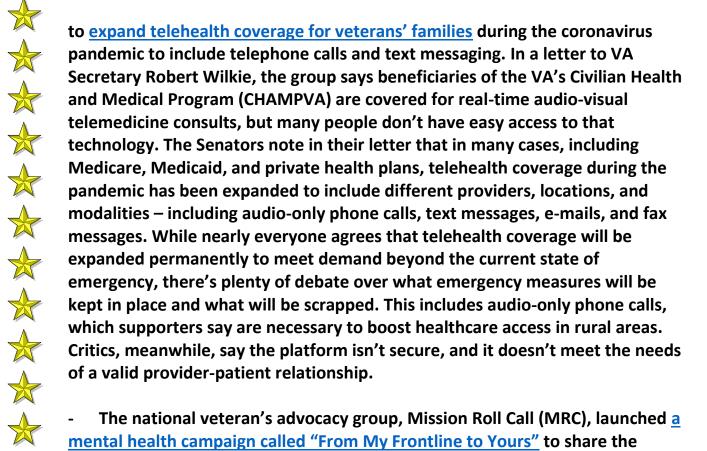
AMVETS LEGISLATIVE UPDATE SEPTEMBER 14, 2020

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News Driving the Week

- The top Veterans Affairs lawmakers in Congress may be close to an agreement that would pave the way for major veterans suicide prevention legislation to pass before the end of this year. Sen. Jerry Moran said during a Senate Veterans Affairs Committee hearing that there were ongoing negotiations with his counterpart in the House, Chairman Mark Takano, on a deal to pass Senate and House priority legislation. "We have reached an understanding that the House will take up (the bill) on Sept. 21 or 22," Moran said, adding that the agreement "presumably" includes House passage without any amendments. The next day, during a House committee meeting on a separate slate of veteran suicide prevention bills, Takano said a deal may be close, but had not been finalized, and he had not yet spoken directly to Moran. At the end of that House hearing, Takano said he believed the two chambers were nearing a deal.
- Department of Veterans Affairs leaders have said repeatedly that veteran suicide prevention is a top priority for the agency, but <u>VA does not have accurate information on how many veterans have died by suicide at its own hospitals</u>, parking decks, and cemeteries, a new watchdog report found. Dozens of veterans have died by suicide on VA property but the department doesn't keep accurate or complete records of those deaths, according to a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report. The report shows that VA's process for identifying "on-campus" suicides doesn't include checking for accuracy in those reports -- so VA's numbers are inaccurate. When investigators reviewed VA's data, it found errors in the 55 reported deaths on VA property from October 2017 to September 2019, including 10 deaths that should never have been included and four that should have been. VA Acting Chief of Staff Brooks Tucker said they planned to create a committee to evaluate the issues GAO revealed in its report and said the committee's review would be complete by July 2021.
- A group of Senators is calling on the Department of Veterans Affairs



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The national veteran's advocacy group, Mission Roll Call (MRC), launched a mental health campaign called "From My Frontline to Yours" to share the lessons military veterans have learned from the challenges related to their service to those affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The group's campaign aims to bring national attention to the mental health needs of veterans, frontline healthcare workers, and others who have experienced trauma and loss during the Covid-19 crisis. The campaign is especially relevant in September, which is "National Suicide Prevention Month." In addition to the "From My Frontline to Yours" campaign, MRC also supports Operation Deep Dive (OpDD), a four-year study about the causes and impacts of how to identify and prevent suicide and non-natural death among veterans. The joint study is a partnership between America's Warrior Partnership (AWP) and researchers at the University of Alabama and is funded by a grant from the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation.

AMVETS in the News

IG: Millions of veterans waiting to hear about canceled VA appointments

The department canceled 7.3 million in-person appointments from March 15 to May 1 as the pandemic spread through the United States, and then canceled an additional 4 million appointments through June 15. Most of the appointments were rescheduled or replaced with phone or video consultations. However, the

