



# AMVETS LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

## JULY 13, 2020

### News Driving the Week

- The Department of Veterans Affairs is one step closer to securing its [largest budget in history](#) at more than \$250 billion. House Appropriations subcommittee members on Monday forwarded a bill funding the VA at unprecedented levels to its full committee to send to the House floor for a vote. The bill gives more money to the VA than the \$243.3 billion requested by President Donald Trump in the proposed 2021 budget from the White House. The funding proposal boosts virtually all of the department's major services and priorities of VA Secretary Robert Wilkie and Capitol Hill: suicide prevention, women's health care and a \$1.1 billion boost to implement the agency's troubled health records system. VA is one of the only federal agencies not getting a budget cut and it is the only Cabinet department eyeing a double-digit budget boost — 14%, according to Trump's proposed budget. The budget proposes \$10.3 billion for mental health care, an increase of \$865 million from the 2020 enacted level and \$40 million more than Trump's budget request, including \$313 million for suicide prevention outreach.

- Just days after lawmakers on Capitol Hill heard about the deadly struggles [veterans with bad-paper discharges](#) face, and how thousands are denied benefits annually, the Department of Veterans Affairs is floating a change to its policies. On July 10, VA published a proposal to "update and clarify regulatory bars to benefits based on character of discharge" in the Federal Register. The policy amendment would change how VA decides whether or not a veteran with an other-than-honorable discharge qualifies for benefits including the GI Bill, health care and home loans. Specifically, VA proposed modifying its framework for discharges considered "dishonorable" for VA benefit purposes, including discharges due to: "willful and persistent misconduct," "an offense involving moral turpitude," and "homosexual acts involving aggravating circumstances or other factors affecting the performance of duty."

- Reducing national suicide, including for Veterans, is the goal of a new [REACH campaign](#), unveiled at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. The campaign's mission is to educate all Americans that suicide is preventable and to encourage them to REACH to those in need to provide hope. It also encourages people who are hurting to REACH to find help. When people

REACH, suicide will be prevented. The campaign's website is <https://www.wearewithinreach.net> and it uses the hashtag #REACHnow on social media.

- Philips and the VA announced a 10-year, \$100 million contract to create what they're calling [the world's largest telecritical care program](#). The partnership between the two longtime collaborators will build upon what's already seen as the nation's largest connected health network, serving close to 9 million veterans a year through mHealth and telehealth platforms and more than 1,700 healthcare sites. Some 1,800 ICU beds are included in the VA health system. The VA recently reported a surge in veterans accessing care through telehealth as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, with as many as 120,000 visits a week in March and April.

### **Upcoming Events**

House Veterans Affairs Committee  
DAMA Subcommittee  
Legislative Hearing  
Thursday, July 16 12:00 PM  
Watch [here](#)

### **AMVETS Legislative Priorities**

[H.R. 1715](#) Charitable Equity for Veterans Act of 2019 introduced by Rep. Ron Kind of WI and Rep. Brad Wenstrup of OH

[H.R. 1997](#) Veterans Posttraumatic Growth Act introduced by Rep. Tim Ryan of OH

[S. 1906](#) Improve Well-Being for Veterans Act introduced by Rep. John Boozman of AR

[S. 785](#) Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019 introduced by Sen. Jon Tester of MT

[H.R. 4154](#) Leave No Veteran Behind Act introduced by Rep. Susie Lee of NV and Rep. Steve Watkins of KS

[H.R. 3025](#) You Are Not Forgotten Act introduced by Rep. Mark Meadows of NC and Rep. Susie Lee of NV

### **Continued News**

- Brain Health, which will focus on [treating brain injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder](#) in military veterans. The grant, announced in a university press release, comes from The Avalon Fund, an organization that works to fund treatments for PTSD and traumatic brain injuries in veterans. Partnering with the university's school of medicine and center for sport, the new clinic will diagnose and treat discharged veterans and their spouses beginning in fall 2020, according to the press release.

- Federal officials are partnering with several health systems and telehealth companies to develop [a nationwide telecritical care network](#), including a separate telemedicine platform for the Department of Veterans Affairs. The US Defense Department's Telemedicine & Advanced Technology Research Center (TATRC) and Medical Technology Enterprise Consortium (MTEC) recently launched Phase 1 of National Emergency Telecritical Care Network (NETCCN) Project, aimed at creating a network of "virtual critical care wards" to address the coronavirus pandemic. TATRC and METC are partnering with Avera Health, the Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU), the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC), UPMC, Philips, Deloitte Consulting, the Expressions Network, Unissant and the Geneva Foundation on the massive project.

- [Can the Trauma of War Lead to Growth, Despite the Scars?](#)

