



AMVETS WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

SEPTEMBER 9, 2019

News Driving the Week

- Diagnoses for [mental health conditions among active-duty U.S. military personnel](#) have remained steady over the last four years, with 8.3% of the total force diagnosed in 2018, compared with 8% in 2014, according to a new study from the Defense Department. The study looked at the number of diagnoses for eight mental health conditions, including adjustment disorder, alcohol dependence, anxiety, bipolar disorder, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, psychosis and substance abuse, and found that the most common mental health diagnoses in troops were adjustment disorder, anxiety and depression. Female service members were diagnosed with mental health conditions at rates higher than men, 12.8% compared with 7.5%, and they outpaced their male counterparts in five of eight conditions reviewed, including adjustment disorder, anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. The overall DoD rate of 8.3% in 2018 is significantly lower than the overall diagnosis rate in the United States. According to the National Association for Mental Illness, one in five adults in the U.S., or 20%, experience a mental illness in a given year, while the lifetime prevalence for mental illness is 50% among all Americans.

- On September 11, the [House Veterans Affairs health subcommittee](#) will hold a hearing on a slew of bills aimed at addressing the health of female veterans. Among other things, the bills would create an Office of Women's Health at the VA; call on the VA secretary to give Congress an annual report on how women veterans use the VA system; retrofit VA facilities with "fixtures, materials, and other outfitting measures to support" care for women; and "better integrate the medical, housing, mental health, and other benefits provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs with existing community-based domestic violence and sexual assault services." Roughly 9% of veterans are female, but that number is expected to climb to 17% by 2043.

- An investigation into [11 suspicious deaths at a West Virginia VA facility](#) has dragged on too long and produced too little in the way of answers for federal officials and the families affected, Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert Wilkie said. The Justice Department late last week confirmed that it had launched a criminal investigation into the deaths, underscoring the gravity of the situation and the magnitude of the multiple investigations underway. Much like the VA secretary, lawmakers say they are growing angry at the lack of clarity. "I'm frustrated that I'm not getting answers because of the ongoing investigation," Mr. Manchin, a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, said in a statement last week. "All of the facts will come out and no one in the VA system will be protected if they had any involvement in this horrible crime against veterans," he said. "We owe every veteran the best possible care they've earned."

- Senator Tester and six other Senators have sent a letter to the VA pushing them to expand the list of presumptive conditions associated with Agent Orange exposure. Lawmakers are urging VA to include Parkinsonism, Bladder Cancer, Hypertension, and Hyperthyroidism. Find the letter here: <https://www.veterans.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2019-09-03%20Letter%20to%20Wilkie%20re%20Agent%20Orange%20Presumptive%20Conditions.pdf>

AMVETS in the News



[American Veteran Podcast](#)

Listen to American Veteran Podcast as they interview AMVETS National Commander Jan Brown, who talks about adjusting to her new role, the state of the organization, her Commander's Project for the year, & more.

Upcoming Events

**House Veterans Affairs Committee
Member Day**

Tuesday, September 10 10:00 AM

Watch [HERE](#)

**House Veterans Affairs Committee
Health Subcommittee**

Pending Legislation

Wednesday, September 11 10:00 AM

Watch [HERE](#)

**House Veterans Affairs Committee
EO Subcommittee Field Hearing**

Combatting Veteran Homelessness in the Tampa Bay Area

Monday, September 16 10:00 AM

Watch [HERE](#)

House Veterans Affairs Committee

Critical Impact: How Barriers to Hiring at VA Affect Patient Care and Access

Wednesday, September 18 2:00 PM

Watch [HERE](#)

**House Veterans Affairs Committee
DAMA Subcommittee**

Update on VA Contracted Exams, Quality Review Process, and Service to Rural Veterans

Thursday, September 19 10:30 AM

Watch [HERE](#)

**House Veterans Affairs Committee
OI Subcommittee**

Examining VA's Over-payments and Collection Processes

Thursday, September 19 2:00 PM

Watch [HERE](#)

AMVETS Legislative Priorities

[H.R. 1715](#) Charitable Equity for Veterans Act of 2019 introduced by Rep. Ron Kind of WI and Rep. Brad Wenstrup of OH

[H.R. 1997](#) Veterans Posttraumatic Growth Act introduced by Rep. Tim Ryan of OH

[H.R. 3495](#) Improve Well-Being for Veterans Act introduced by Rep. Jack Bergman of MI and Rep. Chrissy Houlahan of PA

[S. 1906](#) Improve Well-Being for Veterans Act introduced by Rep. John Boozman of AR

[H.R. 4154](#) Leave No Veteran Behind Act introduced by Rep. Susie Lee of NV and Rep. Steve Watkins of

KS

[H.R. 3025](#) You Are Not Forgotten Act introduced by Rep. Mark Meadows of NC and Rep. Susie Lee of NV

Continued News

- In observance of [Suicide Prevention Month](#), VA encourages Veterans, community leaders, co-workers, families and friends to #BeThere — to help prevent suicide. You can #BeThere by being present, supportive and strong for those who may be going through a difficult time. As part of this approach, VA is working closely with The White House and other partners to implement the [President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide](#) or PREVENTS. "This September, and all year, I encourage everyone to take a moment to be there for Veterans in need." said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "One act of thoughtfulness can make a big difference and may even save a life. That's why VA is proud to work on initiatives like PREVENTS, to prevent suicide and find innovative ways to deliver support and care to all 20 million U.S. Veterans whenever and wherever they need it."
- To stem the rise in veteran suicides, Veterans Affairs officials say [a cultural shift on mental health issues](#) is required. In addition to new projects and a government-wide suicide prevention task force launched in March, VA officials believe elevating the conversation to the national level may help turn the tide. "People are afraid to even say the word 'suicide,' it's scary for them to talk about it," Dr. Lisa Kearney, acting deputy director of suicide prevention for Veterans Affairs, told the Washington Examiner. In addition to spreading awareness, the VA has instituted several programs for veterans suffering from mental health problems. Its Veterans Crisis Line operates 24/7 and can assign vets to counseling services as needed. It has also launched a website, [MakeTheConnection.net](#), where vets share personal stories about how they have coped with suicidal thoughts. Some of the VA's suicide prevention programs have shown promise. A study of VA emergency rooms found patients who received follow-up care after suicide attempts exhibited 45% fewer suicidal behaviors.
- Suicide was the 10th leading cause of death overall in the U.S. in 2017, claiming more than 47,000 lives, according to the CDC. Understanding trends and factors that impact suicide rates can help clinicians and public health officials address suicide in America as a whole and in smaller, local communities. To mark [National Suicide Prevention Month this September](#), Healio Psychiatry has compiled articles featuring the latest research relevant to mental health professionals treating patients with suicidality.
- More sources have confirmed that the VA plans to [partially delay rolling out the Cerner EHR](#) in the Pacific Northwest, but a VA spokesperson said no announcement is imminent. Secretary Robert Wilkie wrote last month that the rollout was starting as planned by next April and he isn't eager to retreat. The latest plan, according to two well-placed sources, is to start the rollout in late March at the Level 3 Mann-Grandstaff Medical Center in Spokane, Wash., while holding off implementation at two Puget Sound-area installations until October. Implementation leaders have told their staff this plan, but it isn't in writing. Problems related to imaging software — not as crucial in Spokane, which offers limited specialty care — are holding up progress in the larger Seattle-area installations.
- The latest estimates reveal a military veteran commits suicide nearly every hour of each day. The [Cohen Veterans Network](#) is trying to stop that disturbing trend. The national non-profit is on its way to building 25 no- to low-cost mental health clinics across the country for post-9/11 veterans and their families. The Cohen Veterans Network is known for delivering holistic evidence-based care. "They

absolutely work," Williams Christians said. "We've seen tremendous improvement, whether it is improvement in their PTSD symptoms, or their depression, or anxiety." "We actually track that, and so we're able to confidently say that it works," she continued. Two US House members from Virginia, who are also both veterans, acknowledged the great need for these facilities. "I was injured in Iraq, but mentally, I think the biggest thing for me was grief and loss," shared former Rep. Scott Taylor (R-VA). "I've unfortunately lost a lot of friends in these wars. I was able to lean, however, on other friends to be able to get through those tough times, and family." "So some people aren't so lucky, so I'm very happy that we have this now – this facility here," he added. "Their core mission is really to be there for the families, when the families need them, and they even provide emergency same-day service," Rep. Elaine Luria (D-VA) explained. "So I think that's the most important thing to get out to people in our community is that they're here as a resource that's conveniently located, centrally located."

- U.S. lawmakers are eyeing a short-term budget extension to [prevent a partial government shutdown](#), despite a [bipartisan agreement](#) in July that appeared to have settled political fights over military and nondefense spending for the next fiscal year. In a letter to House colleagues on Thursday, Majority Leader Rep. Steny Hoyer, D-Md., said Democratic leaders will introduce in the next two weeks "a clean continuing resolution to fund the government past Sept. 30." He said the move is necessary to allow Senate lawmakers to finalize work on a host of appropriations bills. It's unclear whether the Republican-led Senate will go along with the plan. The Senate Appropriations Committee reportedly planned to begin marking up its spending bills in mid-September, and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., was reportedly planning to pass the bulk of federal spending from the floor before the end of the month. Senate Republicans are hopeful they can pass Defense Department funding as part of their first package of spending bills.



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