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Sidra Montgomery

Hello and welcome. We're so glad that you're joining us for today's important conversation. Beyond the diagnosis, shifting the narrative from post-traumatic stress disorder to post-traumatic growth and resilience. My name is Doctor Sidra Montgomery. I'm a principal researcher at A-G Associates, with over a decade of experience conducting impactful research for military and veteran populations. And I will be moderating today's panel.

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Sidra Montgomery

This webcast brings together voices from across the military and veteran community, those with lived experience, clinical experts, and caregivers to explore PTSD not just as a challenge, but as a pathway to growth, strength, and connection. This event is proudly brought to you by A-G Associates and the Military Veteran and Family Center of Excellence, deployed by AG. A-G associates is a service, disabled, veteran owned, small business and mission driven consultancy that's been tackling some of the toughest public health and organizational challenges for nearly two decades.

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Sidra Montgomery

From suicide prevention to strategic change, A-G exists to make a measurable impact. One mission at a time. The Military Veteran and Family Center of Excellence, deployed by AG, is dedicated to advancing the capabilities of organizations that serve our nation's servicemembers, veterans, and their families through high impact solutions and strategic collaboration. By fostering learning, leadership, and belonging, and providing a platform for dialog on key issues affecting military and veteran communities.

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Sidra Montgomery

Each is military veteran and family. Center of Excellence is committed to improving quality of life and driving meaningful outcomes across the broader service ecosystem. So before we get into our discussion, I'd like to ask all of our panelists to briefly share your background and how your personal or professional journey has brought you to this conversation on trauma and growth.

00:01:53:19 - 00:02:16:15

Kayla Williams

Hello. Thank you so much for having me, Sidra, and all of your colleagues at AG. I really appreciate it. My name is Kayla Williams, and, as to my my background and journey here. So I served on active duty in the Army for five years, deployed to Iraq for a year during the initial invasion back in 2003. As an Arabic linguist, I was enlisted.

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Kayla Williams

I also met the man who later became my husband while I was there. He sustained a penetrating traumatic brain injury from an improvised

explosive device or roadside bomb while we were there, and I became a caregiver before that word was commonly used. I did not know anything about traumatic brain injuries. I did not understand how frequently post-traumatic stress disorder co-occur with that, or how frequently.

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Kayla Williams

Major depressive disorder and substance use disorder can also co-occur in this. Like, not a trifecta, but a quadrant vector of misery. I'm being a little snarky, but it's it was very, very difficult. The systems and services were not in place yet back when he was injured to support folks going through that. And I, to be quite honest, I put a lot of my own issues on the backburner because his needs were so much more salient.

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Kayla Williams

And I also found ways to cope with my own issues by trying to intellectualize what I was going through. So I dove into doing research. I spent about a decade total, working at Rand, where I did research on issues including the invisible wounds of war, military sexual assault and harassment. Caregivers. So I was, you know, doing good work, but also trying to understand my own experience at the same time.

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Kayla Williams

I also spent a couple stints working at the Department of Veterans Affairs, running their center for Women Veterans, running their, Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs. And when I look back on my career, I have almost exclusively worked in public service of some kind, whether that's directly for the federal government or in the nonprofit world, kind of adjacent to government spaces.

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Sidra Montgomery

Great. Thank you so much. Chris Gonzalez, I will have you go next.

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Chris Gonzalez

Good afternoon everyone. I am Chris Gonzalez. I am the president of Aid. You associate about 17 years now. I've been doing a lot of program strategy and implementation, data analysis and stakeholder engagement work, in the mental health and substance use space. A lot of our client work was done for the Substance Abuse and Mental Services Administration.

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Chris Gonzalez

Now part of the administration for Healthy America. And I'd say within the last five years or so, we probably started, expanding some of our work into, services for veterans and military families. We've looked at things like quality of life programs for and their effects on things like recruitment, retention and readiness, for the military side and the family side.

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Chris Gonzalez

And then on the veterans side, we've done a good bit of work on things like, mental health and suicide prevention programs. I am a 17 year Marine Corps veteran, have done, combat deployments to both Iraq and Afghanistan. Actually recently got out of the reserves where I served, as an instructor. I've served on at least four different boards of directors for, physical and mental health non-profits.

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Chris Gonzalez

Currently, I'm on the board of directors for Strength and Numbers organization, which helps, young men and women get into the military by increasing fitness and Asvab. And I think one of the things that I'm most proud of is I am the associate producer of a movie called Bastards Road. Pardon my language. So it's a very powerful story of things like recovery.

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Chris Gonzalez

And, I would like to think it has a broader message, not just to the veteran community, but the, the American community that, you know, recovery is possible. As Kayla said, it's not a linear, journey. But it does begin with looking yourself in the mirror, being honest with yourself and, you know, taking that first step, which is always the hardest.

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Sidra Montgomery

Great. Thank you so much. I will have Carie Rogers go next.

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Carie Rodgers

Hi, everybody. My name is Carie Rogers. I am a clinical psychologist. Actually, by training. I have, spent pretty much my entire professional career working with for or adjacent to the military connected community. I worked at VA for almost two decades, and I've also worked in the nonprofit sector for a very long time. I have focused most of my research as well as clinical interests in evidence based practices for post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as training and educating the next generation of behavioral health providers.

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Carie Rodgers

That's a particular passion of mine, not just in evidence based treatments, but also in, culturally humble care, specifically with the military connected community. So, you know, I really think of that as. A specific population that has specific needs. And I think that that many providers are not as aware that they could be about best practices, and simply ways of connecting with that community that gets in the way of providing good care.

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Carie Rodgers

So that's been a huge chunk of the work that I've done in the last almost three decades. Now. I'm not going to I'm going to get real specific about how long it's been, but it's been it's been a day or two. So I'm thrilled to be here and I look forward to the conversation.

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Sidra Montgomery

Great. Thank you so much. Chris, Jack, mic.

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Chris Jachimiec

Thank you, Doctor Montgomery. And, my fellow panelists here, it's an honor to be, present with you. So I'm, Chris Jack MC I'm currently here at A-G associates itself as a senior consultant on a VA suicide prevention project. A little background about me is I spent, over 20 years in the United States Air Force.

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Chris Jachimiec

And I had deployments of prior to nine over 11 and after that, and when somebody asked me is like, what trauma have you been through? Well, it's interwoven throughout my entire career. During my first deployment, I actually, unexpectedly lost my mother and came home on emergency leave. And then several months later, the events of September 11th would actually occur during that time frame.

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Chris Jachimiec

So grief turned into trauma, which turned into grief, which turned into this complexities. And later in my my career, that would be bookended by the loss of my own brother. Mass. Corporal Adam Jackie McNair, suicide. At that time, I had been serving as the Air Force first sergeant to where my job was completely people. So part of my duties was there was like getting care for our enlisted and officer airmen within that air force, and in particular, some special operations units on or some aircraft maintenance units that I was involved in.

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Chris Jachimiec

And so during that loss, I asked a lot of questions for myself, but it didn't stop there as the trauma just this notion that we believe that, you know, all this trauma occurs to our combat veterans is not exactly true, because we we can obtain that just by serving in garrison or within our own environments, because 60 days after the loss of my brother, on the eve of my 37th birthday, was the route 91 shooting at Mandalay Bay, and I was serving between two units at that time because I had to go and take care of a higher responsibility.

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Chris Jachimiec

I just been named the Air Combat Command First Sergeant of the year, and I was promoted to EA, or Senior Master Sergeant within the airfield. So there was just this compounding trauma, and it built up over there to

where I didn't recognize myself. And like Kayla alluded to, is, I coped a lot with work and I coped a lot with alcohol.

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Chris Jachimiec

And, since my medical retirement from the Air Force in 2020, I've gone on to serve in some Goldstar family organizations and military nonprofit that have, helped out the families of those who have died by suicide, along with, paving my way for my own recovery journey from being, no longer using alcohol for almost seven years now and finding my recovery through multiple modalities of health not only clinical health, but alternative therapies and recovering through sport and community connection.

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Chris Jachimiec

And that's what I believe in here. It's like we're not defined by this brokenness. We can go through significant bouts of trauma, integrate the lessons that we learned, throughout these experience in our lives, and actually come out the side better and stronger and be an advocate for those who people who may not have the voice to be able to speak up for the care that they're seeking.

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Sidra Montgomery

Great. Thank you all so much. Lots of rich discussion already and thought provoking things in all of your introduction. So I'm really excited to get into our conversation. I want to turn to understanding and cultivating post-traumatic growth as our, initial starting point. So how do we define and cultivate resilience in the face of trauma? And what individual or systemic strengths do you believe are most crucial for fostering growth?

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Chris Gonzalez

I look at I'm going to focus a little bit more on the term resilience, because I think that's a key piece here. So when I look at the term resilience, I think about a person's ability to overcome adverse experiences or overcome adversity. Right. And I believe that the key component of that is understanding a person's support system and building a strong support system.

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Chris Gonzalez

I think as kids, many of our parents probably discourage us from, hanging out with the bad crowd, and wanted us to get in with the good crowd because a good crowd support one to know they push, they pushed, we pushed one another to do more positive things that led to a better future and so forth and so on.

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Chris Gonzalez

I do believe that that good crowd is much more important as an adult. Because your decisions as an adult have so much more repercussions than

they do as a young person. You know, some of those mistakes you may make, you know, as a young person, fine. No big deal. But as an adult could have some pretty big impacts, especially in, like, things like financial life circumstances.

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Chris Gonzalez

So I think it's important to find that crowd, find your tribe, find your community, and embrace the idea of having a support system. And I think those that have a strong support system are much more able to effectively deal with traumatic experiences versus those who try to do it in isolation. Examples of support system could be your immediate family with sharing things with your immediate family.

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Chris Gonzalez

It could be, a church group. It could be a community service group where you have regular dialog. It could be your neighbors. It could also be something like a, like an exercise group, like go to CrossFit. You know, the reason why CrossFit became so, so popular is because, one, it gave a challenge to individuals, but two, they were able to have a social connection, which gave them a commonality and a, you know, a social place to get together and talk about, health stuff and fitness stuff.

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Chris Gonzalez

And then it migrated to other things. Now we broaden that out a little bit and talk in, in terms of creating resilient communities. I believe the term diversity is a great one to throw in there, because I think communities are resilient when they welcome in, people think and look different than they do. And I think by bringing people in, making them feel welcome, making them feel like they're able to share stuff, positive or negative is very, it's very encouraging.

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Chris Gonzalez

And, you know, I'll, I'll even steer away from the negative. But I think about sharing positives, and I don't mean that from a bragging look at me. I'm so great type of way, but sharing some of the things you accomplished, talking about the road to get to those accomplishments, and hopefully giving some ideas, to some of your, your counterparts.

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Kayla Williams

I mean, this is the question, right? And as a parent, I think about this a lot. How do I try to inculcate resilience in my kids? Because, I will I cannot protect them from everything. And they I want very much for them to be resilient, for them to be able to bounce back if you want to, you know, dig into definitions.

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Kayla Williams

I think when I think about resilience, the ability to bounce back from difficult circumstances and, you know, I think, the importance of

community, like Chris talked about is, is really profound. And for me, it is also connected with acts of service and trying to do good works. And while you were asking the question and Chris was talking, I was chewing over this and I was thinking about how for me, in some ways, like traumatic events have happened.

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Kayla Williams

Yes. But what has worsened the effects of that for me has been when I have felt a sense of institutional betrayal, when, like, I expect bad things to happen in the world, like there are individual people out there that are terrible people, I expect harm to happen in the world. But when the systems that are supposed to protect and nurture and support me have let me down, that has been worse than the traumatic incidents themselves in some ways, and where I have felt the ability to deepen my own sense of resilience and growth is dedicating my energy to trying to improve those institutions and those systems and those services to leave it better than I

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Kayla Williams

found it in service of those who may come after me. And that is where I think I've been able to try to dig up a sense of growth and find some sense of purpose. I think purpose is another really key element in this. And, like force forced resilience on myself by saying, I want to not let this happen to other people.

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Kayla Williams

So I want to engage in acts of service in a purposeful way to strengthen my community and strengthen institutions. That is a way that I've tried to find resilience and growth. And the ability to bounce back is by saying like, okay, this awful thing happened to me, but I can find create like claw meaning out of it by serving others and trying to protect others.

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Chris Jachimiec

I actually am not a fan of the term resilience. I think, throughout the years, especially in the post 9/11 generation, our military services used it too much to the point where it became a Charlie Brown teacher. Everything was resilient training, this resilience training that now I do believe in the principles of, positive psychology and what, you know, Seligman and them teach there.

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Chris Jachimiec

And I think the reframing for me is there, there's a lot of talk about elasticity lately, and then learning to hopefulness. And so we get out of this default mode network of this helplessness type thing, because I think some of the things we wrap up, you know, veteran narrative, and I think it's hard to very escape that as trauma just hijacks the brain.

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Chris Jachimiec

It really does. And it makes you feel like you're just kind of stuck in here. So I reframe it a little bit to where I change the term PTSD into a hopeful acronym. So where I tie it to perspective and perseverance, trust, stability and direction, and the direction being in aiming upward to get this out of the cycle.

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Chris Jachimiec

So let we know it. You know, this, this traumatic event can lead to intrusive memories, avoidance, this negative thought pattern about the world that's out there and especially other systems that we may be wrong by. And then it changes us both physically and emotionally. But what I want to reimagine it to is like these five acts to where, like the perspective is changing the way the experience influenced your life.

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Chris Jachimiec

Like it can shatter your core beliefs, but the world is also a safe place as well too, that we can think of it in harnessing the haunting, the good stuff as we would see out there. And this ties into the perseverance that's there. Like the path to healing isn't linear at all, both in trauma, anxiety and grief. It is no way linear, and it's a commitment to keep moving and driving forward and aiming upward, even with these setbacks.

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Chris Jachimiec

And then trust is the foundation of recovery. So like even within yourself, the systems, it's the cornerstone that's out there with creating safe and supportive relationships both in our communities, our families. Finding that trusted guide, the advisor, whether it's a peer support or whether it's a clinician out there that can help us reframe some of our negative thoughts on that, can really start to lead to that stability, which leads to a positive direction, which leads to post-traumatic growth.

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Sidra Montgomery

So considering the implications of the term disorder and mental health, what are the primary advantages and disadvantages of its continued use and how might alternative terminology impact understanding treatment and societal perceptions?

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Carie Rodgers

For me as a clinician, as a health care provider who provides care to people who come in because they are not feeling well, they are not functioning well, and they want to change that. That language means something very different to me than the way people use it in a broader community. I love my mother in law, but she gives everybody that she's never met a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder.

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Carie Rodgers

Like, oh, that person has PTSD. Don't think. Usually. No, I don't think that that's what's going on with somebody, but I do I do think that that we've taken this term, which was really intended to be and I think should be used very specifically for treatment planning, very specifically for helping people understand a way that some people respond to difficult situations.

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Carie Rodgers

And we've kind of allowed it to take on a life of its own, where the definition often doesn't mean anything anymore. For me, as a treatment provider, I need to know what people are struggling with when they come in. It helps me think through what are the treatments that I know that are are very helpful for working with this particular kind of reaction to a trauma?

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Carie Rodgers

You know, if I were prescribing medication, I would want to if I were going to give you an antibiotic, I would want to know what your symptoms were and what specific thing you had, like, give you the right antibiotic. Right. There are lots of different ways that people react after a trauma. Some of them look like what we going to healthcare call PTSD, and some of them look like what we call depression.

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Carie Rodgers

And some of them look like what we call substance use. And some of them are a combination of all of those things, and some of them are something completely different. So when I'm in the community and I'm talking to to folks on a broader level, I'm talking about reactions to difficult situations. When I'm in a, when I'm in a clinic and I'm working with an individual person, I'm thinking about what they're coming in with, what their symptoms are, and how those things are getting in the way of them living the kind of life that they want to live, and matching a treatment.

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Carie Rodgers

And my intervention to what's going on with them is really important. And so that label helps me to do that. Where I think we do a disservice when we focus on PTSD, too much as we do, forget that there's this whole broad range of ways that people react to trauma, and not everybody, in fact, most people don't have a diagnosis of PTSD, which is a really specific thing.

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Carie Rodgers

After being exposed to trauma. In fact, some people have post-traumatic growth and not post-traumatic stress disorder. Some people have both, and they're actually not the same thing. You can have a growth experience and struggle after trauma, and that struggle can look different in different ways. So as a medical term, as a healthcare term, I think it's really important.

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Carie Rodgers

I think it's way overused. I think that it can, because of that overuse, increase stigma and keep people from getting the care that they need. And I think that that's a really unfair.

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Carie Rodgers

Use of the term. I think there's a level at which, you know, I do this with my primary care doctor. I get on whether I'm the year or whatever and Google, the thing that I saw in my foot yesterday, and I come in and I go, I've got the squamous level blah. And my doctor looks at me and goes, oh, my God, get out of my office.

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Carie Rodgers

Like you, it's a mole. So, so but I also think that all of the information we have, the conversations that we're having, have really helped people recognize sometimes you need to get some additional assistance, and it's actually not uncommon. And it's okay to struggle sometimes. And that that can look really different in different ways. So I think that's really important as a health care provider.

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Carie Rodgers

The that label is really important to me. I, I would caution people to be using it too broadly. That's why I think post-traumatic stress is a great term when we're not talking about a specific health care concern.

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Chris Gonzalez

I really I do not care for the term disorder, and I do totally agree with Carie. There is a place for the clinical diagnosis of the term disorder, but it's become something different and it's become something that's much more mainstream. And unfortunately, I believe that PTSD acronym is truly associated with veterans. In fact, I think I saw in a recent survey from the Collins Veterans that work, 60% of Americans believe veterans and PTSD are synonymous.

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Chris Gonzalez

And I think a good bit of them think that only veterans are able to have PTSD and that if you've experienced trauma, you automatically have PTSD. So unfortunately, I think that term is morphed into something, that is now more harmful than it is helpful. So I want to point out two things. The the concept of labels and designations.

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Chris Gonzalez

When one enters into the military, you come from all walks of life, but when you get there, you work so hard to achieve that designation or the label of soldier marine, airman, so forth and so on. And as you progress

in your career, you then continue to work hard to get those designations like platoon sergeant or instructor or whatever it is.

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Chris Gonzalez

Sometimes there's a lot of, you know, perseverance and sweat and tears and all that good stuff to go into it. But no matter what, those labels do stick with us. People cannot take those labels away in that same way. I do think labels stick with people. And unfortunately, you know, I was trying to give some positive one, but unfortunately, the label of PTSD and veterans have become one in the same in popular culture.

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Chris Gonzalez

And that label also is difficult to get rid of, even if that's not something you're dealing with or not something you're dealing with at the time. And I do believe that that, you know, the association of that term has effect on the person's ability to communicate with others. I think it has a big, negative impact on their ability to communicate what that trauma was and how it affects them to people outside the veteran community.

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Chris Gonzalez

And I think in many cases, that does it. That means their family. And I think that's caused a lot of family, you know, a lot of family issues, because the second piece is around trauma measuring or definition of trauma. And I think, like Carrie said, I think there are many that I know and I've spoken to the don't want to go to a professional because they don't want to find out that they have a disorder.

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Chris Gonzalez

They don't want to. You know, be labeled with the term disorder. And I think that that really becomes a barrier to taking that first step towards getting professional help. And in some cases, it becomes a barrier to even taking that first step to build their own support system. And so a very easy example of that is I've had several conversations where I've asked my buddies, hey, do you feel like you have a disorder?

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Chris Gonzalez

And they say, no, and sometimes they say, a word that starts with F, and then they say, no, and it's a very emotional reaction. And I said, what do you think you've ever, you've ever dealt with things that are, that were a result of kind of traumatic experiences we've had in our past, like from our deployments, whatever.

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Chris Gonzalez

And I said, yeah, I think so. For example, that was Memorial Day. You know, when people kind of get down on Memorial Day. So again, I understand the concept, but going back to how it's applied, I really have

the issue with it. So like to not scrap the term from the clinical side, but would like to just move to a different term.

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Chris Gonzalez

More on the post-traumatic growth or just referring to it as post-traumatic stress. Thank you.

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Carie Rodgers

Yeah, it's a really interesting conversation, right. Because people react really differently to things. I've sat in the room with many, many, many veterans who I've had a conversation with and they've said, wait a minute, how did you not? And we've talked about what it is that's going on with them. And I said, what? What about this? We experienced that too.

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Carie Rodgers

Oh, okay. I wonder if this is another piece of your experience. And they look at me and say, how did you know? Here's a map. How can you how do you have any idea what how did you know that I don't sleep? How did you know? Or whatever it is. Right? And I said, well, you know, it has a name.

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Carie Rodgers

I've worked with many people who have had the same experience, and it has a name, and you know what that means. You're not alone. And had this incredible, massive relief happen for people. So, you know, it's really tough to extrapolate. These conversations to a large level when when individual human beings react so differently to names, to labels, to, conversations.

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Carie Rodgers

You know, it can be it can be tricky, can be really, really tricky. And that's true outside of the veteran space as well. I've worked with lots of people who have had. Who who've been veterans, but their traumatic experience happened outside of their uniformed service. Who still struggle with some of those same challenges of thinking about things differently.

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Carie Rodgers

And what does that mean? I do think the conversations about recovery and growth are really important to have, though. I think that, recovery from a set of symptoms that you've been having is really different than growth following and experience. And they can happen together, but they don't always happen together. And I think in the clinical field, we pay a lot of attention to symptom reduction and not enough attention to growth.

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Carie Rodgers

We can do those same things. We can do those things at the same time. But when I'm working with new clinicians, it's often not something that they're thinking a lot about. We're thinking about curing or we're thinking about recovering from a disorder, and we're not always thinking about growth. And I think that's a way in which the label has its limits, even in clinical practice.

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Carie Rodgers

I don't know. But, you know, I don't know what the solution is. I, I sometimes wonder about, you know, if we rename something is that and I'm going to take another life of its own and we're going to be renaming things every five years. You know, I don't I don't know what the answer to that is, but it's an important conversation to have as well.

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Chris Jachimiec

And we have renamed things over years and years. We talk about it like battle fatigue and shell shock, and then the renaming of all of it. And, I know, I, I'll be short here so Kayla can interject as well too. But for me, like my experience, I think, I think that diagnosis is a key that can unlock doors to different modalities of treatment.

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Chris Jachimiec

Is it is the key that unlocks the skeleton doors that may be able to get you into the care that that you need is from. That's the way I view it as a medical perspective. And in my in my own journey is what I discovered. And there's a there's a pretty widespread point out there is I sat with my post-traumatic stress long enough until she told me her real name was grief.

00:32:05:17 - 00:32:35:19

Kayla Williams

That's a that's a beautiful phrase, Chris. Thanks for sharing that. And other. Chris, when you were talking, I was wondering at how much, to what extent some of this may have gendered implications. When you said you don't hear about PTSD outside of the veterans space? Because I tell you, in the civilian sexual assault community, it is definitely a widespread terminology, a very well known concept, and people do not exclusively associate it with, military service.

00:32:35:21 - 00:33:08:02

Kayla Williams

I think I like Carie, think of it as a useful term in the clinical space and as a way to also differentiate when something is, to a level that is significant enough that it is worth seeking relief from those symptoms. When I talk to people about, PTSD or post-traumatic stress, I talk a lot about how, like the first six months after I got back from Iraq, I exhibited a ton of symptoms of post-traumatic stress that are very, very classic.

00:33:08:04 - 00:33:32:04

Kayla Williams

But they faded over time, over that like six month period, to the point that they were not negatively impacting my life. Like if they had sustained and were negatively impacting my life, that's when I would have said like, oh, maybe it's like slipping into disorder territory where I should be seeking support from a professional to get like a clinically meaningful reduction in those symptoms so that I can live the kind of life that I want to live.

00:33:32:06 - 00:33:54:01

Kayla Williams

But a lot of the things that we may think of as like symptoms of a PTSD, like hypervigilance, they're adaptive in a combat zone. They are adaptive. If I go into a dark alley now and I may want to be able to turn that back on, so, you know, it isn't necessarily an all or nothing scenario. It isn't, it is a gradation.

00:33:54:03 - 00:34:16:24

Kayla Williams

One of the things that I find unfortunate. And then I do think we should, as a community, try to work on is some of the language that comes from the veteran benefits administration is very black or white, all or nothing. You're being given this diagnosis and this disability rating because you have this and it is it is forever.

00:34:16:24 - 00:34:45:21

Kayla Williams

You are never going to be able to live the kind of life you want to live, have the human connections you want to have, hold down a job that I wonder a lot about. The extent to which that type of language can set a trajectory where if you do not believe that improvement is possible, you don't believe that growth is possible because you are being told by the federal government, like you are now so broken that we are going to pay you every month for the rest of your life, because this is a permanent thing that language concerns me.

00:34:45:21 - 00:35:23:01

Kayla Williams

I wonder if there is a way that we can adapt, adjust, reframe, in in that sense, to set an expectation that improvement is possible. And in fact, with the right treatment, we can expect a clinically significant reduction in symptoms, and people can expect to have the quality of life that they want to enjoy. That's really meaningful. We unfortunately, are in a scenario where a lot of folks have this terror that if they experience that, their benefits will be yanked and they may be relying on that to pay their bills.

00:35:23:01 - 00:35:43:19

Kayla Williams

So we're in a, you know, a messy scenario. I personally do not see the benefit of saying like, oh, we should rename it push my stress injury. We didn't make it as I to, you know, focus on the the triggering incident instead of like I that doesn't that has not resonated with me or with people that I spend a lot of time with.

00:35:43:19 - 00:36:08:10

Kayla Williams

I know that it it does matter a lot to some other folks. One other element that I want to mention, when it comes to language that I have found interesting, is for those who have experienced military sexual trauma, which is an umbrella term that includes both sexual assault and sexual harassment. Folks will say, I have messed.

00:36:08:12 - 00:36:41:12

Kayla Williams

And I'm like, no, no, no, that's that's actually the inciting incident. Hey, you may have PTSD or major depressive disorder or substance use. You may have any number of clinical diagnoses triggered by the incident, but MSI itself is not a diagnosis. And I have been really fascinated to watch that term, like shift in casual colloquial usage to be a substitute for PTSD that is caused not by combat but by sexual trauma.

00:36:41:12 - 00:37:01:03

Kayla Williams

And so language as it is used does shift and change through time. Obviously, we are no longer talking like Shakespeare, much less Chaucer. So, you know, language does evolve, but how we want to take it and mean it is, is going to be it's it's going to keep going through time.

00:37:01:05 - 00:37:22:20

Sidra Montgomery

Excellent. Well, I want to stick on this discussion about language. I think this has been so powerful and, and shift a little bit to language and reframing the narrative. So how can we as a community of providers, individuals with lived experience and advocates thoughtfully use language that emphasizes hope, empowerment and growth potential when discussing trauma?

00:37:23:01 - 00:37:41:04

Chris Jachimiec

You know, I think we I think we see this in some framing on there as we talk about the deadly gap in the transitioning, veteran services space. It's like, as as Kayla alluded to, you know, we talk about the benefits that are there is, you know, we some of us are brothers and sisters and, come out and say we are disabled veterans.

00:37:41:09 - 00:38:05:01

Chris Jachimiec

When I think the term itself, it's like, I reframe it into workers compensation is kind of the way I put it is the reframing. There's like something how something occurred to you, you're compensated for an injury that you occurred on the job. You're not technically disabled. In, in, in some ways, in some of the framing of it, there are folks who have had physical debilitating, some brain injury, some physical injuries that, yes, that term does that.

00:38:05:07 - 00:38:30:20

Chris Jachimiec

But for a lot that term doesn't actually fit. And what I think we experience is as we leave the service is a different kind of PTSD, is the post transition from service difficulties to finding that new mission to finding that new growth, that new, that meaning and purpose. Because the time that we may have worn the uniform, whether or not we were injured or not, may have been the most purposeful thing that we have ever done in our life.

00:38:30:22 - 00:38:49:22

Chris Jachimiec

When I walk the halls of my local VA, I see pride with the service era hats. That's on, whether it's like a Vietnam vet, whether it's a Korean War vet, whether it's a post 911 vet, there's joking and jousting. You know, Marines are poking fun at the air Force within the clinic. And that camaraderie is very healthy and forthcoming.

00:38:50:03 - 00:39:17:02

Chris Jachimiec

And I think that that's the hardest thing that we struggle with is perhaps this identity crisis when we take the uniform off, the finding something as purposeful of wanting to lay your life down for your fellow countrymen and your families and this nation, that is very difficult to find once you transition from military service. So how do we cultivate that hope, meaning and purpose?

00:39:17:04 - 00:39:55:09

Chris Jachimiec

And I think we have to find that is is integrate the challenges that we have, challenges, successes and difficulties we had throughout our military life, but continue to prove to this nation that we are the best at what we do because we have been given this unique skill set. Do not treat me like a broken tool. Treat me as an asset to the American people and the organizations that I intend to serve, whether it be the academic environment, whether it be that employer leverage my skills for purpose and hope and help us raise these ships and bring our society up to a level that we deserve.

00:39:55:09 - 00:40:16:06

Chris Jachimiec

As those people who raised our right hands to serve and protect this nation. And that's what we owe to each other, is this hopefulness. It's like, I can find this. I do have meaning and purpose outside the military. I am an honorable individual that has skills and capabilities that make my nation, my neighborhood, my community, and my family better.

00:40:16:08 - 00:40:45:04

Chris Gonzalez

I actually think I agree with everything that Chris just said. Again, him and I have had a lot of conversations about this. I actually would like to take it one step further. I believe veterans could set the standard to become leaders in the trauma space for the general public. Kayla, I think you just mentioned it. While many Americans associate PTSD solely with veterans, I think there's a much broader way to talk about post-traumatic stress.



00:40:45:09 - 00:41:15:10

Chris Gonzalez

You know, for a variety of of issues, whether it be sexual trauma or losing a loved one or vehicle or whatever. I believe veterans should be the ones who set the tone and can be out there as leaders who say, I have dealt with things, these are things that I have dealt with, and you may not be experiencing the same things that I am dealing with, but that's okay because I'm continuing to, you know, I'm addressing them, I've addressed them in the past and I'm going to continue to address them.

00:41:15:12 - 00:41:39:14

Chris Gonzalez

And like Carrie said, you are not alone in dealing with this. You're not alone in facing this issue. And in fact, there's a huge amount of people that are also trying to, to get past this as well. And I give a couple examples, one of which is, you know, I am an older gentleman now, and I frequently like to, exercise a bit too hard.

00:41:39:16 - 00:41:58:12

Chris Gonzalez

So a lot of times I'll have elements of my, my elbow. Other times I have elements of my knee. When I go on YouTube, I don't always want to hear stories from experts. I don't want to hear people who are who have these political ideas. I want to go and I want to hear stories of people who have hurt their knee and recovered from it.

00:41:58:14 - 00:42:21:02

Chris Gonzalez

I want to hear stories of people who have hurt their elbow and recovered from it, and what they did to get back to 100% and get back to what people perceive as normal. And again, I think that's where we're veterans can play a huge role. The second piece is I think, you know, I'll give another example about losing friends in combat that I, that I embrace.

00:42:21:02 - 00:42:42:11

Chris Gonzalez

And it's kind of even a mindset of just looking at, issues in a certain way, in a way that I feel is a bit more, focused on the future versus the past. And so, you know, I've lost one friend in, in Iraq and one friend in Afghanistan, both. I wouldn't say we're terribly close, but I did.

00:42:42:13 - 00:43:05:08

Chris Gonzalez

You know, lose them. And I think about them frequently so I can do one of two in my mind, I can do one of two things. I can relive the days where they passed away, where they were attacked. Or I can look at my life and the fact that I have my life, limbs and sanity as a gift and that I carry on in there, and that I do that in the honor of all that we've lost.

00:43:05:10 - 00:43:26:09

Chris Gonzalez

And so, you know, that's the mindset that I like to encourage in terms of the veteran community. And in no way will I ever say that certain types

of trauma are are not debilitating. I recognize some are, and I recognize that post-traumatic growth people aren't always ready. But the road map to get there is what we can share.

00:43:26:10 - 00:43:45:18

Chris Gonzalez

Being vulnerable is what we can share. And I would argue, what do we have to lose as a community? We've been we you know, we face fear. We've been fearless in other times. So why not embrace the fear of being vulnerable and getting ourselves out there and telling our story, even though it makes us feel a bit, you know, uncomfortable?

00:43:45:20 - 00:43:46:09

Chris Gonzalez

Thank you.

00:43:46:11 - 00:44:13:19

Kayla Williams

I think that's a great point. And the importance of folks who are able to do so sharing their own stories is is very, very strong. The number of people who have come up to me and thanked me for being public about the fact that I, that I get mental health care, like I actually find it heartbreaking, like just nobody ever is ashamed wearing a cast if they break their leg.

00:44:13:19 - 00:44:50:10

Kayla Williams

Right. But, we that radical candor, that transparency, that vulnerability of admitting to our own struggles and and sharing the path that has worked for us is, I think, a really important part of it. And I've been pretty candid, too, about the fact that I've I've needed to go into therapy multiple times and try to say like, hey, you break your leg, your cast upped, and then as you age, you may get arthritis linked to that injury and need to do another round of PT or need a different regimen of medications from this injury that you sustained decades earlier.

00:44:50:13 - 00:45:13:15

Kayla Williams

Again, nothing to be ashamed of. Same thing with mental health injuries, mental health conditions, mental health disorders, whatever label we want to use. You know, I, I had adverse childhood experiences. I had combat trauma, I had sexual trauma. These things can, come together in unexpected moments. Like when my own daughter hit the age where I was first assaulted.

00:45:13:15 - 00:45:32:00

Kayla Williams

Like that was very triggering for me of a lot of anxiety related to, like, what if something happened to her? How could I protect her? There's nothing wrong with saying like, you know what? I need some additional help now to make sure that my coping skills are in place, my support structures are in place, and we just have to be honest about that.

00:45:32:02 - 00:46:21:06

Kayla Williams

As as much as we're able to. And I know not everybody feels comfortable being candid, but those of us who are, I think, should be as much as we can. The one thing I'll say, you know, when thinking about like how do we use language thoughtfully to emphasize growth potential? One of the things that I get skittish about are some folks who are very powerful advocates for post-traumatic growth that occasionally slip into using language that implies that absolutely everyone can do it, and hint that if you haven't experienced it, like you're not trying or you're not open to it and kind of re stigmatize not having grown after trauma.

00:46:21:11 - 00:46:45:19

Kayla Williams

And so I think that is one of the things that we need to be very thoughtful about, very cautious about not not shaming people if they do not find growth in the aftermath of trauma. We're all complex. We all have a lot going on. And.

00:46:45:21 - 00:47:21:11

Kayla Williams

I want us to set that message that clinically significant reductions in symptoms very possible if you do the work growth very possible, but not an expectation. You shouldn't feel like you're broken or there's something wrong with you. If that is not the result that you get, I want to, I feel like so. But I want to hold space for people having really different experiences and be supportive for wherever folks are on their individual journey.

00:47:21:13 - 00:47:40:13

Kayla Williams

Also just throw out. I've seen like we all know that the online space can be super toxic, but there are some people in the online space who really seem to send this message that like this is new for post 911 veterans. Ignore the fact that like Vietnam vets really thought to have this diagnosis recognize, or, you know, send this message like that.

00:47:40:13 - 00:48:10:20

Kayla Williams

We're we're weaker because a higher percentage of those of us experienced PTSD. And I find all of that really unhelpful from my time at VA. I know from VA providers that talk about having, elderly patients who admit on their deathbed to having had profoundly traumatic experiences that they have been carrying alone for decades, that have caused them deep inner distress for decades.

00:48:10:23 - 00:48:41:00

Kayla Williams

But they have never revealed that to even sometimes their closest family members, loved ones, friends, and that I find heartbreaking. I really, truly hope that by more of us being candid about what we're experiencing, we can encourage more folks to seek help and community instead of carrying these burdens alone, sometimes for decades, sometimes trying to bury it with things like alcohol.

00:48:41:06 - 00:48:55:18

Kayla Williams

When they could have more clinically effective support and experience relief from some of the the really intense pain that they're feeling at much younger ages.

00:48:55:20 - 00:49:24:00

Carie Rodgers

I think is you're talking the word that keeps coming. There are a couple of words that keep coming up for me, Kayla. One is humility, right? And we don't actually ever know the whole story of somebody else's experience. And, you know, growth and recovery both. And I think there were different things. And I would I use them really intentionally as different things.

00:49:24:02 - 00:49:50:03

Carie Rodgers

So when I'm speaking of that here, I'm using them very intentionally of different things. Growth and recovery happen for different people at different times in different ways. And I do believe that people have the capacity to grow, but I don't believe that I know when that's going to happen for them or why it may or may not be happening for them.

00:49:50:05 - 00:50:15:08

Carie Rodgers

I believe that people have the capacity to recover, and I have tools that can help with that if they're in my office, but I do not know if they're going to be a good match for this person in this moment, at this time. And I don't even always know why. Right. And so I think that's a really important piece to always remember.

00:50:15:08 - 00:50:48:15

Carie Rodgers

There are lots of variables that go into this, including intersectionality. Right? Race, ethnicity, gender, age and that, you know, it's not just age, but it's sort of the the generation in which you experienced your trauma and the generation and what you experienced, there in which you came to know what mental health meant and whether or not it was okay to talk about or not okay to talk about.

00:50:48:15 - 00:51:32:20

Carie Rodgers

There are regional differences in this country. I grew up in, in Kansas in the 80s. It's not California in 2025, I'll tell you that. That that impacts the way that I think about things. You know, I grew up, my father, a veteran. His experience, was very much dictated by his environment. Right? That rural and rural Midwestern environment, you know, sexual orientation, there's all sorts of things that impact people's timing of growth and recovery.

00:51:32:22 - 00:51:57:16

Carie Rodgers

And so we always have to hold that we actually don't know most of those things about most everybody else. And so that the sort of humility that

we need to have when we have these conversations is really important. And I also think it's really important that most of us are doing the best we can with the information that we have at the time that we have it.

00:51:57:18 - 00:52:14:22

Carie Rodgers

And that's really important to get people some slack to around the way that they try to help or the way that, you know, like we've all stepped in it too, and sort of being willing to to give people a little space for that is really important too.

00:52:14:24 - 00:52:42:17

Sidra Montgomery

So I want to shift to talk about support systems. And, so how can support systems be designed to offer individualized, evolving care that meets people where they are, while recognizing what we've been discussing, that growth isn't always linear. And I know, there's been some discussion amongst you all about community and peer support as well. So if you have specific thoughts about those areas, I would love to hear that.

00:52:42:17 - 00:52:46:22

Sidra Montgomery

In addition to other types of tailored and evolving support.

00:52:46:24 - 00:53:13:11

Carie Rodgers

You know, I'm going to reiterate something that Chris Gonzalez said earlier. Yeah. Chris, social support, in whatever form that takes. And that doesn't have to be 20, 30 people that are at your house every night for a barbecue, right? For some people, that's 1 or 2 really meaningful connections. Sometimes it's being in a system or a community that has more support available to you.

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Carie Rodgers

It looks very different for different people, but having some way of accessing support is one of the most consistent predictors of health and well-being. If you want to call it resilience, it's growth recovery, which are all, I think, different ideas and different things. But support having some sort of social support is one of the best predictors of all of those things.

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Carie Rodgers

And so setting up systems where that's possible is really valuable. Those systems are going to look different for different people too. So we really have to think about different communities and different ways of doing that. There is not one right answer, and I think it's very important that we think about that.

00:54:05:15 - 00:54:30:21

Chris Jachimiec

Yeah. And that's where I, I, I agree wholeheartedly with, Doctor Rogers here is because what form of social support looks like to somebody may

not, may not be the same for some others. So like my communities of choice, beyond my family, it's like I find a lot of recovery through the martial arts community. And I know that's big in the veterans space because there's some connectedness and there's some outward aggression, and it ties into kind of some of that.

00:54:30:21 - 00:55:06:18

Chris Jachimiec

But, in their minds more and more, taekwondo, because I can give back and I can mentor others. Bringing up the past, I'm a big fan of heavy metal music, and that is a very communal environment. They're a concert in itself. Whether what genre of music USA to is a very cathartic communal environment, because you're all hearing it's being projected to you, but you are having a different experience in a communal environment through these settings, through something you collectively, you spent money to join a ticket to go there to see something that you all enjoy, so creates this cohesive environment.

00:55:06:24 - 00:55:42:04

Chris Jachimiec

And then the other play I like is I'm a heavy endurance road cyclist, and a lot of people get road cycling wrong is they think it's an individual sport, but it is anything but that. Road cycling is one of the most profound, team sports that is actually out there because everybody has their role. And so, what you may see is somebody may be pulling on the front and you may need at that time in your recovery, you may need a peer or somebody to pull you along to where that you are in there, and you are getting the benefit of the draft and the benefit of the drafting.

00:55:42:04 - 00:56:04:10

Chris Jachimiec

Cycling is key. Along with the formations. You may need to be in an echelon to where somebody is blocking you from the wind so you can recover properly. Because you may be a sprinter and that's your role on the team, or you may be a set up person for somebody that you can lead them out to the finish line and together achieve this goal as a collective team and as a collective community.

00:56:04:16 - 00:56:25:06

Chris Jachimiec

And I think that that's what we have with the power in our veteran community. I as far as recovery goes, we're one of the communities that actually does it the best. And I'm caring, caring for our own because we have so many other support systems that are built uniquely to meet the needs of our veterans, our service members and their caregivers to where they're at.

00:56:25:08 - 00:56:43:09

Chris Jachimiec

So if you need a if you're interested in, you know, equine therapy or physical sports or anything like that, it's like we've built these micro cultures within our own community for you to test things out that may form these communities that eventually bring you towards whatever healing is. There.

00:56:43:11 - 00:57:11:01

Chris Gonzalez

Echo what, both panelists have said and would like to introduce the concept of community health. I've written several articles about this in terms of, most people understand physical health. And if I do these things, I will be helping you in terms of your diet and your weight and, you know, understanding, the circumstances of your health and your family history, things like that.

00:57:11:03 - 00:57:50:10

Chris Gonzalez

I think generationally, I agree with the older generation, embraces mental health much differently. Do I do feel like the G generation has embraced mental health and probably a more open way? I think we've got a ways to go, but I think we're a bit more open to talking about mental health and understanding the value of mental health services and clinicians and all the other resources that are out there, some of which come in the form of going into an office, other others come in the form of, you know, getting on an application, and talking to someone that way because that makes you feel, you know, that's the best way for you to

00:57:50:10 - 00:58:16:15

Chris Gonzalez

engage with a bit more of anonymity. But I'll throw out the concept of community health as, a very important third and just as important as physical and mental health, and that just one support system that I've talked about already, but to the concept of feeling like you are part of something. And as we've already established, that can mean different things to different people.

00:58:16:17 - 00:58:41:08

Chris Gonzalez

But having some type of purpose or some type of place or some type of shared mission, even if that mission isn't that, you know, that life changing. I think those components are really an important part of for veterans, especially if you leave a group of people that you feel truly engaged with. And that doesn't apply to all veterans, but a lot of them, it does.

00:58:41:10 - 00:59:08:08

Chris Gonzalez

You're leaving your tribe. You got to find your own tribe. You've got to find a new tribe. And I hope that there's no negative connotations with there, because I don't mean it that way, though. Being tribal, there is some, you know, some fears with that. So I'll give you some things that I will read them off. Join a workout program, talked about CrossFit boot camp program, things like camaraderie and, and competition and physical challenges.

00:59:08:10 - 00:59:28:17

Chris Gonzalez

Those help you to reconnect with that military service, volunteer, be part of a mission that's not military driven, but more community driven.

If you volunteer to help someone who's a bit less fortunate than yourself, that helps to give people a good a good new purpose and hopefully meet some good people along the way, some good others. And then let be dependable.

00:59:28:18 - 00:59:50:00

Chris Gonzalez

Volunteer to do things for people. Have them depend on you. Keep that you know. Keep make promises. Keep those promises. Having people depend on you as a key, key component that I've known a couple of veterans, unfortunately, actually more than a couple whose families don't depend on them anymore, and it truly affects them in a pretty and a very negative way.

00:59:50:02 - 01:00:09:19

Chris Gonzalez

Give yourself a difficult challenge, a difficult challenge. Get out there, do a Tough Mudder, join a team like Chris was talking about, get and you know, do something that's totally foreign to you. Like that's for me. It's going out and mountain climbing or something like that, you know, get out there and do some. That is not easy.

01:00:09:21 - 01:00:30:20

Chris Gonzalez

And in a culture of taking the path of least resistance, that's not always the most comfortable thing. Reach out to someone. That could be to a formal resource like the Veterans Crisis Line. It could be to a fun group text where you share a bunch of inappropriate stuff. It could be to, you know, just a buddy that you give a call to.

01:00:30:22 - 01:00:49:20

Chris Gonzalez

Or it could be just telling someone, I'm going to get in the car. I'm to come see you, because I just need to come see you. And I need to talk to someone who gets me. And finally, Kayla, I think you alluded to this one. Get off of social media. For me, social media is the worst place for you to be.

01:00:49:20 - 01:01:11:10

Chris Gonzalez

If you're going through something because everybody puts their own filter on social media. Everybody says, oh, look at me. I'm so happy. You look at me and my family so pretty, so forth and so on. But that is their best self. You don't see behind the curtain, you don't see what they're dealing with. The many times they're dealing with the same exact thing that you are, but you just don't see that.

01:01:11:10 - 01:01:28:02

Chris Gonzalez

You see the big smile. So get off social media, get out there, do some things with other people. If that other person is just a buddy you need to reconnect with and do it and think about how to be community healthy. Thank you.



01:01:28:04 - 01:01:46:00

Kayla Williams

I think all those are really fantastic tips. And I'll say, you know, for my spouse, fly fishing with other veterans has been a really great way for him to spend time in nature, do something that is meditative, forge those community connections. And I think it's great that everybody's talked so much about ways to find that community and peer support.

01:01:46:02 - 01:02:12:05

Kayla Williams

So I want to go in a slightly different direction and, talk about some other things that may be important elements of being able to have strong support systems as we move into the future. First, you know, thinking about how people may need care or connections in asynchronous moments. So I think it is more that we are all aware of places for folks to get support that may be more than just connection with communities.

01:02:12:05 - 01:02:41:20

Kayla Williams

So VA has a lot of great apps that can help be adjunctive to mental health care. They have, like act acceptance and commitment therapy, which is I'm a big fan of as a modality. They have an act, app, they have PTSD app, they have an app. Many of these have things like guided meditations that can be helpful as ways to, stay on top of things or manage symptoms, flare ups and others.

01:02:41:22 - 01:03:02:12

Kayla Williams

I also want to really drive home that, you know, it's been mentioned we leave the military that is this big disruptive thing. But it also points to the fact that veterans go home to various communities all over the country. We don't go live in veteran barracks and go to veteran exclusive jobs. And, and, and often we're not getting veterans exclusive health care.

01:03:02:14 - 01:03:27:12

Kayla Williams

So when things happen that harm our communities, those things will harm veterans, too. And I think about ways that veterans like, for me, telehealth is fantastic. I don't have the time to drive 45 minutes, fight for parking, walk inside, do my appointment. Do that in reverse. I can't take four hours out of my day for an appointment. So for me, telehealth is amazing.

01:03:27:12 - 01:04:01:11

Kayla Williams

It's fantastic. There are many parts of the country where that's not an option because they don't have broadband, and so government programs that are out there trying to increase broadband access are really important. And when we see cuts to those programs, it's going to harm veterans as it is harming other members of those communities. And when we think about these, evidence based treatments for PTSD, most of those were developed and proven to be effective in VA.

01:04:01:13 - 01:04:29:17

Kayla Williams

And so I want to urge everyone to fight for a strong VA system of care. Direct care. I have been, seeking some care outside of VA while I'm waiting for VA appointment to be available and the non VA clinicians that I'm seeing ask me in our first or second appointment what is MST. And it was that like gut punch reminder of why we need a strong VA.

01:04:29:22 - 01:05:09:21

Kayla Williams

Because that cultural competence or as Kerry said, cultural humility like it isn't always there. And VA provides high quality, evidence based, culturally competent care with no copays for the vast majority of patients. And we need a strong VA. And I am going to resist with every part of me threatened cuts to VA because we need a strong direct care system, and we need other types of supports out there to make sure that that veterans can pay the bills, that they can have broadband access, that they're not going to bed hungry.

01:05:09:21 - 01:05:41:10

Kayla Williams

These things that will layer on top of and add on to stresses that may already exist. So when we're thinking about recognizing growth, may not be linear and meeting people where they are, like, let's think about ways that other harms to our communities will amplify those situations, those harms for veterans. I think about how important it is for folks who are the primary caregivers to young children, are the primary caregivers to aging parents to be able to find support in meeting those needs.

01:05:41:16 - 01:06:04:07

Kayla Williams

I was only able to go and do a two week intensive outpatient program because I have a spouse at home who was able to step up and be the primary caregiver for our kids. Well, what about people who don't have that? How can we create systems that support folks in meeting their other needs so that they can focus on getting their own mental health needs met?

01:06:04:13 - 01:06:31:15

Kayla Williams

These are complex. These are hard. I don't have an easy button for this. I would just urge everyone is thinking about how to solve these problems, to remember how important our broader communities are, and how imperative it is that we continue to fight for services and supports to benefit all of us that we pay for with our taxes, and that we should demand remain strong and serve all of us.

01:06:31:20 - 01:06:32:11

Carie Rodgers

Excellent.

01:06:32:15 - 01:06:51:12

Sidra Montgomery

Well, we I want to move on to, a wrap up question. So I want to ask a group a very broad question. You can take this any direction that you want to. So looking ahead, what collaborative steps can we take as a community to continue fostering a wider understanding of PTSD?

01:06:51:14 - 01:07:18:08

Chris Gonzalez

I would like to know a little bit more about individuals before they enter the military, in that and how that affects a person's transition, how that affects a person's ability to embrace trauma or overcome trauma. Because, you know, many of the people you see in boot camp, you see a wide variety of people from all different walks of life.

01:07:18:08 - 01:07:44:08

Chris Gonzalez

And I've said that before, but many are many come with issues. They come, some come from broken homes. They come, they come to the military escaping certain things. And I think the military is actually the perfect place for those people, because it gives them a place that they didn't always feel. Again, this is based on a lot of conversation that I've had.

01:07:44:10 - 01:08:09:18

Chris Gonzalez

So it gives them a place to feel welcome. It gives them a place within a team that gives them a sense of purpose and all of those things help to, I believe, not mask some of those things that that has happened in their past, but make them less significant. And I believe when a person transitions out into the civilian side, into the veteran side, they lose a piece of themselves.

01:08:09:19 - 01:08:26:17

Chris Gonzalez

I think that about everybody. But for those who had some of those issues coming in, I believe many of them reemerge in a way that we don't quite understand because we haven't totally looked at the some of those circumstances prior to the military.

01:08:26:19 - 01:08:43:17

Kayla Williams

So Bill Cly had a great, piece in I think it was New York Times about the failure of imagination. And it really struck a chord with me. And it's something that I try to bring up a lot in these moments. And I will be candid. When I first got back from Iraq and civilians would say, like, what was it really like over there?

01:08:43:21 - 01:09:10:13

Kayla Williams

My knee jerk reaction was like, well, you can understand if you didn't have boots on the ground, like you could not understand. And, as I say, and also just personal growth and, and time has really driven home to me how, wrong I was, I was wrong. We can, through the power of art, understand things that are very foreign to our own experiences.

01:09:10:13 - 01:09:38:15

Kayla Williams

That is the point in some ways of art. We can watch films and and have emotional connections to sentient robots and like Wall-E, right? Like we can imagine what it's like to go fight, like aliens with the blues in an avatar, right? Like we can understand and imagine experience is very different from our own and feel profound empathy for people.

01:09:38:15 - 01:10:00:18

Kayla Williams

Having experience is very different from our own. So when our fellow Americans ask us, what was it like if we say, you wouldn't understand, that's not fair to them, and it ends up hurting us in the long run, because we are not giving them, offering them that window into our experiences. And I understand we can't all do that right away.

01:10:00:20 - 01:10:30:06

Kayla Williams

Not everybody's ever going to be able to do that. But I think the biggest thing that we can do to foster this wider understanding of PTSD is to when and how possible, be candid, tell the truth about what it is like. And if a way to do that is through, comedy boot camp or through writing as as I have done, I'm a writer or through film or through any other type of art, or pointing people towards those things.

01:10:30:06 - 01:10:49:10

Kayla Williams

If you can't share your own experiences to say, hey, read this book or go watch this movie, it'll give you some insight into it. I think that that is a really important, way that we can help folks understand right now, a movie that I'm really, encouraging folks to see is my dead friend Zoe. It's fantastic.

01:10:49:10 - 01:11:08:21

Kayla Williams

It gives a great window into post-traumatic stress from a multigenerational perspective. And it's a fantastic film. So opening up instead of closing down, I think that's how we can help, help folks understand what?

01:11:08:23 - 01:11:31:14

Chris Jachimiec

And, Kayla, I'm going to riff off of you a little bit. There is like, for us comic book nerds that, like a lot of it is if you want to examine, nothing better than PTSD and PTG, look at the story arc of Thor in The Avengers, especially that aspect where he is Fat Thor and he's not there and can't get out of his own home, but then eventually comes back and finds purpose by joining the Guardians of the Galaxy.

01:11:31:14 - 01:11:50:24

Chris Jachimiec

Later on, after his home had been destroyed, his dad is dead and his brother betrayed them, and his whole community of Asgard has been burned down to the ground. So that's a great thing. And I think it ties into

this theme about the storytelling is, I'm going to, you know, I'll keep it in fantasy. Is Tyrion Lannister at the end?

01:11:50:24 - 01:12:12:16

Chris Jachimiec

The Game of Thrones says, what unites people armies? Gold flag? No, it's stories. There's nothing more powerful in the world than a good story. Nothing can stop it and no enemy can defeat it. And what we need to do as veterans is to tell our stories of our experiences, to get away from the information that might be played out there.

01:12:12:16 - 01:12:32:04

Chris Jachimiec

That is not quite accurate. You have this experience, go out there and meet your community members that you represent, and you wore the uniform for halfway and tell them your story. Tell them the truth about your military service. We're not all Navy Seals and Rangers and kicking down doors. If you were a cook, be proud that you were a cook.

01:12:32:04 - 01:12:43:13

Chris Jachimiec

If you were an admin troop, be proud that you weren't admin troop because you facilitated the mission that made this nation better. Go out there and tell your story on this and that will change this nation.

01:12:43:15 - 01:13:20:05

Carie Rodgers

I also think that, you know, part of what we need to be fostering is. The sense that we are a community and the that we are each other's safety net. And I'm not sure how much it matters which way you reacted to something. Right? Whether it's got a deal or it's got whatever, you know, whatever we want to call something, what we're talking about is fostering each other, recovery and growth.

01:13:20:06 - 01:13:46:20

Carie Rodgers

And, I think will be the best way I can describe this. And I don't really love this jargon when we are othering people. Right. Oh, that's to you, not me. That's when we get in trouble. That's when we lose sight of that. We are in communities with people who have different experiences that we do and react to different things than we do.

01:13:47:01 - 01:14:09:24

Carie Rodgers

And that doesn't mean and it doesn't mean that you always have to understand. You don't have to, always understand to show up and to ask how you can be helpful to support somebody in their getting better or in their growth, or in their just being where they're at, right now. Because there's not there's not any movement right now.

01:14:09:24 - 01:14:39:17

Carie Rodgers

And that's just what it looks like. But I really think that what we need to be doing is foster a sense that we are all in this together. And maybe

we can back off of some of the labels and some of the other thing that's happening. And just remember that we're neighbors and you don't even have to like everybody, but you can still show up.

01:14:39:19 - 01:15:08:10

Sidra Montgomery

Well, I'd like to thank all of our panelists for sharing their insights and you as our viewer for tuning in. We hope that you found this discussion to be informative, insightful, and meaningful. As an organization dedicated to fostering learning, leadership and belonging to improve quality of life across the broader service ecosystem. The A-G Military Veteran and Family Center of Excellence is proud to provide a platform to talk about the key issues affecting military and veteran communities.

01:15:08:12 - 01:15:24:24

Sidra Montgomery

We encourage you to share this video with your network, and together, let's reframe the narrative. You can follow and catch up with everything that A-G and our military veteran and Family Center of Excellence is doing through our LinkedIn page and our website, A-G associates.com. Thank you for tuning in.