



Commanders and Adjutants Orientation



Legislative Briefing

July 1, 2024

**DAV National Headquarters
Erlanger, Kentucky**

Legislative Update

- Second Session of 118th Congress
- Congressional activity
- August Recess
- October Break
- Election Year



Status on DAV

Key Legislative Priorities

118th Congress



2024 Critical Policy Goals

118th Congress, 2nd Session

- 1. Correct inequities for veterans receiving compensation benefits and provide parity in benefits for survivors**
DAV will fight for concurrent receipt of earned compensation and military payments without offsets and parity with other federal programs for survivors receiving Dependency Indemnity Compensation (DIC) benefits.
- 2. Ensure the faithful implementation of the PACT Act and address gaps in toxic-exposure benefits**
Thousands of disability claims have been submitted to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) following the passage of the PACT Act (P. L. 117-168), but far too many veterans who have suffered from toxic and environmental exposures still do not qualify for benefits. Our nation must ensure these veterans receive the care and benefits they have rightfully earned.
- 3. Establish equity in VA care, services and benefits for women, LGBTQ+ and minority veterans**
The VA must ensure these veterans have access to benefits and timely, high-quality and specialized health care services to the same extent as their veteran peers. The VA must provide a safe, welcoming and harassment-free environment at all its health care facilities.
- 4. Provide a full spectrum of long-term care options for service-disabled and aging veterans**
The VA must have a comprehensive geriatric and extended care program that includes a broad range of care options and supportive services—from home-based primary care to long-term institutional care to assist a rapidly aging veteran population, particularly veterans with service-connected conditions.
- 5. Bolster mental health resources to ensure reduction of veteran suicides**
Despite increased resources for VA mental health services and targeted efforts, rates of suicide among veterans have increased. By improving lethal means safety efforts, enhancing care for veterans in crisis and requiring training for community partners, the VA can help to reduce suicide for at-risk veterans and ensure all veterans have timely access to needed mental health services.
- 6. Expand the VA's capacity to deliver timely, high-quality care to veterans**
The VA must remain the primary provider and coordinator of care to ensure the best health outcomes for veterans, particularly veterans with service-connected conditions who rely on the VA for all or most of their care. This will require new investments to hire and retain clinical staff, rebuilding health care infrastructure and modernization of information technology systems.

Correct Inequities/Compensation Parity in Survivor Benefits

- Repeal of offset for military retired pay/
VA disability compensation SC 40% ↓
- Repeal of offset of military separation
pay/VA disability compensation
- Parity for survivors (DIC rates equal to
federal employees survivor benefits)

Legislation Introduced

- S. 344/H.R. 1282, **Major Richard Star Act** (concurrent receipt)
- H.R. 3489, **Restore Veteran Compensation Act** (repeal of offset for separation pay/VA disability compensation)
- S. 414/H.R. 1083, **Caring for Survivors Act** (DIC)
- S. 1266/H.R. 3651, **Love Lives on Act** (remarriage age)

Ensure Implementation of the PACT Act Address Gaps in Toxic Exposure Benefits

Karshi-Khanabad (K2) Air Base in
Uzbekistan/former Soviet air base

- Recognize exposures at K2 and related diseases
- 400 chemical compounds: jet fuel, radioactive depleted uranium
- K2 veterans have a 500% greater chance of developing certain cancers

Radiation Exposure

Ensure parity for radiation-exposed veterans

- Remove radiation dose-estimate requirements
- DOJ RECA (Radiation Exposure Compensations Act) program
- Payments to uranium workers, on-site nuclear participants and down winders

Legislation Introduced:

- H.R.4566, the PRESUME Act

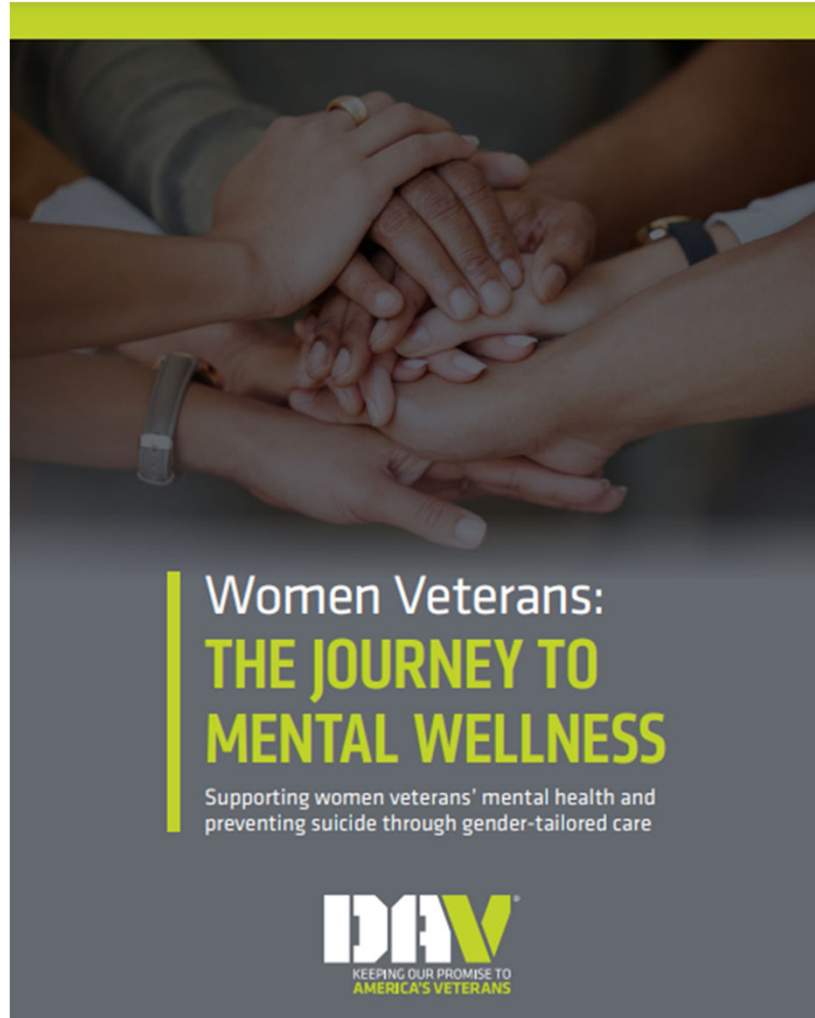
Establish Equity in Care for Women, Minority and Underserved Veterans

- Improve environment of care
- Safe, welcoming, harassment free
- Enhance research and data collection
- Ensure diversity and culturally sensitive programming

Legislation Introduced:

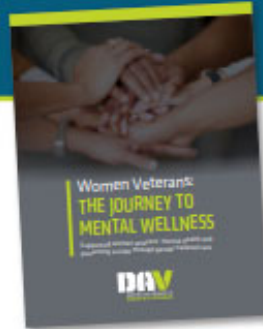
S.2026 - Maternal Health for Veterans Act

Women Veterans: *The Journey to Mental Wellness*





Women Veterans: THE JOURNEY TO MENTAL WELLNESS



DAV's *Women Veterans: The Journey to Mental Wellness* is a comprehensive assessment of the unique factors contributing to the staggering rate of suicide among women veterans. It details how the system charged with their mental health care can and must do better. Using the latest in research and data, combined with a thorough review of the Department of Veterans Affairs' available services, this in-depth report reveals that too many women veterans are at risk of falling through the cracks due to gaps in lifesaving mental health care.

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Women veterans are dying by suicide at an alarming rate compared with their male and civilian counterparts.

Suicide rate among women veterans
between 2020 and 2021:

↑ 24.1%

Nearly 4X higher than the 6.3% increase
among male veterans and vastly higher than
the 2.6% increase among nonveteran women

2X

more likely than male
veterans to attempt suicide

3X

more likely than nonveteran
women to choose a firearm
as means of suicide

More than

50%

of deaths for women
veterans are by self-
inflicted firearm injury

THE CHALLENGES

Women veterans experience unique challenges that can put them at greater risk for suicide, including:



Military sexual trauma (MST)

Among veterans
enrolled in the VA,
1 in 3 women report
experiencing MST.



Intimate partner violence

Nearly **1 in 5** women
veterans using VA
primary care reported
experiencing intimate
partner violence in the
past year.



Substance use disorder

The risk of suicide death
among women veterans
with active substance use
disorder is **more than
twice** what it is for men.



Pregnancy

During pregnancy and
up to one year after
giving birth can be a time
of increased risk for a
mental health diagnosis
and suicidality.*

* In women patients with a prior
mental health diagnosis.



Menopause

Menopause has been
shown to raise the risk
for depression twofold
and corresponds to the
highest rates of suicide
among U.S. women.



THE GAPS

The report found numerous gaps in mental health care and understanding related to women veterans, including:

- **Screenings:** Evidence shows a significant number of false negative screens for MST, a known risk factor for suicide among many women veterans.
- **Intervention:** The VA's innovative model to predict suicidality and intervene with high-risk veterans uses male veterans as its baseline and does not consider MST.
- **Access:** According to the VA, 1 in 4 women veterans live in rural areas, and rural veterans face significant barriers to accessing health care.
- **Gender-specific care:** The VA reports that only about 13 residential rehabilitation centers nationwide provide gender-exclusive care and services.
- **Training:** Community care providers are not required to be trained in suicide risk identification and intervention or lethal-means safety counseling.
- **Understanding:** The impact of reproductive life stages on mental health and suicide risk among women veterans is woefully understudied and not well defined.
- **Awareness:** Many women veterans say they did not even know they were eligible for VA health care or were unaware of the resources available to them, including mental health care and other VA benefits.



THE SOLUTIONS

DAV makes over 50 policy and research recommendations intended to spark necessary and urgent change that can save lives, which include the following:

- MST should be a central pillar of suicide prevention efforts within the VA, and the VA must ensure veterans are effectively screened or rescreened for MST.
- Similar to 988 for veterans in crisis, the Department of Health and Human Services should create a three-digit number, with a veteran option, for the National Domestic Violence Hotline (800-799-7233).
- The VA must revise its model for predicting suicidality to incorporate risk factors weighted for women veterans.
- The VA must develop targeted solutions to bridge gaps for the provision of mental health care services in rural communities.
- The VA should assess the need to increase gender-specific programming in residential rehabilitation programs.
- The VA must require that providers in the VA Community Care Network be trained in suicide prevention and lethal-means safety counseling.
- VA and non-VA experts in menopausal women's health should collaborate to explore a research agenda on the related threads of menopause and suicide.



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Long-Term Care Options for Service-Disabled and Aging Veterans

- Expand home and community-based care services
- Improve the PCAFC program
- Expand mandatory eligibility for nursing home care to SC veterans rated 50% and 60%

Legislation Introduced:

- S. 141, Elizabeth Dole Act
- H.R. 1815/S. 495, Expanding Veterans' Options for Long Term Care Act

Improve Access to Mental Health/VA Suicide Prevention Efforts

- Increase VA mental health staffing
- Continue lethal-means safety efforts
- Require comparable training and quality metrics for community care providers

Legislation Introduced:

- H.R. 100/S. 326, the **VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act of 2023**

Expand VA's Capacity to Deliver Timely, High-Quality Health Care

- Increase staffing levels
- Modernize infrastructure
- EHR modernization

Legislation Introduced:

- S. 42/H.R. 3225, **BUILD Act** (VA Infrastructure)
- S. 1125, **EHR Program RESET Act of 2023**

Other Key Legislation

- S. 592, the **DRIVE Act** (Driver Reimbursement Increase for Veteran Equity Act)
- H.R. 7777/S. 4047, **Veterans Cost of Living Adjustment Act of 2024**

Omnibus: Veterans Package

H.R. 8371, Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Act

Provisions in the bill address:

- VA long-term care home-health and community-based services
- caregiver services
- dental care
- homeless programs

Omnibus: Veterans Package

Provisions in the bill address:

- educational programs
- substance-use disorder services
- emergency care transportation
- VA home loans
- DBQ modernization
- disability examinations
- telehealth
- IT infrastructure/Electronic Health Record

VA Budget Update

- Independent Budget recommendations for fiscal year 2025/2026 available at www.independentbudget.org
- Independent Budget VSOs testified at HVAC/SVAC Budget hearings
- IB called for increased funding for—
VBA, BVA, VA health care,
infrastructure, research, women
veterans

The Importance of Grassroots Advocacy

DAV CAN—JOIN NOW!

- Let your elected officials know where you stand: join the ranks of **DAV CAN!**
- Add your voice to the chorus of DAV members and supporters
- Strengthen the messages we're delivering to Capitol Hill
- Keep our promises to America's veterans

DAV Legislative Resources



[VIEW DAV'S FULL POLICY GOALS FOR 2024](#)

[VIEW DAV'S CONDENSED GOALS FOR 2024](#)

[2023-2024 Legislative Program \(Resolutions\)](#)

DAV's Legislative Program includes all of the legislative resolutions adopted at our most recent national convention, which guide DAV's positions on federal programs, policies and legislation.



[Congressional Testimony](#)

Read official testimonies DAV has delivered to the Senate and House of Representatives, which cover legislation, funding, policies and proposals to strengthen and reform veterans health care services and benefits programs.

[Issue Briefs](#)

Through a series of DAV issue briefs, learn more about the most critical issues challenging veterans today. Topics include veterans health care reform, caregiver support, women veterans, burn pits and survivor benefits.

[Legislative Webinars](#)

Find out how to become more involved and effective as a DAV advocate through our series of webinars about the legislative process, department and national conventions, resolution writing, Benefits Protection Teams and many other topics of interest to our members and supporters.

[Independent Budget](#)

In partnership with Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) and Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), DAV annually produces the *Independent Budget* and policy recommendations for the Department of Veterans Affairs and Congress.



<https://www.dav.org/about-dav/legislation/>

Benefits Protection Team Leaders

- **DAV CAN** (Commander's Action Network)
- **Meet** with Members of Congress at home
- **Educate**—Who We are and What We do
- **Inform** about DAV legislative priorities
- **Webinars** and legislative updates/**Resources**
- **OPA Advocacy Award** for departments and BPTLs

www.dav.org/dav-benefits-protection-team

DAV National Convention 2024

- Thank you for submitting Resolutions!
- **Deadline for Resolution Submittal:**
July 20 – Resolutions@dav.org
- Benefits Protection Team Workshop:
Friday August 2, at 11:00 am
- Seminar— “Preparing to Serve on a
Convention Resolution Committee”
August 2, at 3:45 pm

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Thank You!

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