# Mental Health Stigma Persists in Security Clearance Process, Leidos Study Reveals

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*Report highlights opportunities for collaboration between Intelligence Community and private sector; provides insights to develop and implement solutions for retaining and attracting talent*

RESTON, Va., Aug. 14, 2023 /PRNewswire/ -- Leidos (NYSE: LDOS), a FORTUNE® 500 science and technology leader, announced today a new study on mental health stigma within the Intelligence Community (IC) and implications for the security clearance investigation process. The research shows that despite positive changes in how the government considers mental health in the application review process, stigma, misinformation and misunderstanding persist.

"The security clearance process is essential to protecting our national security, but it should not discourage current and prospective cleared employees from taking care of their mental fitness," said Roy Stevens, Leidos Intelligence Group president. "As society takes a more sophisticated view on the importance of mental health, persistent stigmas remain. We hope this report sparks a new discussion focused on solutions, support and maintaining the talent pipeline for careers in intelligence."

"The stigma of mental health has been pervasive in our industry for far too long and we applaud Leidos for putting this study together and driving the conversation toward solutions," said Suzanne Wilson Heckenberg, President of the Intelligence and National Security Association (INSA) and Foundation (INSF). "By eliminating barriers to attracting talent the IC can grow and strengthen our resources while enhancing our nation's security."

The paper, "Mental Health and Security Clearances: Addressing Misperceptions and Stigma," offers qualitative and quantitative data that examines the current state of the security clearance process. It also addresses perceptions among security clearance holders and prospective applicants, many of whom report anxieties that seeking support could jeopardize their clearance status.

The research found increased awareness and understanding related to mental health among younger clearance seekers. However, the research found significant levels of mistrust as to how mental health disclosures are evaluated during the clearance process. This was compounded by a view that the adjudication process lacks transparency.

The white paper's recommendations were informed by interviews with current and former security clearance holders. The insights were further enhanced by a roundtable session hosted by Stevens with leaders from across the IC as well as Wilson Heckenberg of INSA and industry peers. These recommendations include:

1. Recognize the role leadership plays in fostering a culture where mental well-being is prioritized.
2. Consider continuous evaluation of mental health needs for the IC workforce.
3. Train recruiters and security clearance personnel on how to destigmatize mental well-being with applicants.
4. Establish and overcommunicate clear criteria for mental health evaluation to debunk stigma and misconceptions among recruits and IC officers.

"We believe these recommendations will help create a supportive environment for people seeking help," said Stevens. "As a people company, Leidos is committed to working with our partners and peers in the IC to find solutions. We look forward to supporting the broader security clearance community to implement these recommendations and ensure that everyone has access to the care they need."

The white paper is available for download by clicking here.

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Leidos is a Fortune 500® technology, engineering, and science solutions and services leader working to solve the world's toughest challenges in the defense, intelligence, civil, and health markets. The company's 46,000 employees support vital missions for government and commercial customers. Headquartered in Reston, Virginia, Leidos reported annual revenues of approximately $14.4 billion for the fiscal year ended December 30, 2022. For

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