



It is important for Airmen to have access to resources for [invisible wounds](#). In many instances, Airmen may require medical treatment within primary care, Behavioral Health Optimization Program (BHOP), the Mental Health Clinic, and may also benefit from options described below.

Complementary Treatments for Health and Well-being

The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health defines Complementary and Integrative Health (CIH)¹ as “treatments not considered to be standard in the current practice of traditional or Western medicine.” Many CIH services have proven beneficial. Battlefield Acupuncture (BFA), for example, has been shown to reduce acute, chronic, and neuropathic pain, and can also be an option when opioids/narcotics are not desired by a patient.

According to a 2017 RAND report, one-third of the U.S. adult population and up to 45% of active duty military members use CIH approaches. Additionally, the report noted an estimated 83% of Military Treatment Facilities offer CIH treatments to service members, including but not limited to²:

- Acupuncture
- Chiropractic
- Guided imagery
- Mindfulness meditation
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Stress management/relaxation therapy

The Veteran’s Administration reported that Veterans with 8 or more CIH visits over the course of a year decreased their opioid average daily dose, showed decreased perceived stress, and enhanced feeling of control over their lives.

Healing Arts Therapies & Programs

Participation in [creative arts therapies](#) can help decrease anxiety, improve sleep, and increase positive emotions. This type of complementary treatment, led by nationally certified creative arts therapists, has been shown to increase engagement in therapy, and help patients’ invisible wounds to become more “visible”³. These types of healing arts are being used in clinical and non-clinical settings to promote physical and mental healing and improve overall well-being. Examples include:

- Craft-making
- Creative writing
- Dance
- Drama
- Music
- Visual arts

Research has shown that creative arts therapies are highly rated by participants and are non-invasive, cost-effective medical treatments that make a difference in people’s lives which medicine alone could not achieve. 85% of military patients say art therapy helped their healing and patients often rate art therapy among the top treatments⁵.

Community Organizations and Clinical Programs

Leaders play a critical role in encouraging Airmen to seek treatment for invisible wounds and normalizing the culture for addressing mental health concerns. If your Airmen are interested in learning about clinically-based complementary therapy programs, encourage them to check the Recreation Therapy Department of their local VA hospital. A few examples of programs include:

- [Arts in the Armed Forces](#): Arts are used to foster conversations between service members, civilians, and family to promote resilience, boost morale, and build community
- [Rock to Recovery](#): Music helps people heal through writing, playing, and performing as a group. [Music therapy](#) is evidence-based therapy using music to help individuals reach personal goals
- [Gardening Therapy](#): In addition to medical treatment, gardening can improve health. Two examples of gardening programs for Veterans are these offered in [Boston](#) and [Dayton](#)
- [Equine Therapy](#): [Horses](#) are comforting for invisible wound symptoms, helping Service Members to recover both mentally and physically

The [Invisible Wounds Center at Eglin AFB](#), an Invisible Wounds Initiative that strives to develop comprehensive treatment for mental health, joins the network of Intrepid Spirit Centers where Airmen receive both traditional and CIH treatments.

Resources



The [Mindfulness Coach App](#) provides simple mindfulness practices.



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

[U.S. Department of Veteran’s Affairs Whole Health Program](#) is VA’s cutting-edge approach to care that supports overall health and well-being.



[The National Intrepid Center of Excellence \(NICoE\) at Walter Reed Hospital](#) provides hope, healing, discovery, and learning for patients and families impacted by TBI.



[2019 Air, Space, and Cyber Conference Healing Arts Panel](#) discusses creative outlets to help Airmen cope with stressors unique to military life.



[The NEA Creative Forces Program](#) was launched in 2016, as part of an earlier NEA Military Healing Arts Partnership at NICoE.

¹ https://www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=5401

² https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1380.html

³ <https://www.arts.gov/partnerships/creative-forces/why-healing-arts>