



### From the Editor

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### Introduction to the Special Edition

Helping this generation of troops and veterans make a successful transition from the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan and into the civilian world is a crucial issue for social workers and other health and human service professionals. With over 2 million military personnel returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, military drawdown and budget cuts, and evidence mounting of numerous challenges many veterans face, the issue of working to help these warriors make a successful transition is one of the most important challenges facing our field and communities today. However, it will require more than increased educational benefits to help ensure that our veterans are successful in making this transition and succeeding on our college campuses and in the community in civilian jobs. To address this challenge requires an understanding of who our troops and veterans are and where they have been. In addition, communities, human service organizations, and universities must respond by developing supportive services in a variety of areas including mental health, health, legal, education, peer-to-peer, adaptive sports, housing, substance abuse, and special supportive employment services. Helping this generation of veterans transition into the community is one of the most important challenges facing our nation today.

The data on veterans' needs have been chronicled and continue to unfold. To date, over 2 million troops have been deployed in these operations, and over half a million have been released from active duty after deployment requiring transition services. Over 42,000 soldiers have been wounded, many with multiple traumatic injuries requiring interdisciplinary treatment, and over 5,000 have been killed. Geographic mobility and separations, multiple and long deployments, and signature injuries such as Minimal and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) from incidents of improvised explosive devices (IED) contribute to difficulties for the soldier transitioning home. A hallmark 2008 Rand study found that among the 17% of returning soldiers identified with post-traumatic

stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, many reported being concerned that seeking services would possibly stigmatize them, and this continues to be a challenge. These needs, coupled with challenges of access to existing care, infrastructure that is not adequate to the surge of veterans needing assistance, long-term health care implications, continued issues regarding adequate peer-to-peer services, and evidence that the stigma of receiving care is still an existing barrier to using services, are factors that will challenge our field for the next two decades.

These factors have profound implications for the education of our professionals who will serve this population and for national, state, and local staff of veteran-serving organizations. This special issue helps address the need for more focus on our veterans and their stories of transition back, as well as efforts to help them be successful. We sit at a historical intersection of the military, higher education, and social work practice at a time of great national challenge. We have been a nation at war for over a decade. Those sent to fight are now returning, and our work to help these warriors make this transition back is only just beginning.

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