

DAV pursues critical policy goals for the 117th Congress

A number of DAV's key legislative priorities were enacted in the 116th Congress, including historic women veterans legislation, mental health and suicide prevention, survivors' benefit reforms, benefits for Blue Water Navy veterans and the addition of three diseases—bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and Parkinsonism—as presumptive to Agent Orange exposure. Now, DAV has turned its legislative focus to achieving the organization's critical policy goals for the 117th Congress.

These goals include ensuring veterans who were exposed to toxic substances receive full and timely benefits, particularly for burn pits, Agent Orange and other known exposures. DAV will also focus on protecting veterans in the claims and appeals process, further enhancing survivor benefits, building a Veterans Health Care system for the future, eliminating health disparities and improving services for women, minority and underserved veterans, and ensuring that VA's community care network providers are required to meet the same quality and training standards for mental health and suicide prevention that are mandated for VA health providers.

“Congress needs to enact legislation that concedes burn pit exposure and removes the obstacles for veterans having to prove their individual exposure to burn pits and the toxins they emit,” said National Legislative Director Joy Ilem. “Removing these barriers will help veterans establish direct service connection in their VA disability claims, which can be a painstaking and drawn out process. We're committed to working with congressional leaders to get this done in the 117th Congress.”

Another legislative push that will help veterans during the

claims process is re-establishing the pre-decisional review period for VA accredited representatives—like DAV service officers—to ensure all veterans and claimants receive quality and timely entitlement to benefits.

In enhancing survivor benefits, DAV will work with Congress to enact legislation that would increase Dependency and Indemnity Compensation rates to 55% of 100% disability compensation to provide parity with similar federal programs, and urge Congress to index these rates for inflation.

DAV will also work with Congress to reduce the remarriage age for a surviving spouse to a more reasonable age or institute a new method of retaining eligibility so that surviving spouses do not have to wait an unreasonable length of time to maintain their benefits. Similarly, DAV will work for the removal of the 10-year delimiting date for spouses and surviving spouses to use their Dependents Educational Assistance benefits.

“Whether it’s monitoring the faithful implementation of the VA MISSION Act, ensuring all veterans have equitable access to health care or implementing mandatory suicide prevention training for all VA clinical staff and its community care partners, DAV is going to continue fighting on behalf of those who served,” said Ilem. “DAV has always stood at the forefront of legislative victories for America’s veterans and we look forward to working with congressional leaders to continue doing the same in the 117th Congress.”