

Leading Veterans Groups Respond to VA Budget for Fiscal Years 2018-19

Veterans Service Organizations concerned funding will fall short to meet veteran health care demands

WASHINGTON, DC—Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Paralyzed Veterans of America (Paralyzed Veterans) and Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)— authors of *The Independent Budget* (IB)—today responded to the Administration’s proposed budget for the delivery of health care for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for FY 2018 and advance appropriations for FY 2019. The Independent Budget Veterans Service Organizations (IBVSOs) entered a statement for the record at today’s hearing before the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs.

“We appreciate the fact that the Administration’s budget request just released includes some increases in discretionary dollars for the Medical Care accounts,” stated the IBVSOs. “However, it is important for us to address the notion that VA does not need any additional resources, based on the expansive growth of overall VA expenses in the last 10 years. These ideas are not grounded in thorough analysis of demand and utilization of VA health care.”

The IBVSOs released a report on VA’s funding requirements in February 2017 warning that a potential funding crisis could arise before the end of FY 2017, and would exist in FY 2018 if VA did not address the new community care demand it has fostered without necessary resources. For FY 2018, The Independent Budget recommended approximately \$77 billion in total medical care funding. Congress previously approved only \$70 billion in total medical care funding for FY 2018, which included an assumption of approximately \$3.6 billion in

medical care collections.

“Last year’s advance appropriation request for FY 2018 medical care remains woefully inadequate to meet the ever-increasing demand for services both inside and outside the VA health care system, a fact acknowledged by VA officials. The Administration’s budget request includes a not-insignificant overall medical care funding recommendation of approximately \$75.2 billion, however we remain concerned that this level of funding will not keep pace with the continually increasing demand and utilization.”

The IBVSOs expressed specific concern for the funding of the Choice Care program, which calls for a combined \$6.4 billion for FY 2018-19 which would indefinitely continue the program as currently implemented. The IB’s recommendations for FY 2018 took into account the estimated \$1 billion VA was expected to have remaining in the Veterans Choice Fund and anticipated increases in demand for care, including community care, that will not diminish or go away if the Choice Program expires. As such, for FY 2018, *The Independent Budget* recommended \$64.5 billion for Medical Services.

This recommendation included:

Current Services Estimate.....	\$60,897,313,000
Increase in Patient Workload.....	\$1,595,242,000
Additional Medical Care Program Cost.....	\$2,001,000,000
Total FY 2018 Medical Services.....	\$64,493,555,000

“Congress must reject continued funding of the Choice Care program through a mandatory account. We recommend adhering to all other community care funded through the discretionary

Community Care account established previously. This will eliminate competing sources of funding for delivery of health care services in the community, while maintaining visibility on spending through the Choice program,” the IBVSOs said.

The IBVSOs also strongly objected to two legislative proposals included in the budget; one that would penalize millions of disabled veterans or survivors by rounding down cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) for recipients of VA disability compensation and certain other benefit programs; and the other to cutoff eligibility to recipients of disability compensation due to individual unemployability (IU) once they reach age 62.

“We are adamantly opposed to a 10-year round down of veterans’ disability compensation, which would have the cumulative effect of taking \$2.7 billion away from injured and ill veterans who rely on such payments. We are equally opposed to arbitrarily cutting off eligibility for IU for veterans who turn 62, an age at which millions of American’s continue working and saving money for their retirements, a luxury that many disabled veterans do not have. Congress must reject any proposals that seek to shift the cost of VA health care or benefits onto the backs of disabled veterans,” said the IBVSOs.

To read the complete statement entered by the IBVSOs to the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, [click here](#).

For more than 30 years, the three *Independent Budget* co-authors have presented budget and policy recommendations to Congress and the Administration. These recommendations—which are supported by 27 other health, family, military and veteran service organizations—are meant to inform Congress and the Administration of the needs of all veterans, and to offer substantive solutions to address the many health care and benefits challenges they face. This budget serves as the veterans groups’ benchmark for properly funding the Department of Veterans Affairs to ensure the timely delivery of quality

health care and accurate and appropriate benefits.

To view the full budget report, please visit www.independentbudget.org.

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About Disabled American Veterans (DAV):

DAV empowers veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity. It is dedicated to a single purpose: fulfilling our promises to the men and women who served. DAV does this by ensuring that veterans and their families can access the full range of benefits available to them; fighting for the interests of America's injured heroes on Capitol Hill; assisting them with employment; and educating the public about the great sacrifices and needs of veterans transitioning back to civilian life. A non-profit organization with nearly 1.3 million members, DAV was founded in 1920 and chartered by the U. S. Congress in 1932. Learn more at dav.org.

About Paralyzed Veterans of America (Paralyzed Veterans):

Paralyzed Veterans of America (Paralyzed Veterans) is the only congressionally chartered veterans service organization dedicated solely for the benefit and representation of

veterans with spinal cord injury or disease. For 70 years, Paralyzed Veterans has ensured that veterans have received the benefits earned through their service to our nation; monitored their care in VA spinal cord injury units; and funded research and education in the search for a cure and improved care for individuals with paralysis. With more than 70 offices and 34 chapters, Paralyzed Veterans serves veterans, their families and their caregivers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico (pva.org).

About the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW):

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. is the nation's largest and oldest major war veterans organization. Founded in 1899 and chartered by Congress in 1936, the VFW is comprised entirely of eligible veterans and military service members from the active, Guard and Reserve forces. With nearly 1.7 million VFW and Auxiliary members located in more than 6,500 Posts worldwide, the nonprofit veterans service organization is proud to proclaim "NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS" than the VFW, which is dedicated to veterans' service, legislative advocacy, and military and community service programs. For more information or to join, visit our website at VFW.org.