



A JOINT MESSAGE FROM

DAV and the DAV Auxiliary

Legislative Update: Information on Recently Passed Legislation

We are pleased to inform you about two important veterans bills supported by DAV that were recently passed by Congress and signed by the President.

On October 17, the President signed into law S. 785, the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act. Public Law 116-171

This comprehensive bipartisan bill, in line with DAV Resolution No. 370, will help increase outreach and services to veterans at risk for suicide and improve VA mental health services by:

- Strengthening VA's mental health workforce to serve more veterans by offering scholarships to mental health professionals to work at Vet Centers, and placing at least one Suicide Prevention Coordinator in every VA hospital;
- Directing the department to develop a staffing plan for increasing the number of mental health counselors and region-specific incentives needed to hiring them; Improving rural veterans' access to mental health care by increasing the number of locations at which veterans can access VA telehealth services;
- Implementing a pilot program to expand veterans access to complementary and integrative health programs through animal therapy, agriculture therapy, sports and recreation therapy, art therapy and post-traumatic growth programs;
- Studying the health benefits of providing integrative health treatments such as yoga, meditation, acupuncture, chiropractic care;
- Establishing a grant program that allows VA to better collaborate with community organizations already serving veterans with a goal of early identification and supportive prevention services for veterans at risk of suicide;
- Studying the impact of living at high altitude and associated suicide risk factors for veterans and implementing a precision medicine initiative to identify and validate brain and mental health biomarkers among veterans to better identify and treat depression, anxiety, PTSD, and traumatic stress disorder.

The bill also includes provisions, supported by DAV Resolution No. 020, to improve services to women veterans by:

- Expanding the capabilities of the VA women veterans call center, to include text messaging; and
- Creating a centralized website that includes information about all the benefits and services available to women veterans, the name and contact information for each women's health coordinator, and specific services available for women veterans at each medical center and community-based outpatient clinic throughout a designated VISN—Veterans Integrated Service Network.

On October 20, the President signed into law H.R. 6168, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2020, which authorizes a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for veterans receiving Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability compensation, clothing allowance, and survivors receiving dependency indemnity compensation or DIC payments.

This bill, now Public Law 116-178, will increase the amount paid to veterans and their survivors by 1.3%, effective December 2020, and be reflected in their January 2021 compensation payment.

VA adjusts veterans' monthly disability compensation amounts based on the yearly change in the cost of living as determined by the Social Security Administration (final COLA adjustment of 1.3% in 2021 was based on the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) report of September 2020 inflation data). While this increase is slightly less than the 1.6% increase from last year—it is in line with the historical increases over the last 10 years. The new rates are not yet posted, but [click here](#) to view VA's website, where they should be posted soon.

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