



# 2025 Critical Policy Goals

## 119th Congress, 1st Session



### 1. **Strengthen presumptive policies to ensure toxic-exposed veterans receive earned benefits in a timely manner**

Military service members have faced toxic exposures for over a century. The Honoring our PACT Act of 2022 expanded health care and benefits for millions of affected veterans, establishing presumptives for dozens of diseases and related conditions. However, it lacks timely accountability measures and doesn't cover all current or future exposures. Our report, *Ending the Wait for Toxic-Exposed Veterans*, found that it takes an average of 34 years for the Department of Veterans Affairs to acknowledge toxic exposures and grant presumptive benefits. The VA must establish a new presumptive process that ensures more timely decisions for these veterans claims.

### 2. **Eliminate gaps in mental health care and suicide prevention with a focus on gender-tailored care**

The rate of suicide among veterans continues to exceed that of the general American population. According to the VA's most recent annual report, 6,407 veterans died by suicide in 2022. However, military sexual trauma and intimate partner violence—known risk factors—are not included in the VA's suicide predictor model. DAV's 2024 report, *Women Veterans: The Journey to Mental Wellness*, highlights these gaps and provides over 50 recommendations to improve care and reduce the rising suicide rates among veterans.

### 3. **Prevent congress or the VA from reducing, offsetting or taxing veterans benefits**

Over 5.6 million disabled veterans receive compensation for service-related conditions, but those with medical retirement benefits can't receive both military retirement pay and VA disability compensation. Veterans rated 40% or less disabled also face this prohibition. Veterans must also repay special separation pay when receiving VA disability compensation. It is time to end these unjust offsets and keep the promises made to those who served.

### 4. **Modernize and strengthen benefits for survivors**

The VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) program provides tax-free monthly benefits to survivors of service members who died in the line of duty or from service-related conditions. In 2025, the DIC benefit for a surviving spouse is \$1,653.07 per month, about 41% of the VA disability compensation that a 100% service-connected veteran receives—significantly lower than the 55% survivor benefits for federal civil service retirees. Survivors of veterans totally disabled for less than 10 years receive no DIC, and those who remarry before age 55 lose their benefits. It's time to reform these critical survivor benefits.

## **5. Expand comprehensive dental care services to all service-disabled veterans**

The VA only provides full dental care to 100%-disabled veterans and veterans with service-connected dental disabilities. Poor dental hygiene can lead to a number of chronic health conditions, some which can be life-threatening if not treated. The VA health care model is specifically designed to be a comprehensive, integrated and preventive system that treats the whole health of veterans. Congress should close the gap and add dental care coverage for all disabled veterans.

## **6. Enhance long-term care by providing assisted-living and increasing caregiver support**

The VA offers various long-term care programs for aging veterans, but there are still some gaps, including for those who can't self-sustain at home but don't need full nursing home support. Assisted-living care offers help with meals, housekeeping and other activities of daily living, which could fill this gap and provide an alternative to nursing home care. Veteran caregivers also help veterans remain at home longer, and integrating their support with assisted-living care could provide an optimal solution to meeting aging veterans' care needs.

## **7. Sustain the VA health care system by reforming infrastructure planning and funding mechanisms**

The VA operates the largest integrated health care system in the U.S., with over 1,750 access points and 5,600 buildings; however, many facilities are over 50 years old. Failure to provide sufficient funding for modernizing, realigning and expanding VA infrastructure and constructing new VA facilities unnecessarily forces some veterans into community care and also threatens the long-term viability of the VA health care system. Congress must address the VA's aging infrastructure by fully funding facility modernization efforts.

## **8. Protect veterans benefits and services by ending PAYGO offsets and budget caps that cut funding**

Congress has adopted budget rules like PAYGO—which limits spending—making it difficult to expand veterans benefits without reducing other existing VA programs and benefits. The Statutory PAYGO Act further enforces overall budget limits resulting in multiyear budget caps that arbitrarily constrain VA spending. Congress should exempt veterans programs from PAYGO and budget caps to ensure adequate funding for critical benefits and services.



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