



Strengthening the Force by Strengthening Military Families:

*Mental Health Challenges Facing Service
Members and Their Families*

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Why This Matters



★ **A distracted or struggling family directly affects mission readiness, retention, and quality of life.**

Military readiness depends upon:

- Physically healthy service members
- Mentally healthy service members
- Strong military families
- Supportive military communities

Military Mental Health Data



- Approximately **1 in 10** active-duty service members receives care for a mental health condition each year.
- Anxiety and adjustment disorders each affect about **7.5%** of the active-duty force annually.
- More than **500** service members died by suicide in 2023, with young enlisted members at greatest risk.
- **146** military family members lost their lives to suicide in 2023.
- Military spouses and children experience elevated rates of anxiety, depression, and stress related to deployments and military life.
- PTSD affects an estimated **14–16%** of deployed U.S. military personnel, underscoring the importance of early identification and treatment.

The Current Environment



★ **Military service affects the entire family—not just the individual wearing the uniform.**

Today's military families experience:

- Frequent relocations
- Operational tempo
- Geographic separation
- Financial pressures
- Childcare challenges
- Employment disruptions for spouses
- Social isolation
- Constant uncertainty

Invisible Wounds



Mental health conditions may include:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- PTSD
- Moral injury
- Grief
- Adjustment disorders
- Substance misuse
- Burnout



These injuries deserve the same compassion and treatment as physical injuries.

Stress Across the Military Lifecycle



Before Service

- Family expectations
- Transition into military culture



During Service

- Deployments
- PCS moves
- Long work hours
- Family separations
- Operational stress



Transition

- Retirement
- Medical separation
- Identity loss
- Employment changes



Veteran Life

- Continued mental health needs
- Caregiver stress
- Reintegration

Challenges Facing Military Spouses



Military spouses often experience:

- Interrupted careers
- Financial uncertainty
- Parenting alone during deployments
- Caregiver responsibilities
- Isolation after relocation
- Difficulty building support networks

★ **Many become the emotional anchor for the entire family.**

Challenges Facing Military Children



Military children may experience:

- Multiple school changes
- Separation from parents
- Anxiety during deployments
- Social adjustment difficulties
- Increased household responsibilities

Protective factors include:

- Stable adult relationships
- Strong schools
- Community support
- Access to behavioral health care



Barriers to Care



Although access has improved substantially, many service members continue to delay seeking care because of:

- Fear of stigma
- Career concerns
- Confidentiality worries
- Unit culture
- Limited time due to operational demands

Top Military Mental Health Diagnosis



Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

- Service members have a higher rate of witnessing severe injuries, accidental deaths, violent deaths, or learn of deaths by suicide.
- Service members also risk non-military-related traumas, such as interpersonal violence and physical or sexual abuse.
- Symptoms related to these traumas may be exacerbated in the deployed environment.

Depression

- Separation from loved ones and support systems, the high-stress military environment, exposure to trauma, physical injuries and chronic pain, and transitions out of the military are all unique factors that increase risk of depression
- Depression symptoms affect the service member's capacity to operate at full potential or transition well into Veteran status as a civilian.

Additional Mental Health Concerns



Moral Injury

- Service members have high exposure to potentially morally injurious events which are conceptualized as "perpetration, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations" (Litz, et al., 2009).
- Associated with shame, self-blame, poor self-worth, low compassion, anger, and loss of trust

Suicidal Ideation

- Research has shown that service members are at significantly **increased risk of suicide during their first year after leaving the military service.**
- Risk often fluctuates and therefore periodic check-ins are important

Talking About Mental Health With Transitioning Service Members & Families



Ask about
military service
history early

Leaving service
is an identity
shift, *not just a
job change*

Use military-
culturally
competent
language

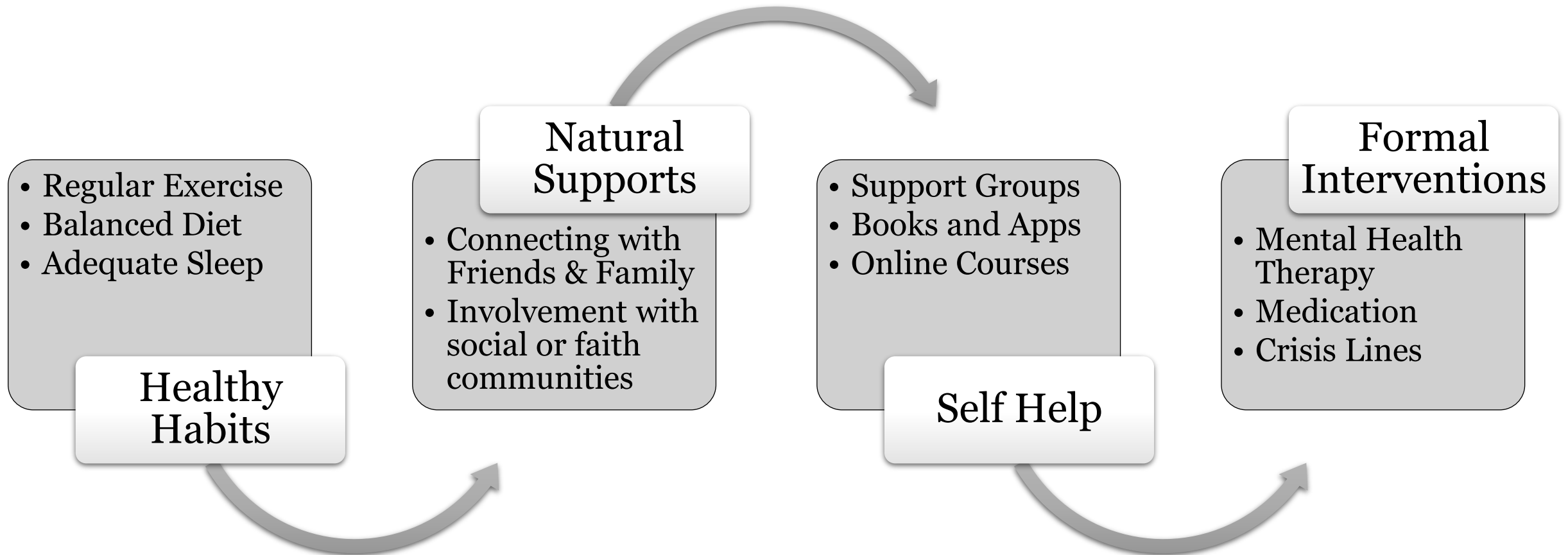
Frame help-
seeking as a
strength

Include the
family system

Address broader
psychosocial
concerns

Screen for
elevated suicide
risk

Pathways to Resilience



Senior Leaders Influence Culture



★ Service members watch leaders. ★ Families watch leaders.
★ Communities watch leaders.

When senior leaders openly support mental wellness:

- Stigma decreases
- Help-seeking increases
- Trust improves
- Readiness improves

The Role of Flag Officer Spouses



Your influence extends beyond protocol.

You help shape:

- Community climate
- Family resilience
- Connectedness
- Compassion
- Access to resources

★ **You often become trusted voices within military communities.**

Reducing Stigma

Normalize:

Counseling

Marriage counseling

Parenting support

Stress management

Peer support

Seeking help demonstrates strength



Suicide Prevention



★ **Most individuals considering suicide show warning signs.**

Protective factors include:

- Strong relationships
- Purpose
- Connectedness
- Access to care
- Hope
- Every conversation matters

Special Considerations



Remember:

- National Guard families
- Reserve families
- Dual military families
- Special needs families
- Families of wounded warriors
- Gold Star families
- Each experiences unique stressors

What You Can Do



You can:

- ✓ Listen without judgment
- ✓ Encourage help-seeking
- ✓ Welcome new families
- ✓ Support spouse employment initiatives
- ✓ Promote mental wellness
- ✓ Share resources
- ✓ Model compassion

★ **Small acts often have lifelong impact.**

Stories Matter



A single conversation can:

- Change a life
- Reconnect a marriage
- Support a struggling child
- Prevent a suicide
- Restore hope

★ **Leadership is often remembered through moments of compassion.**



Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinics

Founded by Steven A. Cohen in 2016, Cohen Veterans Network was created to serve post-9/11 veterans and military families through our

Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinics.

- *Improve quality of life* for veterans and military families
- *Outpatient mental health clinics* with trained clinicians
- Provide *high-quality mental health care* that is *accessible to all*

Mission



ACCESSIBLE

LOW TO
NO
COST

HIGH
QUALITY

Cohen Veterans Network's mission is to improve the quality of life for post-9/11 veterans and military families by providing low to no cost, high-quality, accessible, and integrated mental health care. Through a network of outpatient mental health clinics, trained clinicians deliver **holistic evidence-based care** to treat mental health conditions, while working to destigmatize mental health treatment.

Who We Serve at CVN



Service
Members/
Veterans

Family Members



Includes
National
Guard and
Reserves

Includes
Dishonorable
Discharge

Includes
Caretakers,
Spouses,
Children

Family members
of active duty and
Guard/Reserves

Others as
defined by the
veteran

Find Care

A person wearing a red and black plaid shirt and a large backpack is carrying a young child on their back. The child is wearing a straw hat, a red shirt, and denim overalls. They are standing on a grassy hill, looking out over a hazy landscape with a body of water in the distance. The scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of a sunset or sunrise.

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Adjustment issues
- Substance misuse
- Anger
- Grief and loss
- Family issues
- Transition challenges
- Sleep problems
- Relationship problems
- Children's behavioral problems

Our Care



Our **Cohen Clinics** provide:

- Confidential care
- Cost will never be a barrier to care
- Short wait times
- Military competent care
- Welcoming clinic environment for all
- Case Management support for employment, housing, finances, and education
- Telehealth available at all clinics

Leadership

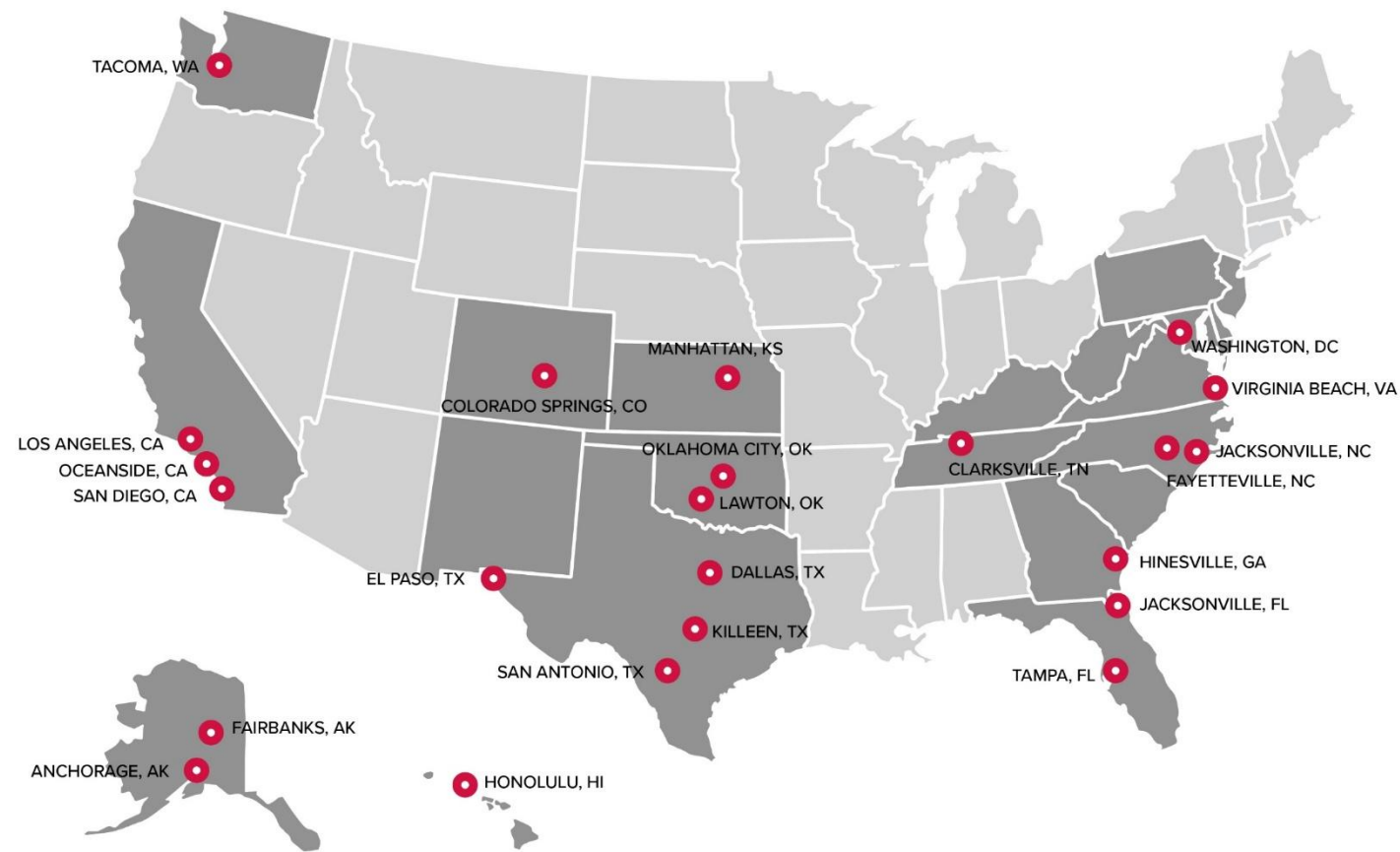
CVN and Cohen Clinics are operated by a team of highly qualified individuals including social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, and mental health professionals-

many of whom are veterans themselves.





Cohen Veterans Network



- CLINIC OPEN NOW
- CARE AVAILABLE VIA TELEHEALTH
- CLINIC COMING SOON

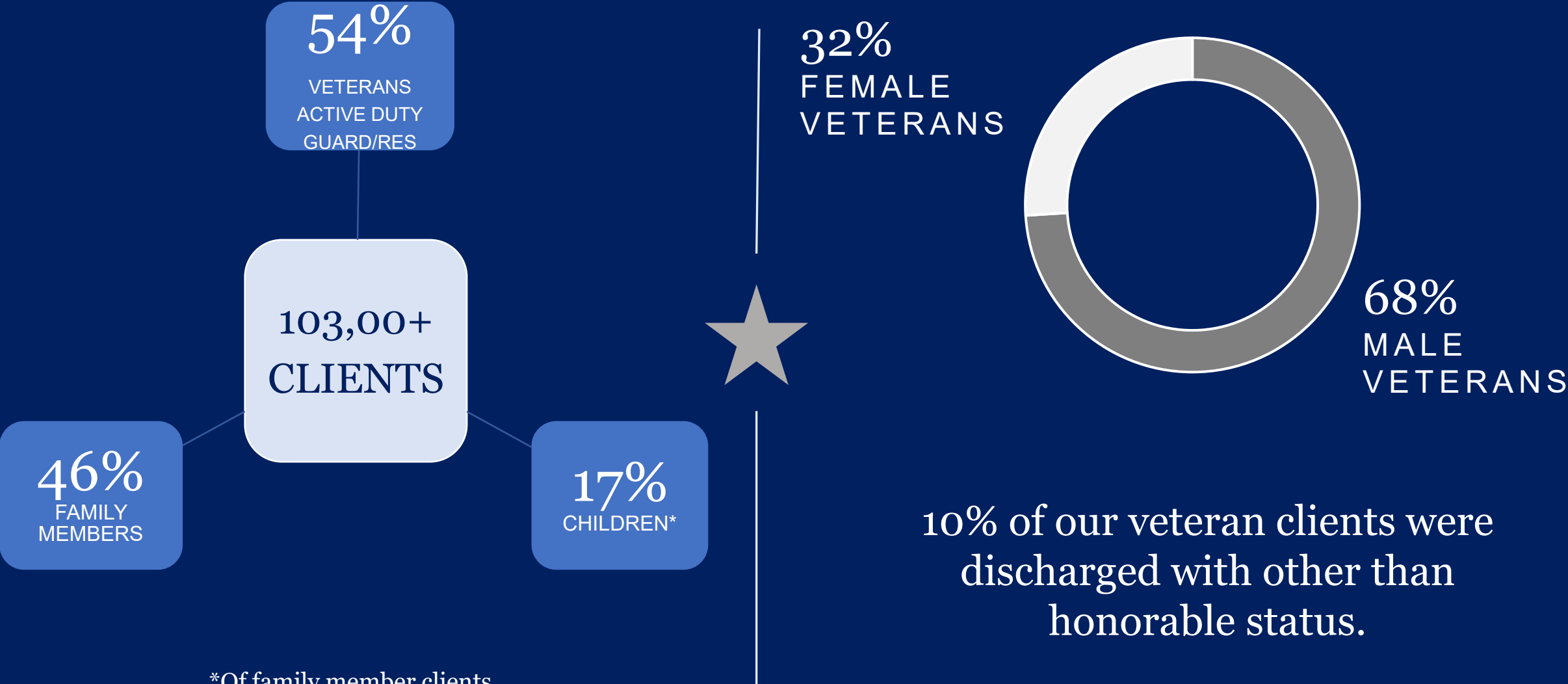
Our Care

Our components of high-quality care:

- Clinical screenings & assessments
- Evidence-based therapies
- Military cultural competence
- Network referrals for community resources, continued support
- Ongoing clinical training for providers



Cohen Veterans Network Clients



CVN Points Of Contact



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