

Independent Budget sets priorities for the 117th Congress



Though the COVID-19 pandemic has upended much of the past year, the Independent Budget (IB) partners—DAV, Veterans of Foreign Wars and Paralyzed Veterans of America—remain committed to elevating critical veterans issues spanning from veterans health care and benefits to employment and education. In February, the group—as it has for the past three decades—released *The Independent Budget Veterans Agenda for the 117th Congress*

along with recommendations for the Department of Veterans Affairs' fiscal year 2022 budget.

The past year has presented new challenges for veterans, impacting their access to VA health care, benefits and transition services. As the disruptions from the pandemic are expected to stretch into much of 2021, the IB's budget recommendations and critical issues reflect a cautious approach, urging flexibility in meeting unprecedented and unpredictable needs.

“Given the public health crisis and the amount of uncertainty in the year ahead, it is imperative that the new administration and VA leadership work closely with the 117th Congress and veterans organizations to ensure that there is full transparency about VA expenditures throughout fiscal year

2021,” said the IB partners.

For FY 2022, *The Independent Budget* recommendations include approximately \$102.2 billion in total medical care funding and approximately \$109.2 billion for FY 2023; however, the IB cautions that the VA must be prepared to request—and Congress should be prepared to approve—supplemental appropriations in the event that VA appropriations fall short of what is needed to provide veterans timely access to medical care. Similarly, the group says, the “VA and Congress must be ready to adjust fiscal year 2022 budget requests and appropriations to ensure full funding for all veterans benefits, programs and services.”

The impact of the pandemic on demand for VA services both at present and into the future, the IB partners believe, must be accounted for, including the likelihood that deferred care and demand by veterans will increase VA health care usage as 2022 approaches. Additionally, the group believes the VA will likely experience a period of new, unique patient growth—estimated to be roughly 80,000 patients—partially due to pandemic-related job losses and economic turmoil.

The Independent Budget tackles a number of issues—including VA claims reform, benefits for toxic exposure, mental health care and suicide prevention efforts, refinement of services for underserved and minority veterans, and veterans education and employment. It also provides lawmakers and the administration with a series of recommendations for improvements.

“The 117th Congress will be responsible for continuing to oversee the completion of modernization efforts begun under the VA MISSION Act, as well as confronting the ongoing health and economic challenges associated with the pandemic,” said National Legislative Director Joy Ilem. “*The Independent Budget* is an important guide to help this new Congress identify and tackle these issues, building on the wealth of historical knowledge and expertise the IB partners bring to

the table.”

Learn more

View all the IB partners’ critical issues and budget recommendations at independentbudget.org.