

Who Will Take Care of the Soldiers?

Gabriel Payan

I was in the military for 10 years, and I served in Iraq from 2004 to 2005. When I came back, I experienced a lot of anger and anxiety. I had suicidal thoughts. I had a hard time leaving the house. It was a big challenge for me to function in a normal way.

I went to the clinic. The physician's assistant listened to me for about 10 minutes and then told me I had chronic indigestion. He told me to take an antacid.

The military uses us until we are too broken to use and then they discard us.

I now find comfort in speaking to other young people about my experiences. To this day, I continue to fight for the right to decent care.



Gabriel Payan in Iraq.



Gabriel Payan speaking out about his experiences.



Gabriel Payan (middle) marching with Iraq Veterans Against the War at a peace demonstration in Boston. Photo by Michael Borkson.

Gabriel Payan, originally from California, is a first generation Mexican American. He is a member of the Iraq Veterans against the War <www.ivaw.org>.

Did You Know?

- **About 44,000 U.S. troops** have been wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many injured veterans wait months to get help.
- **Nearly 20 percent of military service members** who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan—300,000 in all—report symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or major depression. Only about half of them have sought treatment. Of those, only half received treatment that was “minimally adequate” for their illnesses.
- **Suicides among soldiers in 2008** rose for the fourth year in a row, reaching the highest level in nearly three decades.

Sources: <www.msnbc.msn.com>, <www.sciencedaily.com>, <www.icasualty.org>, <www.nytimes.com>.