

AMVETS Legislative Priorities for the 117th Congress

- oAllow 501(c)(19) nonprofit organizations to accept tax-deductible donations
- oFully fund the VA to provide quality healthcare to our nation's veterans
- oCreate a better VA for women veterans
- oProvide funding for nontraditional mental health programs, research, and pilot programs
- oHold oversight hearings on VA's mental health programs

501(c)(19) tax code

The Internal Revenue Code non-profit designation specifically for veterans' organizations is 501(c)(19). The key benefits are tax-exemption and the ability to accept tax-deductible donations. The current regulation requires 501(c)(19) organizations to maintain a membership of at least 90% wartime veterans to accept tax-deductible donations. AMVETS is the only one of the "Big 6" Congressionally-chartered veterans service organizations open to all non-wartime veterans. About 38% of AMVETS members are not wartime veterans, leaving the 70-year-old organization unable to accept tax-deductible donations.

VA healthcare

AMVETS supports a VA health care system that is fully funded first and then begins providing funding for outside care. Our veterans deserve to receive the highest quality of healthcare whether they choose to receive it from the VA or from an outside provider. Outside providers should be held to the same standard as the VA.

VA for women veterans

VA, Congress, and all advocates need to work together to eliminate barriers to care and services that many women veterans face. We will work to increase the number of gender-specific providers in VA facilities to enhance privacy and improve the environment of care for women veterans.

Veteran mental health

AMVETS has used data, research, and personal testimonials to form our support for nontraditional mental health programs. The VA's mental health budget has increased tremendously over the years and the veteran suicide rate has only increased or remained stagnant. We believe in programs that incorporate tai chi, yoga, and posttraumatic growth practices. We believe programs that are showing better results than the VA's mental health program should receive funding from Congress.

Oversight hearings

We are calling on Congress to hold oversight hearings examining the VA's mental health programs because we believe they are not working for most veterans. First of these hearings should be an examination of the 2018 Clay Hunt SAV Report. As the number one report created to study the effectiveness of VA's programs, we feel this report should be given more attention from Congress.

AMVETS (American Veterans) is the nation's most inclusive Congressionally-chartered veterans service organization, representing the interests of 20 million veterans. AMVETS is open to and fighting for all who honorably served in the United States military, including the Reserve and Guard. With more than 250,000 members nationwide, we are veterans serving veterans.

Our membership is asking Congress to support these three bills:

- 1) **Bill:** S. 2530 Charitable Equity for Veterans Act
Sponsor: Senators Bill Cassidy and Tammy Duckworth
Status: Introduced
Summary: This legislation would simply address the unintended consequence in the 501(c)(19) tax code by allowing any congressionally chartered 501 (c)(19) organization to be eligible to receive tax-deductible charitable donations.

- 2) **Bill:** S. 1520 Military Justice Improvement and Increasing Prevention Act of 2021
Sponsor: Senator Kirsten Gillibrand
Status: Introduced
Summary: The *Military Justice Improvement and Increasing Prevention Act* would take critical steps to create a more professional and transparent military justice system for serious crimes — including rape and sexual assault, murder, manslaughter, child endangerment, child pornography, and negligent homicide — and address the need for sexual assault prevention that DoD has not implemented. Specifically, the legislation would:
 - Move the decision on whether to prosecute serious crimes to independent, trained, and professional military prosecutors, while leaving misdemeanors and uniquely military crimes within the chain of command. By moving this work off of the commander's plate, it will empower commanders to focus on mission critical activities—while specifically preserving the authorities that a commander needs to provide strong leadership and a successful command climate.
 - Ensure the Department of Defense supports criminal investigators and military prosecutors through the development of unique skills needed

to properly handle investigations and cases related to sexual assault and domestic violence.

- Require the Secretary of Defense to survey and improve the physical security of military installations – including locks, security cameras, and other passive security measures – to increase safety in lodging and living spaces for service members.
- Increase, and improve training and education on military sexual assault throughout our armed services. This training would help shift the culture in the military and ensure that the armed services can enforce a no-tolerance zone for sexual assault and other grievous crimes.

3) **Bill:** S. 3017 Veterans Dental Care Eligibility Expansion and Enhancement Act

Sponsor: Senator Bernie Sanders

Status: Introduced

Summary: The Veterans Dental Care Eligibility Expansion and Enhancement Act of 2021 will eliminate the current eligibility restrictions for VA dental care and expand eligibility to all veterans receiving VA health care. It will also work to address the shortage of dentists in the U.S. by incentivizing dental school enrollment and service to our nation’s veterans, and ensure the VA maintains dental clinics in all states to meet the needs of veterans from all parts of the country. The Veterans Dental Care Eligibility Expansion and Enhancement Act would ensure the VA educates veterans on their eligibility for dental care and the importance of dental hygiene for an individual’s overall health; improve veterans’ overall physical health; and provide a reduction in long-term taxpayer spending on VA health care.

