



CENTENNIAL TALKING POINTS

A century ago, more than 200,000 veterans came home injured or ill from their service in WWI to a nation not prepared or equipped to provide the medical care and services they needed. Many had been kept alive by improvements in medical technology, but the advancements made on the battlefield created a brutal reality—these veterans would require a lifetime of care, but with no government department or agency able to claim overall responsibility for the veterans a glaring need was discovered.

Cincinnati's Robert S. Marx, who served as an army captain and received a Distinguished Service Cross from his time in WWI, returned to the United States and, along with a handful of other WWI combat veterans, set out to start an organization of their own that would seek to improve medical care and job training for injured veterans.

In 1920, the Disabled American Veterans of the World War (now DAV—Disabled American Veterans) was founded and headed by Marx, who summed up the need for DAV by saying, “We had a common experience which bound us together, and we are out to continue through an organization of our own... an organization of us, by us and for us.”

A century later, medical advancements continue to save lives of service members in combat zones, but all too frequently, these injuries are devastating and require a lifetime of care. With 100 years of service and support and more than one million members, DAV continues the fight for medical treatment, employment and earned benefits for America's 4 million disabled veterans, who need our help today just as they did after the “War to End All Wars.”

DAV's founding and mission

- When DAV was founded in 1920, there was no central, federal agency responsible for assisting the combat veterans wounded in the trenches of World War I with medical care or education, and there was no organization to fight for better lives for the men and women who have served and their families.
- In 1932, Congress recognized the Disabled American Veterans of the World War's unique and outstanding service to veterans by issuing a federal charter to the organization, and since then, DAV has filed more than 11.5 million claims for benefits and represents more than one million veterans today as their powers of attorney.
- Today, with more than one million members, DAV remains a leading voice on Capitol Hill and serves veterans across the nation with the mission of ensuring our nation's service men and women who put everything on the line in defense of America's freedom receive the benefits they have earned.

How DAV has impacted generations of veterans

WWII

- The number of those who served in World War II was four times that of World War I, and DAV committed to ensure the organization could effectively respond to the rising number of disabled veterans returning home.
- In October of 1944, DAV launched a new National Service Officer Training Program at American University in Washington, D.C., and 354 new benefits experts were trained and hired to ensure veterans would receive their earned benefits from the VA.
- Today, with more than 100 offices nationwide and nearly 4,000 total service officers, DAV continues to make strategic decisions to position the organization to meet the ever-changing needs of present day veterans.

Korea

- A total of 5.7 million Americans served during the Korean War—over 36,000 died, and another 103,000 came home wounded, and the early 1950's saw the total population of veterans in the United States grow to 19.8 million.
- With such a sharp increase of the veteran population, employment of injured or ill veterans returned to center stage as an issue of concern for DAV, and the organization prioritized educating both the public and industry leaders about the plight of disabled veterans.
- Employment remains a top priority today, with the release of *The Veteran Advantage: DAV Guide to Hiring and Retaining Veterans with Disabilities*, aiming to dispel myths and demonstrate the business case for employing America's nearly 4 million veterans with a service-connected disability.

Vietnam

- Perhaps no time in our nation's history displays DAV's commitment to veterans more so than the Vietnam War era.
- Initially, benefits for Vietnam veterans, even those who came home from the war injured or ill, were not equal to those that had been granted to veterans of WWII. DAV advocates worked diligently to change that by urging passage of the Veterans Readjustment Benefits Act of 1966, which made Vietnam veterans eligible for benefits similar to veterans of WWII and Korea.
- Decades later, DAV would also successfully fight for passage of legislation ensuring presumption of exposure for Vietnam veterans made ill by Agent Orange.

Gulf War

- During the 1990s, focus was placed on expanded service programs for veterans, and DAV became the first organization to make a concerted effort to employ Gulf War era veterans.
- DAV began the National Service Officer Training Academy at the University of Colorado in Denver in 1994 to help train new benefits experts, graduating 290 new national service officers.
- One of the most pressing issues was the health care needs of Gulf War veterans, and DAV pressed for VA regulations to expand the list of undiagnosed illnesses for which these veterans could receive health care and compensation.
- DAV successfully urged Congress to authorize the VA to establish for the first time a presumption of service connection for illnesses associated with the Gulf War, removing a significant barrier to obtaining needed medical care and disability compensation for Gulf War veterans.

Post-9/11

- Immediately following the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, DAV national service officers and volunteers delivered clothing and comfort kits, transported units of blood and issued nearly 300 disaster relief grants to impacted veterans and their families.
- Less than two years later, U.S. military members found themselves at the helm of yet another coalition invasion, this time in Iraq. As the country engaged in wars on two fronts, DAV began to focus on the influx of veterans who would be returning home and the signature injuries that would follow, including traumatic brain injury.
- During this time, DAV created a new Transition Service Program, stationing benefits experts at military separation centers to inform those leaving the military about their rights and benefits as veterans immediately upon their discharge, and helping these new veterans file their necessary paperwork and claims on the spot where their military records were readily available.
- From the very start of the war on terror, DAV was lending assistance to disabled veterans and their families, and to this day DAV stands ready to support injured or ill veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

DAV's Major Innovations and Accomplishments over a Century of Service

The Forgotten Warrior Project and PTSD

- In 1976, DAV funded the groundbreaking Forgotten Warrior Project, which first defined the issue of PTSD among war veterans—particularly Vietnam veterans experiencing serious postwar mental health challenges.
- When Congress and the VA failed to act on the findings of the project, DAV initiated its own Vietnam Veterans Outreach Program which included clinical outreach—spurring other research and forcing the government to realize the psychological impact of war on veterans of Vietnam and all wars.
- The DAV Vietnam Veterans Outreach Program served as an effective treatment model to be adopted by the VA's Vet Center program, which has now served veterans for 40 years.

The Stand Up for Veterans Campaign

- In 2007, DAV received a grant of \$7 million from the California Community Foundation to begin an awareness and advocacy campaign focused on women veterans, caregivers, traumatic brain injury, mental health care and changing funding for the VA.
- The three-year campaign helped DAV achieve major victories in these areas, including: passage of advance appropriations legislation in 2009, ensuring sufficient, timely and predictable funding for the VA health care system; passage of legislation to expand the VA's caregiver program to pre-9/11 veterans in 2019; and the launch of DAV's Stand Up For Women Veterans campaign, which resulted in numerous pieces of legislation to help women veterans access VA health care and services.

Advance Funding for the VA

- One of DAV's primary legislative goals is to ensure sufficient, timely and predictable funding for veterans' health care, and the enactment in 2009 of advance appropriations was a major step towards accomplishing that goal.
- With veterans service organization partners, DAV led the charge to pass the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act in October 2009. As a result of the new law, Congress is now required to approve funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical care programs one year in advance of the next fiscal year.
- Each and every year DAV advocates for a sufficiently funded VA, and it remains a top legislative priority today—it is a part of the promises made to our service men and women and DAV is here to ensure the promise is kept.

Expansion of Benefits for Veteran Caregivers

- For many veterans who have suffered injury or illness in service to our nation, it is often a family member or friend who steps in at the most critical moment to take on the role of caregiver—often sacrificing their own career or educational pursuits.
- The Department of Veterans Affairs created a comprehensive support program for caregivers; however, that system was originally created only to serve veterans severely disabled *after* Sept. 11, 2001.
- In 2017, DAV released its report, *America's Unsung Heroes: Challenges and Inequities Facing Veteran Caregivers*, to highlight the need for more support for seriously injured veterans of all eras.
- DAV fought for legislation to expand the VA's caregiver program, language for which was ultimately included in the VA MISSION Act of 2018. The bill was signed into law in June of 2018, and DAV continues to lobby for proper implementation of the law to best serve veterans and their families.

Equalizing Benefits and Services for Women Veterans

- Women are the fastest-growing subpopulation of the military and veteran communities, representing more than 15 percent of active-duty military and 10 percent of veterans.
- Yet according to two landmark DAV reports—*Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home* (2014) and *Women Veterans: The Journey Ahead* (2018)—some women veterans continue to face significant barriers accessing health care and other earned benefits, and do not receive proper recognition for their service to the nation.
- DAV's *Women Veterans: The Journey Ahead*, spotlights how the expanding role of women in our armed forces is necessitating changes to an array of policies and programs in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and other federal agencies.
- The reports issued dozens of key recommendations covering a broad range of issues affecting women veterans throughout their lifetime, including comprehensive primary and gender-specific health care, mental health and readjustment services, and disability and employment benefits. These reports—and DAV's advocacy in Washington, also helped spur the introduction of critical legislation and enactment of policy changes to address these issues.

American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial

- Past DAV National Adjutant Art Wilson, noted philanthropist Lois Pope, and former DAV Executive Director and VA Secretary Jesse Brown shared a vision to honor disabled veterans, and together they founded the Disabled Veterans' LIFE Memorial Foundation. The foundation rallied to raise the funds necessary for the design and construction of the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial (AVDLM) in Washington, D.C. The memorial concept was endorsed by DAV and other veterans service organizations.
- Dedicated in October of 2014, the Memorial shines a light on the important lessons of courage, sacrifice, tenacity, loyalty and honor by bearing witness to the experiences of war heroes who were disabled as a result of military service. It is the first national memorial dedicated solely to disabled veterans.
- The AVDLM is another example of DAV's unwavering commitment to the men and women who have sacrificed so much for our freedom. It is a standing memorial that shows future generations of veterans that DAV will remain by their sides just like the organization has for veterans of the last 100 years.

The Road Ahead

- DAV will continue to provide a lifetime of support for veterans of all generations and stands ready to face the challenges of an aging veteran population and an American public that has fewer veterans than ever before.
- With the implementation of the VA MISSION Act, the VA is set to redirect billions of dollars into private care for veterans. DAV must continue to fight to ensure proper funding for the VA in order to provide specialized care for the men and women who have served.
- Medical technology continues to provide cutting-edge advancements in life-saving procedures that will hopefully help to minimize the human cost of war. However in many cases, the injuries and illnesses sustained during military service will still require a lifetime of medical care for many veterans.
- Despite recent progress, many women veterans still face significant barriers accessing health care and other earned benefits, and do not receive proper recognition for their service to the nation. DAV will continue to be a leading voice for women veterans, raising awareness about key issues and needed culture changes in Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs.