials and on the relevance of the messages it is disseminating. The RWC has not conducted any usability testing of the website since the website was launched.

Limitations of Our Assessment

Our evaluation was limited in scope to an assessment of campaign activities. We focused our efforts on the core elements of the campaign: its goals, target populations, and core messages; the ways in which those elements were executed to create meaningful, relevant, and actionable campaign materials; and the methods and strategies used by the campaign to disseminate those messages. While this approach provided important insight into the strengths and opportunities for improving campaign activities, it does not provide information on the effectiveness of the campaign in achieving short-term or intermediate outcomes such as gains in knowledge or changes in perceptions related to help-seeking. Another limitation of our evaluation is that we were not able to collect data from target audiences due to time, budgetary, and logistical constraints. Finally, we did not assess the campaign's penetration rates.

Recommendations to Improve Future Design, Content, and Dissemination of the Real Warriors Campaign

Below, we summarize our recommendations to improve the design, content, and dissemination of the RWC, as well as our recommendations for improving the RWC's use of research and evaluation. We recognize that the RWC may not be able to implement all of these recommendations, but we offer them as ideas for consideration as the RWC is being continually improved and refined. It is also possible that the awareness of an external assessment and the process of re-competing the RWC contract may have already prompted some changes in the campaign between the time of our assessment and publication of this report. As a result, some of the recommendations may have been addressed. Therefore, our recommendations should be considered in light of any recent changes to the campaign.

Based on our assessment, we recommend the following changes to the RWC design and content that could improve the effectiveness of the RWC:

- Clearly state the goals and core messages of the RWC on the website.
- Review content and links on the website to ensure that they are still current.
- Streamline existing website content to ensure that it aligns with goals and key messages.
- Base the development of new goals and messages on findings from objective data sources, such as the Mental Health Advisory Team survey.
- Optimize the web layout of existing content.
- Improve the tailoring of website content to specific target populations.

Several recommendations for how the RWC can improve the reach and effectiveness of its dissemination emerged from our findings:

- Enhance and grow the social media channels that are the most effective.
- Become more proactive in the dissemination of information.
- Utilize partners more effectively.

To improve the RWC's ability to conduct continuous quality improvement, monitor progress, and assess its short- and long-term impacts, we recommend that the RWC do the following:

- Solicit regular feedback from partners.
- Engage in regular usability testing of the website.
- Convene an ongoing expert or advisory panel to help the campaign stay current and highlight key issues.
- Use improved communication metrics to conduct ongoing monitoring.
- Conduct ongoing evaluation to assess whether the campaign is meeting its short- and long-term goals.

Our assessment of the RWC design, content, and dissemination strategies suggests that the RWC shows promise in its ability to reach the intended target audiences and achieve its goals. We found that the RWC is generally adhering to best practices for health communication campaigns. However, to be responsive to the evolving needs of the military community, media campaigns like the RWC will need to invest in mechanisms that allow them to be nimble. The RWC should consider

- clearly communicating the goals of the campaign on its website and in its materials so that those goals are evident to users and partner organizations, particularly if they change over time
- more effectively leveraging the existing network of partner organizations
- conducting ongoing research and regular usability testing.