



Veterans Recovery Pilot Program Evaluation Report

**As Required by
Texas Health and Safety Code
Section 49.008**

Health and Human Services

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Executive Summary

The *Veterans Recovery Pilot Program Evaluation Report* is prepared in compliance with [Texas Health and Safety Code, Section 49.008](#), as added by House Bill (H.B.) 271, 85th Legislature, Regular Session, 2017. The biennial report is due to the governor, lieutenant governor, speaker of the House of Representatives, and appropriate standing committees of the legislature no later than October 1 of each even-numbered year. Section 49.008 requires the report to include an evaluation of the effectiveness of the pilot program, as well as the number of veterans and facilities participating in the pilot program.

Pursuant to Texas Health and Safety Code Section 49.002, further implementation of the Veterans Recovery Pilot Program is on hold pending sufficient funding in the Veterans Recovery Account, including an evaluation of the program upon completion of the pilot program.

The Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) continues to explore next steps regarding the program. This report includes information on the funds available in the Veterans Recovery Account and summarizes HHSC's efforts to gather more information for the pilot program implementation.

Since the last report in October 2018, HHSC has conducted the following activities:

- Analyzed research on the existing hyperbaric oxygen treatment (HBOT) programs for people with traumatic brain injuries (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); and
- Developed a request for information (RFI) to obtain information on the program protocols and project design for HBOT programs for people with TBI or PTSD.

1. Background

H.B. 271 amended Health and Safety Code, Chapter 49, to establish the Veterans Recovery Pilot Program. The program seeks to provide diagnostic services, HBOT, and support services to eligible veterans who have PTSD or a TBI, pending sufficient funds in the Veterans Recovery Account established pursuant to Health and Safety Code, Section 49.004.

Health and Safety Code, Section 49.008, requires HHSC to submit a report to the governor, lieutenant governor, speaker of the house of representatives, and appropriate standing committees of the legislature on the pilot program no later than October 1 of each even-numbered year. The report must include:

- An evaluation of the effectiveness of the Veterans Recovery Pilot Program;
- The number of veterans; and
- The number of facilities participating in the pilot program.

Veterans Recovery Account

The Veterans Recovery Account is a dedicated account in the general revenue fund to support the Veterans Recovery Pilot Program. The account consists of:

- Gifts, grants, and other donations received for the account; and
- Interest earned on the investment of money in the fund prior to September 1, 2019.¹

Funds from the account can only be used to pay for the following:

- Expenses of administering the pilot program;
- Diagnostic testing and treatment of a veteran with PTSD or a TBI under the pilot program; and
- Necessary travel and living expenses for a veteran required to travel to obtain treatment under the pilot program.

¹ Effective September 1, 2019, House Bill 3317, 86th Legislature, reactivated Texas Government Code Section 403.0956 in which interest for any type of revenue is no longer kept by the program but goes to General Revenue.

As of September 21, 2020, the account had a total of \$1,242.83 to be used toward the pilot program. This includes one \$1,200 donation received in December 2017 and \$42.83 from interest gained on the donation.

HHSC has posted information on the pilot program and how to donate to the account on the HHSC website and distributed to stakeholders for awareness.²

Hyperbaric Oxygen Treatment (HBOT)

HHSC conducted a literature review of the existing research on HBOT programs for people with TBI, PTSD or both. The review included an analysis of existing research on HBOT programs and research on existing HBOT programs for people with brain injury and PTSD.

² <https://hhs.texas.gov/services/disability/acquired-brain-injury/veterans-recovery-pilot-program>

2. Veterans Recovery Pilot Program

Health and Safety Code, Section 49.004(e), as established by H.B. 271, directs Health and Human Services (HHS) to seek reimbursement for payments made under the pilot program from the TRICARE program of the United States Department of Defense, appropriate federal agencies, and any other responsible third-party payor. While TRICARE does cover the cost of HBOT for some FDA-approved uses such as air or gas embolisms, carbon monoxide poisoning, and decompression sickness, TRICARE does not cover HBOT for TBI.³ Other insurance providers will also typically only cover HBOT treatment for FDA-approved uses.^{4,5} Therefore, reimbursement for costs associated with the pilot program from TRICARE may not be possible.

On January 2, 2019, HHSC posted an RFI to solicit information on establishing protocols for HBOT programs for treating TBI and PTSD in veterans. The RFI was posted on the Electronic State Business Daily and interested parties were notified. Respondents were asked to answer questions about implementation policies, treatment protocols, staff and equipment needs, costs of operation, and research on the effectiveness of HBOT for individuals with brain injuries or PTSD. Responses were due on March 12, 2019. HHSC received two responses to the RFI.

HHSC will continue to research, prepare for and discuss development of the pilot program by learning more about veteran needs and HBOT treatment programs across the United States, exploring funding streams for implementation, and collaborating with other HHS programs and state agencies. Within HHSC, there are two offices dedicated to supporting health and human services for Texas veterans: the HHSC Office of Veteran Services and the HHSC Veterans Mental Health Coordination and Programs in HHSC's Office of Mental Health Coordination. These two offices, as well as other agencies or groups with a focus on veterans' health, will provide valuable information to develop pilot program goals. In addition, HBOT as a therapeutic treatment is being explored or implemented in other states. HHSC will utilize the National Association of State Head Injury Administrators network to identify these states and learn about their best practices for program development

³ TRICARE Covered Services: Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy. Available at <https://tricare.mil/CoveredServices/IsItCovered/HyperbaricOxygenTherapy>. Last accessed April 29, 2020.

⁴ American Hyperbaric Center: Conditions for Treatment. Available at <http://www.americanhbot.com/conditions>. Last accessed April 29, 2020.

⁵ Blue Cross Blue Shield, A Healthy Me: Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy. Available at <http://www.ahealthyme.com/RelatedItems/134,147>. Last accessed April 29, 2020.

and implementation. In addition to developing program goals and best practices for program operation, HHSC will also utilize these networks to determine the funding needs to implement the pilot program in Texas.

Using information gathered from the RFI and research on HBOT, HHSC plans to develop a request for applications (RFA), contingent on sufficient funds in the Veterans Recovery Account. The agency will continue researching the funding needed to develop the program. The RFA will be used to contract with a brain injury subject matter expert with expertise in HBOT to develop program and medical protocols for establishing and operating the Veterans Recovery Pilot Program. The program will provide diagnostic services, HBOT and support services to eligible veterans who have PTSD, a TBI or both. HHSC does not have staff with this expertise and needs consultation for these services. The anticipated release date for the RFA is contingent on funding availability.

Contingent on sufficient funds, HHSC will also conduct a competitive procurement to establish contracts with eligible facilities. While the extent of activities will depend on the final budget available in the Veterans Recovery Account, the agency will seek to utilize and maximize other potential funding streams.

3. Conclusion

HHSC released an RFI on January 2, 2019 and reviewed existing HBOT programs in the United States designed specifically to treat TBI and PTSD. HHSC will continue to prepare for implementation of the pilot program by developing and implementing a work plan to gain information about veteran health needs, set program goals, create best practices for program implementation and develop a strategy for determining funding needs.

Contingent on available funds, the RFA for the solicitation of a subject matter expert will help HHSC with the development of program and medical protocols as well as identification of funding needs to implement the pilot program.

HHSC will continue to share information about the Veterans Recovery Pilot Program and the Veterans Recovery Account, research existing HBOT programs, determine adequate funding levels, and move forward with program development once sufficient funding levels are reached.

List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name
HBOT	Hyperbaric Oxygen Treatment
HHSC	Health and Human Services Commission
FDA	United States Food and Drug Administration
OABI	Office of Acquired Brain Injury
PTSD	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
RFA	Request for Applications
RFI	Request for Information
TBI	Traumatic Brain Injury