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Veterans and families respond to cultural organization's quest to identify their behavioral health care needs

Columbus, OH - The Ohio Departments of Mental Health and Veterans Services join the Multiethnic Advocates for Cultural Competence (MACC) in releasing the 2010 "*Learning Your Needs*" (LYN) *Cultural Competence Needs Assessment on Veterans and Family Members*. The report highlights the challenges, and more importantly, the opportunities for service and care providers to reach, and appropriately serve the needs of, active and retired service personnel and their loved ones. The project was conducted to gather information on the knowledge of, use and appropriateness of mental health services for veterans and their families.

"As a statewide organization focused on addressing the needs of racial, ethnic and cultural communities, we recognized the insular nature of the military and veteran cultures and the importance in reaching out and collaborating with veteran service organizations and family support groups," stated Charleta B. Tavares, MACC Executive Director. "The LYN assessment gave us insight into the difficulty of veterans and their families in connecting and taking advantage of services, information and programs that may be of benefit to them."

The assessment included interviews, and online and hard copy surveys. Veterans who participated identified these themes for consideration: better coordinate systems serving veterans, educate service providers on all programs for which veterans and their families are eligible, address growing issues of homelessness and prepare for the influx of Iraq/Afghanistan veterans. Family members identified the need for training of state hospital staff on war trauma and additional mental health resources.

Ohio Department of Veterans Services Director Bill Hartnett said the MACC research is important because this information comes from veterans, and also from some of their family members. "Not only do we have testimony from our veterans who were placed in harm's way," said Hartnett, "but we also have insights from family members who live and love with them on a daily basis. That's why this MACC research is such an insight."

According to Ohio Department of Mental Health Director Sandra Stephenson, "This outreach to veterans, service members and their families is necessary because of the great need that exists for mental health services to help with issues during and after deployment. The data in this report is indicative of that need and will assist our communities to develop the initiatives, treatment protocols and empathy that will support Ohio's military personnel."

Since 2006, the MACC has conducted mental health needs assessments among 12 racial, ethnic and cultural communities through a Transformation State Incentive Grant to Ohio from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. To receive a copy of the report or for additional information, contact MACC at (614) 221-7841 or yaldea@maccinc.net.