

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-1502**

July 21, 2016

The Honorable Robert A. McDonald  
Secretary  
Department of Veterans' Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

I write today to inquire about the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) policies regarding mental health admissions at VA Medical Centers. It is with great sadness that I recently learned of a constituent's suicide following his visit this July to the Iowa City VA Medical Center in my district. I am very troubled by the reported circumstances surrounding his passing, and I am committed to finding out more about the VA's admissions procedures to make sure that we can prevent a tragedy like this from occurring again.

Specifically, I was disturbed to receive reports that the veteran had been turned away after he reached out to a psychiatrist at the VA to request that he be admitted for in-patient care at the Medical Center's mental health department. According to a posting that the individual wrote on a social media website, his request was denied despite him explaining that he was in crisis and needed urgent assistance. The veteran tragically took his own life shortly thereafter.

We owe those who have served access to high-quality health care, and that must include timely, robust mental health services that meet the unique needs of our veterans. No veteran should ever have to struggle alone with mental health issues after fighting for our country. Twenty veterans commit suicide every day – one is too many.

For this reason, I write today to learn more about the VA's procedure for processing requests for admission to a VA mental health department. Why would a veteran who shows signs of being in crisis be denied admission to a VA mental health department? Why would an individual explicitly requesting in-patient psychiatric care be denied? Is the VA required to follow up with veterans if they are denied in-patient psychiatric care to inquire about their condition?

I have inquired about these issues directly with the Iowa City VA Medical Center, but have yet to receive a response. All of America's veterans deserve timely and high quality mental health care, which is why I am interested in how admissions policies are administered throughout the VA.

I know that you share my deep concern for our veterans' mental health and safety, and I thank you in advance for your response to this inquiry. As the details of this specific incident come to light, I look forward to working with you to ensure that no veteran's call for help goes unanswered.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dave Loeb sack". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D".

Dave Loeb sack  
Member of Congress