



NACVSO Legislative Priorities for the 117th Congress

Improve Support for Local Government: Local governmental veterans service offices at the State, County, Tribal and Municipal levels are on the frontline of assisting veterans who have “borne the battle”. County Veterans Service Officers (CVSO) and their local equivalent carry a significant workload for the federal and state governments. That workload includes but is not limited to filing of disability claims, advocacy, healthcare enrollment, community care coordination, utilization of educational benefits, death benefits, and everything in-between. Currently the federal government provides no fiscal support to CVSOs or the local equivalent. CVSO offices are often one of the lowest funded offices in county government with no unified funding support to bolster efforts. Maintaining staffing levels, technology, education, and outreach can be difficult due to the misconception by local governmental leaders that these services are primarily a federal responsibility and that the federal government perform these duties.

Support – H.R. 4601/S. 2405 the Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach Act (CVSO Act)

- The first ever funding for CVSOs or their local equivalent to carry out programs/services to improve outreach and assistance to veterans and eligible dependents.
 - \$50 million a year in competitive grants for five years.
 - States and Tribes apply and administer through CVSOs
- Funding may be used to hire new or additional county veterans service officers, provide technical/accreditation training for existing staff to serve veterans more effectively.
- **Shall be used to supplement and not supplant** (not a bait and switch) State and local funding that is otherwise available.
- Supported by the National Association of Counties (NACo) and National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA).

Support – S.3388 the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2021

- Would establish a BVA internship and Honors program to assist with recruitment.
- Report on improving veteran access BVA tele-hearings.
- Provides VHA and Contracted personnel with better access to Disability Questionnaires and relevant fact sheets.
- Requires that VA contractors also communicate with the veteran’s representative when scheduling a medical disability exam.
- Requires VA to report back to Congress on “Supporting Governmental Veterans Service Officers”.
 - Enhanced access
 - Viability of providing intergovernmental liaisons

Increase Access to Care: Access to medical and mental health care is one of the most impactful services a veteran can receive. Often our members are the community point of contact for assisting veterans with VA health care enrollment applications. Many veterans are not provided access to VA care due to the VA’s tiered “Priority Groups”, which considers a veteran’s VA disability level, housing status or income when determining eligibility. We know from the VA’s 2021 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Report that roughly 60% of the veterans that commit suicide are not utilizing VA health care services. With this in mind, we must seek to get as many veterans as possible access to life saving health care services regardless of how much money they make or if they have a VA service-connected disability. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of the cure.

Support – H.R. 4673 Ensuring Veterans’ Smooth Transition Act (EVEST)

- Would automatically enroll discharging service members in VA health care.
 - Current enrollment is self-initiated after the veteran has been discharged.
 - Has an opt out option if the service member does not want to enroll.

Support – S. 3541 Health Care for Burn Pit Veterans Act

- Increases Post 9/11 combat veteran’s VHA eligibility from 5 to 10 years post discharge.
- Provides a Toxic Exposure health screen for all VA enrolled veterans.
- Tracts causes of death and health trends among Post 9/11 veterans.
- Improves VA benefits and care outreach program specific to toxic exposed veterans.

Additional Recommendations

- Open lines of communication between outgoing DoD care providers and oncoming VHA providers to achieve thorough transition of care from one system to another.
- Allow, if feasible, transitioning service members to have a pre-discharge consult with their oncoming VHA Primary Care and Mental Health Provider (can be done via tele-health consult).

Pass and Implement Toxic/Burn Pit Exposure Legislation: Veterans who have served in harm's way during the last 20 years of conflict were exposed to toxic substances. Exposed veterans and their families cannot wait another 20 years to get access to benefits needed to address the health conditions caused by those exposures. NACVSO's members work tirelessly to get veterans access to VA benefits for Toxic/Burn Pit related injuries, but unfortunately under the current system this can be a challenging task. It is time to provide access to health care, define and expand presumptions for exposure service-connection, and improve reporting of exposures to toxic substances while in service. NACVSO supports any legislation that aggressively seeks to accomplish this.

Support – S. 3003 the Comprehensive and Overdue Support for Troops of War Act (COST Act)

- Expands VA health care eligibility for toxic exposed veterans, burn pit exposed veterans, and others.
- Reforms the service-connection process for toxic exposure veterans.
- Presumes certain veterans based on campaign participation were exposed to 50 toxins.
- Requires VA to provide a medical nexus examination for a veteran claiming a disability related to a toxic exposure.
- Expands presumptive conditions for Atomic, Vietnam and current conflict veterans.
 - 13 total conditions (11 lung, 2 cancer) added for Burn Pit Veterans.
- Improves resources and outreach related to toxic exposure for veterans.
- Strengthens Federal research on toxic exposures.

Support– H.R. 3967 Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act (PACT Act)

- Expands VA health care eligibility for toxic exposed veterans, burn pit exposed veterans, and others.
- Would add 23 new presumptive conditions for service connection for Burn Pit exposed veterans.
- Adds presumptive conditions for Atomic and Vietnam veterans.
- Establishes a Formal Advisory Committee, Independent Review Board, and a Working group to review new conditions to be considered for presumption.
- Establishes a presumption of exposure based on location of service.
- Requires VA to publish resources related to toxic exposures.
- Requires VA add a toxic exposure questionnaire to primary care appointments.