

US pledges millions to study ways to ease soldiers' pain

September 25 2014



Photo courtesy: U.S. Army

Thirteen projects will look at alternative therapies, in hopes of lessening use of narcotic painkillers.

(HealthDay)—The U.S. government announced Thursday that it will launch a massive research effort to explore alternative ways of managing chronic pain among members of the military.

Investigators will also examine the use of [alternative treatments](#) for pain-related conditions such as [post-traumatic stress disorder](#) (PTSD), [drug abuse](#) and sleep problems.

The 13 research projects will cost a total of nearly \$22 million over five years, and all will be conducted at Veterans Affairs medical centers and academic institutions across the country.

"Pain is the most common reason Americans turn to complementary and

integrative health practices," Dr. Josephine Briggs, director of the U.S. National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, said in a government news release.

"The need for non-drug treatment options is a significant and urgent public health imperative. We believe this research will provide much-needed information that will help our military and their family members, and ultimately anyone suffering from chronic pain and related conditions," Briggs said.

Nearly 100 million American adults have chronic pain, according to a 2011 Institute of Medicine study, and the problem disproportionately affects current or former members of the military.

A report in the June issue of the journal *JAMA Internal Medicine* said the rate of chronic pain is 44 percent among members of the U.S. military after combat deployment, compared with just 26 percent in the general population.

And [chronic pain](#) is only part of the issue. The report said the rate of use of powerful and potentially addictive narcotic painkillers is 15 percent among U.S. military members after deployment, compared with only 4 percent in the general population.

These drugs can have disabling side effects, may worsen pain conditions in some patients and are often abused. About 52 million Americans (20 percent of those aged 12 and older) have used prescription drugs for nonmedical reasons at least once, according to the U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA).

"Prescription opioids are important tools for managing pain, but their greater availability and increased prescribing may contribute to their growing misuse," NIDA Director Dr. Nora Volkow said in the news

release.

"This body of research will add to the growing arsenal of pain management options to give relief while minimizing the potential for abuse [of narcotic painkillers], especially for those bravely serving our nation in the armed forces," she added.

More information: The U.S. National Library of Medicine has more about [chronic pain](#).

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Citation: US pledges millions to study ways to ease soldiers' pain (2014, September 25) retrieved 27 April 2024 from

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