



February 13, 2026
WEEKLY GRASSROOTS NEWSLETTER

**119TH CONGRESS, 2ND SESSION LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES TRIFOLD
IS NOW AVAILABLE!**

You can view and download the Legislative Priorities trifold on the Legion website [here](#).
Point papers will be available for download soon!

****There will be hard copies available at Washington Conference to be taken and
handed out at your meetings on the Hill****

HIGHLIGHTED CAMPAIGN

This week, we are asking Legionnaires to contact Congress to urge them to pass *the Major Richard Star Act*. This legislation would ensure that combat-injured retirees can receive both their Department of Defense retirement pay and the disability compensation earned through their sacrifices.

The American Legion appreciates all the emails you have sent so far.

Make your voice heard before the National Commander testifies at Washington Conference! Go to the [Action Center](#) to quickly email a letter of support to your members of Congress.

Have you had a recent meeting or phone call with your member of Congress? Report your contact today! Click [here](#) to register your Congressional contact and demonstrate the power of The American Legion advocacy in action.

NEED TO FIND YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS?

<https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Address>

TOP GRASSROOTS DEPARTMENTS

Wisconsin	190
Kansas	189
Tennessee	170
New York	82
Texas	70

Register more participants in your Department to increase the number of veteran voices advocating on the Hill!

<https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Register>

WASHINGTON CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Washington Conference is scheduled for Feb 28-Mar 5 at the Washington Hilton! The full agenda and hotel information can be found on the Legion website [here](#). Some important dates and events to note:

March 2 – Legislative Commission Meeting and Commander's Call

March 3 – Hill visits

March 4 – National Commander's Testimony to Joint session of Congress

VA MOVES TO IMPROVE DENTAL CARE ACCESS FOR ELIGIBLE VETERANS

This article's original publication can be found [here](#)



The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has released a [request for proposals](#) for a new dental care administrator to operate the department's next generation network of community care dental providers.

The goal is to contract with a vendor that will support the department in building and maintaining a robust national network of licensed dental providers and practitioners. The network will include general and specialty dental care, preventive dental services, and pharmacy support.

Through this new contract, VA aims to improve and standardize dental care delivery, ensuring Veterans receive the preventive and restorative dental services they need to maintain their health.

VA's community care program enables Veterans to access health care from non-VA medical providers at the department's expense. Community care has been an integral part of caring for Veterans since the World War II era. In 2018, President Trump

enshrined this right for Veterans by signing the bipartisan [MISSION Act](#). Today, about 40% of all VA care is provided through community care.

Of the nearly nine million Veterans enrolled in VA health care, approximately 26% are eligible for dental care. In fiscal year 2025 alone, 888,051 Veterans received dental care through VA, with more than 3.5 million dental procedures delivered through community care.

“Dental health is a critical component of overall well-being,” said VA **Secretary Doug Collins**. “This RFP will result in a contract that dramatically improves our ability to provide quality dental care to eligible Veterans while ensuring they can choose the provider that’s best for them.”

View the [RFP](#) here. VA invites interested companies to submit proposals by March 16, 2026.

NUMBER OF VETERANS DYING BY SUICIDE DROPPED SLIGHTLY FROM 2022 TO 2023, BUT THE RATE OF SUICIDE GREW

This article’s original publication can be found [here](#)

Recently released National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report also notes that veterans experiencing mental health, substance use or homelessness, and those with easy access to firearms were at a higher risk of suicide.

The recently released 2025 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ [National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report](#) showed that while the total number of veterans who died by suicide slightly reduced from 2022 to 2023, the overall rate of veteran suicides increased over that period.

From 2022 to 2023 – the most recent year for which data is available – suicides among veterans dropped from 6,442 to 6,398 suicides. And the average number of veteran suicides per day fell slightly, to 17.5 in 2023 from 17.6 in 2022.

However, the rate of suicides per 100,000 veterans rose during the same period in both the male and female population. For women, the rate rose from 13.7 to 13.9, and for men, it rose from 37.3 to 37.8.

The report also showed that 61 percent of veterans who died by suicide in 2023 were not receiving VA health care in the last year of their life. For veterans receiving VHA in the previous year or year of their suicide, the suicide rate dropped from 40 percent to 39 percent from 2022 to 2023.

“Veteran suicide has been a scourge on our nation for far too long,” VA Secretary Doug Collins said in a press release. “Most veterans who die by suicide were not in recent VA care, so making it easier for those who have worn the uniform to access the VA benefits they have earned is key.”

Also noted in the report is that suicide rates are elevated for veterans aged 18 to 34 years, and those with certain risk characteristics. Those include:

- **Mental Health Issues or Substance Use:** Among veterans in VHA care who died from suicide in 2023, 60.9 percent had a VHA mental health or substance use disorder diagnosis, while 39.1 percent did not.
- **Head Trauma/Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI):** Research shows increased suicide ideation, attempt and death rates among people who have experienced head trauma. In each year from 2001-23, suicide rates for veterans in VHA care were elevated for those with a TBI. In 2023, the suicide rate was 77.6 per 100,000 for those with a recent diagnosis of TBI, which was 94.3% higher than for those without a diagnosis.
- **Unsecured Firearms:** Unsecured firearms in the home increase the risk of suicide death. In 2023, firearms were involved in 73.3 percent of veteran deaths by suicide, compared to 52.9 percent of suicides of non-veteran U.S. adults.
- **Homelessness:** In 2023, the suicide rate among veterans in VHA care with diagnoses of homelessness was 146 percent higher than for those without diagnoses of homelessness.

The American Legion's Be the One veteran suicide prevention mission seeks to reduce the stigma associated with mental health treatment, providing free suicide prevention training and empowering everyone to take appropriate action when a veteran or servicemember may be at risk. Learn more or signup for one of our virtual Be the One training sessions at betheone.org.

LEGIONNAIRE OF THE WEEK

To recognize the weekly accomplishments of our Legionnaires, we will spotlight an individual every week. These individuals demonstrate exceptional grassroots activism by meeting with/contacting their Congressional Representative/Senator to advocate for veterans. Efforts like these truly make a difference and give veterans a voice in Congress.

Alan Young, Department of Arizona

Alan, thank you for your steadfast advocacy of Legion priorities; we are honored to name you Legionnaire of the Week!

Last month, Alan met at American Legion Post 36 in Tuscon with Rep Ciscomani's staff and was briefed on the services available to veterans in the district through the Congressman's office. These services include assistance with VA claims, record locating services, and veteran recognition awards.

Thank you, Alan, for your report and the time you have dedicated to the Legion's legislative priorities.

GRASSROOTS INFORMATION

Interested in what the Legion is advocating for in Congress? Check out our [information papers and Legislative priorities](#). This is a great starting point for a conversation with your elected officials!

10 Tips for a Successful Meeting on Capitol Hill and the *Legislative Meeting Worksheet* are now available for viewing and download on The Legion's website. You can find them and other legislative resources on the [Legislative Advocacy Resources & Toolkit page](#).

As part of our ongoing Grassroots efforts, LegDiv staff is available to provide **Grassroots Training** tailored to the hosting Department's needs. If you are interested in hosting a Grassroots training event, please contact grassroots@legion.org or jfunari@legion.org.

You can find relevant legislation and the Legion's stance on them in the [key legislation section of VoterVoice](#).

Register for Action Alerts today at
<https://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Register>



UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS

As of 2/13, there are **NO** hearings scheduled. Congress will be back in session on 2/23.

HVAC hearings can be viewed at: [Calendar Home | House Committee on Veterans Affairs](#)

SVAC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings - U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs](#)

HASC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings – House Armed Services Committee](#)

SASC hearings can be viewed at: [Hearings – U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services](#)

[View The American Legion Legislative Handbook Here](#)