



# 2022 Critical Policy Goals

## 117th Congress, 2nd Session



### **1. Ensure Benefits, Health Care and Justice for Veterans of All Eras Exposed to Toxic Substances**

When service members are exposed to toxins and environmental hazards, our sense of duty to them must be heightened, as many of the illnesses and diseases due to these harmful substances may not be identifiable for years, even decades, after they have completed their service.

Although there has been some notable progress achieved for veterans who suffered illness due to toxic and environmental exposures, there are still too many who have yet to receive the benefits, health care and justice our nation owes to them.

### **2. Enhance Benefits for Service-Disabled Veterans' Survivors**

Spouses and survivors of veterans who die due to a service-connected condition are eligible for a number of benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs, including monthly Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) payments and education benefits. However, the current value of DIC benefits is insufficient to provide meaningful support to survivors of severely disabled veterans, and some eligibility rules have limited the number of deserving recipients.

### **3. Advance Equity in Health Services and Benefits for Women, Under-served and Minority Veteran Populations**

The VA must ensure women, minority and underserved veterans have access to timely, high-quality and specialized health care services to the same extent as their veteran peers.

The VA continues to struggle to meet increased demand for gender and culturally-sensitive care, and to hire and train enough clinical providers to offer expert care to women, minority and LGBTQ veterans at all VA facilities. Ensuring a safe, welcoming and harassment-free environment at VA health care facilities is essential for achieving equity of health services for all enrolled veterans.

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#### **4. Improve VA Mental Health Services and Suicide Prevention Efforts to Reduce Veteran Suicide**

Despite increased resources for VA mental health services and targeted efforts, rates of suicide among veterans have not significantly decreased.

DAV supports the VA's suicide prevention strategy for reducing military and veteran suicide through the advancement of a public health model including a comprehensive set of services and supports aimed at increasing access to and delivery of effective mental health care. By improving lethal means safety efforts, enhancing care for veterans in crisis and increased collaboration with community partners, the VA can help to reduce suicide for at-risk veterans and ensure all veterans have access to needed mental health services.

#### **5. Ensure Access to Long-Term Care for Aging Veterans and Veterans with Service-Connected Disabilities**

While the overall veteran population is decreasing, the VA estimates that by 2039, the number of enrolled veterans who are 85 years of age or older will grow by almost 40%. This group uses long-term care at three times the rate of veterans ages 65–84.

Many veterans have higher burdens of disability and more family dissolution than the general population. As such, they may require more intensive care than home and community-based options can support.

The VA must have a comprehensive program of geriatric and extended care that includes a broad range of care options and supports—from home-based services to long-term institutional care to assist an increasingly aging veteran population, particularly veterans with service-connected injuries.

#### **6. Strengthen the Capacity to Deliver Timely, High Quality Care to Veterans**

The VA MISSION Act of 2018 set in motion major reforms to the VA health care system intended to ensure veterans have timely access to high-quality care, particularly veterans with service-connected conditions who rely on the VA for all or most of their care. Although the pandemic disrupted and delayed implementation of some parts of the law, the VA has made significant changes to its community care program and is currently engaged in the mandated Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) that will play out over the next couple of years.

To ensure the best health outcomes for veterans, the VA must remain the primary provider and coordinator of care, which will require new investments to rebuild its health care infrastructure and modernize IT systems. As demonstrated during the pandemic, the VA also plays an essential federal role during national emergencies, not just for veterans but for all Americans.