

# Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019



President signs comprehensive

Before the end of the 116th Congress, President Donald Trump signed the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act, now Public Law 116-171. The bipartisan legislation—introduced by Sens. Jon Tester and Jerry Moran in 2019—is a comprehensive and aggressive approach to connect more veterans with mental health care services. DAV fought hard to see this legislation signed into law before the start of the new Congress in 2021.

The law allows the Department of Veterans Affairs to improve programs for service members transitioning from military to civilian life, increase suicide prevention efforts and collaboration with non-VA community providers, expand veterans access to complementary and integrative health programs, and conduct research to better understand specific risk factors associated with mental health conditions common among veterans.

“We are extremely pleased to see this comprehensive mental health legislation become law after years of advocating on its behalf,” said National Legislative Director Joy Ilem. “This law allows the VA to take a new approach in fighting the

veteran suicide crisis.”

This comprehensive bipartisan bill, in line with DAV Resolution Number 370, will help increase outreach and services to veterans at risk of suicide and improve VA mental health services by:

- Strengthening the VA’s mental health workforce to serve more veterans by offering scholarships to mental health professionals to work at Vet Centers and placing at least one suicide prevention coordinator in every VA hospital.
- Directing the department to develop a staffing plan for increasing the number of mental health counselors and region-specific incentives needed to hire them.
- Improving rural veterans’ access to mental health care by increasing the number of locations at which veterans can access VA telehealth services.
- Implementing a pilot program to expand veterans’ access to complementary and integrative health programs through agriculture, sports and recreation and art therapies as well as post-traumatic growth programs.
- Studying the health benefits of providing integrative health treatments such as yoga, meditation, acupuncture and chiropractic care.
- Establishing a grant program that allows the VA to better collaborate with community organizations already serving veterans, with a goal of early identification and supportive prevention services for veterans at risk of suicide.
- Studying the impact of high-altitude living and associated suicide risk factors for veterans.
- Implementing a precision medicine initiative to identify and validate brain and mental health biomarkers among veterans to better identify and treat depression, anxiety, PTSD and traumatic brain injury.

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