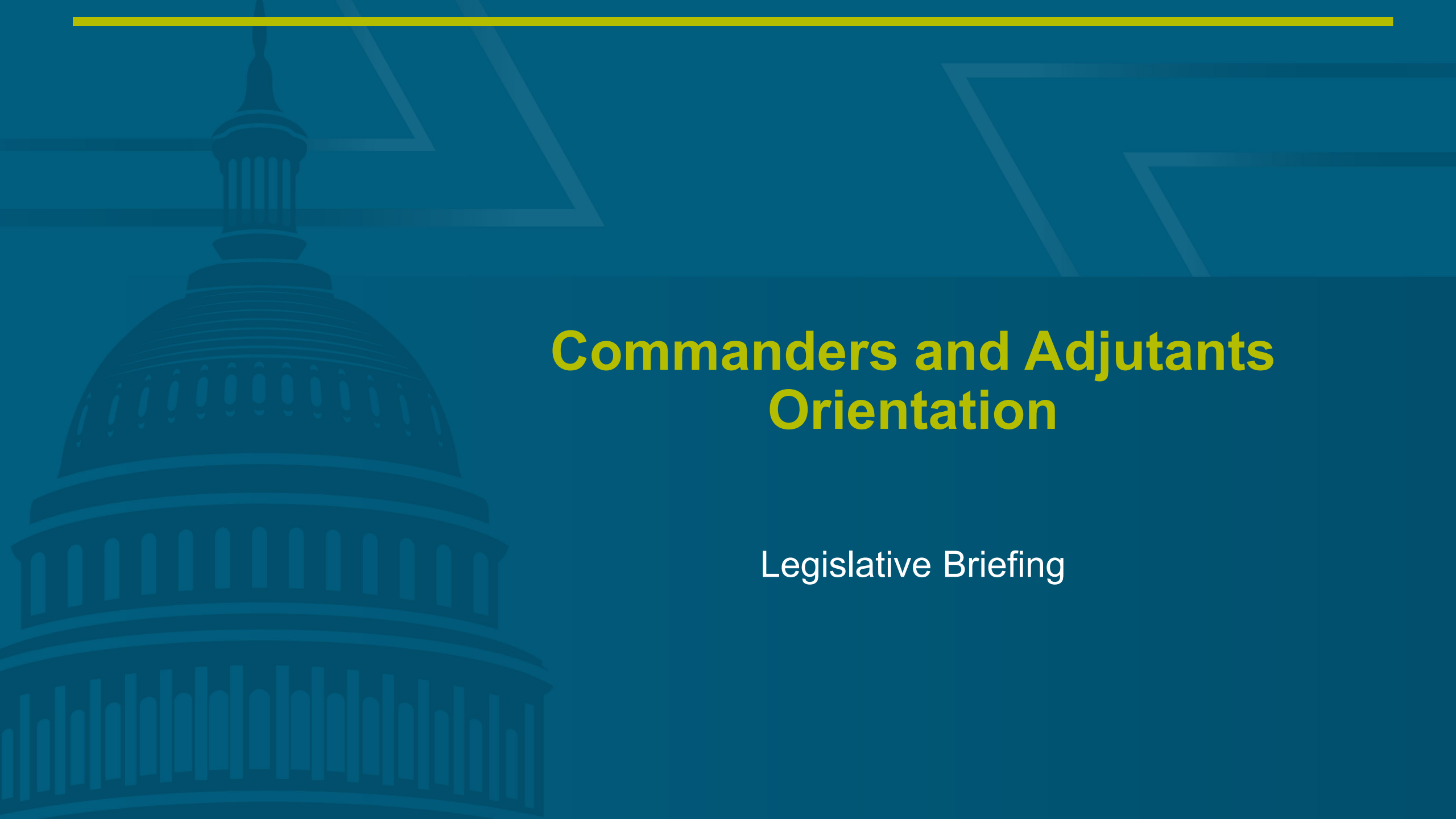


The background is a solid dark blue. On the left side, there is a stylized, light blue graphic of a dome, likely representing the U.S. Capitol. The dome has a series of vertical lines around its base and a small spire on top. In the upper right area, there are several light blue geometric shapes, including triangles and lines, that create a sense of depth and structure.

Commanders and Adjutants Orientation

Legislative Briefing



Legislative Update

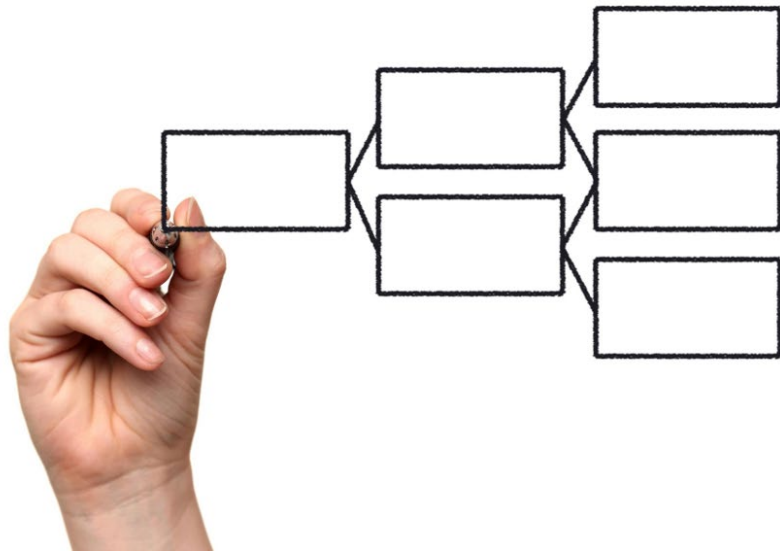
- DAV Members, Leadership and Congressional Interaction
- Political Climate
- Congress
- VA
- Priorities



From Membership to Congressional Outcomes

■ Foundation of Membership

- ▶ Membership delivers the priorities and lived experiences that drive effective advocacy.



■ Leadership and Coordination

- ▶ Commanders engage; Adjutants ensure communication and organization flow.

■ Advocacy and Congressional Engagement

- ▶ BPTL and National staff both advocate; staff develop strategies.

■ Impact on Veterans' Outcomes

- ▶ Unified advocacy strengthens veterans benefits, healthcare, and support.

National Legislative Staff



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Health Care/Benefits: Caregiver • Community Care • Mental Health • Psychedelics • VA Research • Women Veterans



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Benefits: Claims and Appeals • Education • Employment • Toxic Exposures • VBA Issues • Survivor Benefits & Cemeteries

Benefits Protection Team Leaders

- Meet with Members of Congress at home
- Educate—Who We are and What We do
- Inform about DAV legislative priorities
- Webinars and legislative updates
- Resources





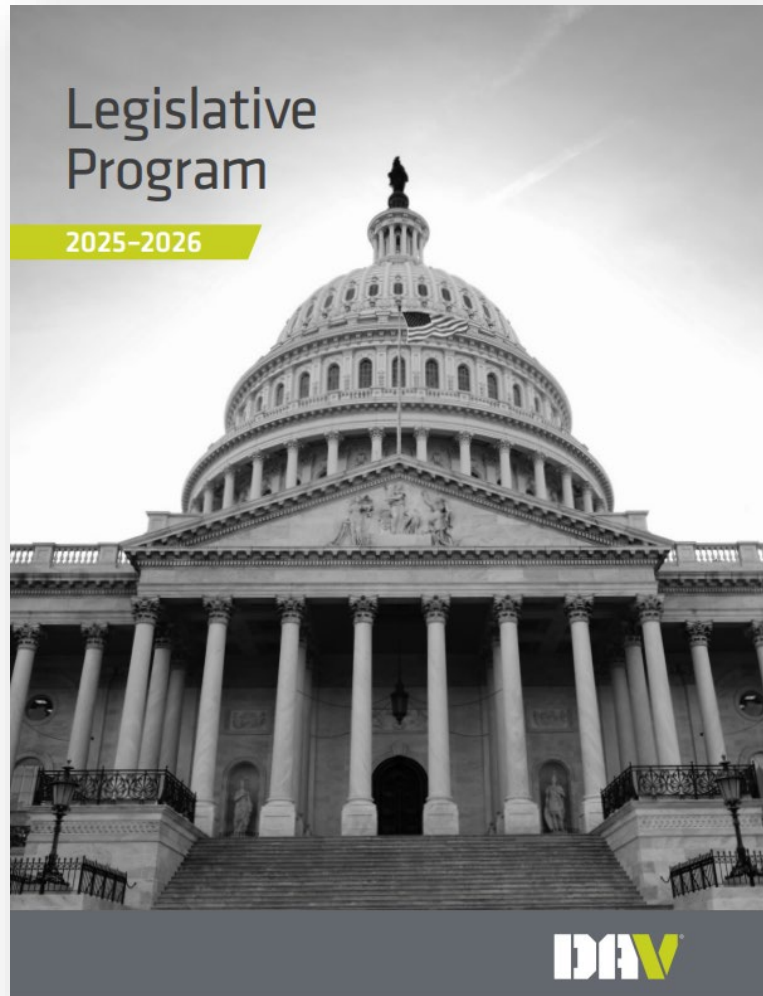
Importance of Grassroots Advocacy

- Let your elected officials know where you stand: join the ranks of DAV CAN
- Add your voice to the chorus of DAV members and supporters
- Strengthen the messages we're delivering to Capitol Hill
- Keep our promises to America's veterans

DAVCAN.org —JOIN NOW!



Resolutions



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Washington Headquarters
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Washington, DC 20005
tel 202-554-3501

**STATEMENT OF
COLEMAN NEE
DAV NATIONAL COMMANDER
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEES ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. SENATE AND U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D.C.
FEBRUARY 24, 2026**

Chairman Moran, Chairman Bost, Ranking Members Blumenthal and Takano and
Members of the Committees on Veterans' Affairs:

Thank you for the opportunity to present the 2026 legislative priorities of DAV—



DAV National Convention 2026

- Thank you for submitting Resolutions!
- **Deadline for Resolution Submittal: July 18** – Resolutions@dav.org
- Benefits Protection Team Workshop
 - ▶ Friday, July 31 at 11:00 a.m.
- Seminar— “Preparing to Serve on a Convention Resolution Committee”
 - ▶ Friday, July 31 at 3:45 p.m.

DAV 2026 Critical Policy Goals

- Make the claims and appeals process work better for veterans.
- Strengthen presumptive policies to ensure toxic-exposed veterans receive earned benefits in a timely manner.
- Eliminate gaps in veterans mental health care and suicide prevention.
- Modernize and strengthen benefits for survivors of disabled veterans.
- Prevent Congress or VA from reducing, offsetting or taxing veterans benefits.
- Expand comprehensive dental care services to all service-disabled veterans.
- Enhance long-term care by providing assisted living and increasing caregiver support.
- Sustain the VA health care system by reforming infrastructure planning and funding mechanisms.
- Protect veterans benefits and services by ending PAYGO offsets and budget caps that cut funding.

Make the Claims and Appeals Process Work Better for Veterans

- Complex and confusing process continues to burden veterans
- Delays, inconsistent decisions, and unclear communications persist
- Veterans Claims & Appeals Modernization Act improved structure, but challenges remain
- Veterans struggle to navigate review options and evidentiary requirements
- Inefficient evidence development and frequent rework drive unnecessary appeals
- System must be simplified, more transparent, and veteran-focused

Strengthen Presumptive Policies to Ensure Toxic-exposed Veterans Receive Earned Benefits in a Timely Manner

- DAV-MOAA Report: *Ending the Wait for Toxic Exposed Veterans*
- A Post-PACT Act Blueprint for Reforming VA's Presumptive Process
- The PACT Act expanded care and benefits for millions of veterans
- Service members have faced toxic exposures for over a century
- An average of 34.1 years wait time from exposure to establishing a presumptive
- Gaps remain with limited accountability and incomplete coverage of exposures
- VA must establish a faster, more accountable presumptive process



Ending the Wait for TOXIC-EXPOSED VETERANS

A post-PACT Act blueprint for reforming the VA presumptive process

DAV | **MOAA**
Military Officers Association of America



Ending the Wait for TOXIC-EXPOSED VETERANS

A post-PACT Act blueprint for reforming the VA presumptive process

The groundbreaking DAV and MOAA report *Ending the Wait for Toxic-Exposed Veterans* reveals an enduring legacy of failure by the Department of Veterans Affairs and Congress to adequately care for veterans made ill by toxic exposures in service. Backed by original research and historical analysis, the report shows that toxic-exposed veterans—many of them suffering life-threatening diseases—often have to wait decades to receive access to the health care and benefits they earned and urgently need. *Ending the Wait for Toxic-Exposed Veterans* offers a blueprint for reforming how our government handles service-related toxic exposures in a way that ensures timely, equitable access to lifesaving care and benefits.

A HISTORY OF DELAYED JUSTICE

Average number of years from when the first service member was exposed until the VA presumes the exposure caused an illness

34.1 years



THE TOXIN: AGENT ORANGE
Almost 20 million gallons of herbicides—including Agent Orange—were sprayed over Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos between 1962 and 1971 to defoliate the jungles, exposing millions of service members to dioxin and other toxins.

THE REMEDY: AGENT ORANGE ACT OF 1991
Congress created a presumptive for exposure to Agent Orange for veterans who later became ill with cancers and other diseases. The first presumptive diseases included were non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, soft-tissue sarcoma and chloracne. However, several other diseases like diabetes mellitus Type 2 and hypertension were not considered presumptives until many years later.

THE WAIT:

20 years
after last spray/exposure

Nearly
30 years
after first use

(Continued on other side)

DAV

Eliminate Gaps in Veterans Mental Health Care and Suicide Prevention

- Veteran suicide rates remain higher than the general population
- Gaps persist in mental health access, coordination, and effectiveness
- Current approaches have not sufficiently reduced suicide risk
- Women veterans and other underserved groups face disproportionate risk
- DAV's 2024 Women Veterans report outlines gaps and 50+ recommendations to improve care and reduce suicide rates
- Require comparable training and quality metrics for community care providers

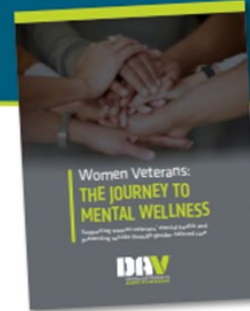


Women Veterans: THE JOURNEY TO MENTAL WELLNESS

Supporting women veterans' mental health and preventing suicide through gender-tailored care



Women Veterans: THE JOURNEY TO MENTAL WELLNESS



DAV's *Women Veterans: The Journey to Mental Wellness* is a comprehensive assessment of the unique factors contributing to the alarming rate of suicide among women veterans. It details how the system charged with their mental health care can and must do better. Using the latest in research and data, combined with a thorough review of the Department of Veterans Affairs' available services, this in-depth report reveals that too many women veterans are at risk of falling through the cracks due to gaps in lifesaving mental health care.

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Women veterans are dying by suicide at a rate higher than their civilian counterparts. In 2022:

The suicide rate among women veterans was
92.4%
higher than for nonveteran women.

The rate of suicides involving firearms among women veterans was
144.4%
higher than among nonveteran women. Overall, firearms were involved in 45.4% of suicide deaths among women veterans.

Among women using VA health care, the suicide rate was
75%
higher for those who reported experiencing military sexual trauma (MST).

The above numbers have been updated since original publication to reflect more recent data.

THE CHALLENGES

Women veterans experience unique challenges that can put them at greater risk for suicide, including:



Prevent Congress or VA From Reducing, Offsetting or Taxing Veterans Benefits

- Over 6.5 million disabled veterans receive VA disability compensation
- Many face offsets that reduce earned benefits:
- These offsets unjustly reduce or tax veterans' benefits
- Congress must end these offsets and protect veterans' earned compensation
- DAV **strongly opposes** any attempts to reduce, offset or tax veterans benefits



Modernize and Strengthen Benefits for Survivors

- DIC provides tax-free monthly benefits to survivors of service-connected deaths
- In 2026, surviving spouses receive \$1,699/month
- DIC equals about 41% of 100% VA disability compensation
- This is lower than the 55% survivor benefit for federal civil service retirees
- Gaps in eligibility:
- Survivor benefits need reform

Expand Comprehensive Dental Care Services to all Service-disabled Veterans

- A generally limits full dental care to:
 - ▶ 100% service-disabled veterans
 - ▶ Veterans with service-connected dental conditions
- Poor dental health increases risk of serious and chronic health conditions
- VA health care is intended to be comprehensive and preventive
- Dental care is essential to whole-health treatment
- Expand dental coverage to all disabled veterans

Dental care is healthcare

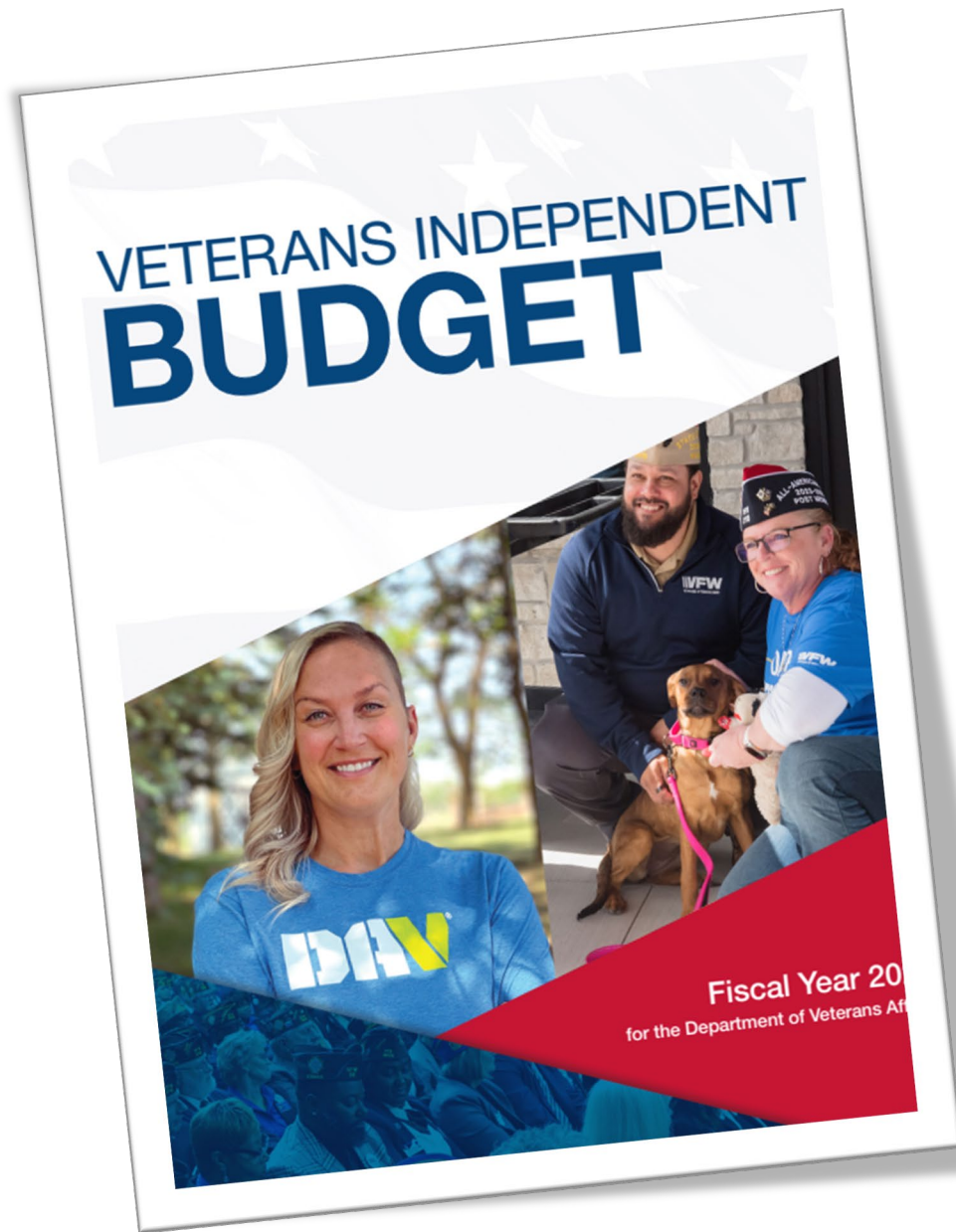


Enhance Long-term Care by Providing Assisted Living And Increasing Caregiver Support

- VA long-term care programs leave gaps for veterans
- Caregivers save taxpayers and improve veterans' quality of life
- Assisted living can fill the care gap with support for daily activities
- These options help veterans remain at home longer and avoid nursing homes
- Require VA to offer assisted living options for disabled veterans
- Integrate caregiver support with home- and community-based services

Sustain the VA Health Care System by Reforming Infrastructure Planning and Funding Mechanisms

- VA operates the nation's largest integrated health care system
- Over 1,750 access points and 5,600 buildings, many more than 60 years old
- Aging facilities force veterans into community care and strain the system
- Insufficient infrastructure funding threatens long-term VA viability
- Reform and fully fund VA facility modernization



Veterans Independent Budget
recommendations for FY 2027 for the
Department of Veterans Affairs.

DAV Legislative Resources

We solve veterans issues through legislation



For over 100 years, DAV has been advocating for better federal veterans programs, benefits, health care and transition services for the men and women who served, their families and survivors. DAV's National Legislative Department takes the resolutions adopted by DAV members at our annual National Conventions to Congress to advocate for improved federal laws, regulations and policies of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and other federal agencies whose programs support the veteran population.

DAV's key legislative priorities are detailed in the Critical Policy Goals brief linked below on this page. Please review these goals, participate in the Commander's Action Network, and use the links below to ensure you are an effective advocate when meeting with your members of Congress and addressing these priorities and other important issues impacting veterans. Grassroots advocacy and your active participation is the key to our collective strength in Washington, D.C., and achieving more legislative victories for veterans in the year ahead.



Vision for Veterans

[Legislative Program \(Resolutions\)](#)

[Congressional Testimony](#)

[Issue Briefs](#)

[Preparing to Serve on a Convention Resolution Committee](#)

[Veterans Independent Budget](#)

[Legislative Webinars](#)

[Statement of Policy](#)

[Benefits Protection Team Leader Workshop](#)

[DAV National Constitution, Bylaws & Regulations](#)

[Benefits Protection Team Leader Toolkit](#)



What We Need From You This Year

- Promote DAV/CA
- Support EOTL
- Submit resolutions
- Engage Members in Congress locally
- Use DAV resources

**PROMOTE
DAV CAN TAKE
ACTION!**

Jon Retzer

National Legislative Director

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jretzer@dav.org