

Veterans' Health Care

VFW's Concerns:

A recent suicide study of veterans conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) found that veterans total 18 percent of adult suicides in the United States, with an average of 20 veterans who die by suicide every day. Of those 20 veterans, 14 had not received care from VA within a year of their deaths, and the majority of veterans who die by suicide are 50 years of age or older.

Veterans who rely on VA for their health care, and the uninsured, are the only people in the United States required to pay copayments for preventive medications. Veterans who turn to VA for their health care needs are more likely to have chronic illnesses and injuries, and have lower income than veterans who do not use VA health care. According to VFW health care surveys, the cost of preventive medicine often leads to veterans choosing to forgo filling possible life-saving prescriptions such as aspirin for cardiovascular disease, vitamin D to improve lower extremity function, preventive breast cancer medication, and many more.

Women veterans are the fastest growing subpopulation within the veteran community and while VA has made strides in improving care for women veterans, it still has more work to do. VA must be ready and able to provide the gender-specific care women veterans deserve, to include more reproductive research.

At the center of many issues within VA are the difficulties faced with quickly hiring and retaining high-quality employees. VFW members across the country continue to face delays in accessing VA health care because their local VA medical facilities have positions that have been vacant for months.

VFW's Solutions:

- Congress must commission research on the 14 veterans who die by suicide every day who do not use VA health care.
- Congress must provide VA the resources it needs to ensure its health care service programs are equal among men and women veterans.
- Congress must also commission toxic exposure research to understand gender-specific health ailments, as well as how it has affected reproduction for veterans who were exposed to toxic substances.
- Congress must pass H.R. 1100, or S. 1161, to remove copayment requirements for VA preventive care prescriptions.
- Congress must pass H.R. 2452, or S. 681, to improve gender-specific care and benefits for women veterans.
- Congress must pass H.R. 2652, or S. 992, to review the total number of veterans who died by suicide and the circumstances of each death, and to recommend ways to prevent overmedication.