



# **Veterans-For-Change Newsletter**

## *A Voice of the Veterans*

Week Ending Sunday, May 07, 2017

Volume 8, Issue 19

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### **This-N-That**

As many of you know, President Donald Trump visited the VA and signed an executive order 'Improving Accountability and Whistleblower Protection at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The order is intended on improving accountability and whistleblower protections, an Executive Director will be appointed who would report directly to the Secretary of the VA, Dr. Shulkin and plans developed on how to address corrections and termination of staff and directors as needed.

Provided the program works as intended we would see those who are not performing up to standards or violating patient care standards, causing risks to Veterans would be reprimanded and/or terminated.

Although I don't anticipate it any time soon, it might also be a means to do away with the VA Union which, personally I am not fond of due to many of their actions over the past few years.

Once gain the VA is digitizing Veterans records, not sure how well it will work this time. Last attempt they stopped doing it based on the excuse of

costs involved. Now they're restarting it again based once again on "costs involved", but this time for buildings leased and their costs for lease and insurance.

I'm not sure if it's a good or bad thing, but they're starting with all closed Veteran claims. But more than 500,000 files have been moved to the facility to be digitized and the goal is to complete the project by the end of 2018.

It's been some time now since the last time we had said anything about annual physicals, but we would like to encourage all Veterans to make an appointment and schedule yourself for your annual physical.

It's always better to be safe than sorry, and for all our male Veterans, talk to your doctor about getting a colonoscopy and prostate exam as well. And for all our women Veterans we strongly recommend Mammograms and Pap Smears.

For the past few weeks we've posted many legislative alerts, and to all those who have sent off the Pre-Written E-Mails we sincerely thank you and ask that you please keep it up, every single week. And please pay particular attention to the Legislative Alert for both Blue Water Navy and the SBP/DIC off set.

On behalf of our Volunteers nationwide and myself, we wish you and your family good health!

Respectfully,

Jim Davis

Founder

[Jim.Davis@Veterans-For-Change.org](mailto:Jim.Davis@Veterans-For-Change.org)

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## Help Blue Water Vietnam Vets Exposed to Agent Orange

The “Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act” has been introduced in both the House and Senate (H.R. 299 & S. 422 respectively). These proposals would clarify that service members serving off the coast of the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam conflict have a presumption for filing disability claims with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for ailments associated with exposure to the Agent Orange herbicide. FRA believes Congress should recognize that so-called “Blue water” veterans were exposed to Agent Orange herbicide and authorize presumptive status for VA disability claims associated with this exposure.

Please use the [Action Center](#) to ask your legislators to support this important legislation.

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## New TRICARE Contracts Drive 'Historic' Reforms

According to Vice Adm. Raquel Bono, director of the Defense Health Agency, military healthcare is seven months from rolling out "historic" reforms to improve patient access and quality of care, to streamline health operations across the services, and to better integrate that direct care system with networks of private sector providers supporting TRICARE insurance beneficiaries. Read the full story [here](#).

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## **S. 319, Helping Veterans Exposed to Burn Pits Act**

Senator Amy Klobuchar introduced S. 319, the Helping Veterans Exposed to Burn Pits Act. The bill would establish a Center of Excellence in preventing, diagnosing, mitigating, treating and rehabilitating conditions related to veterans' exposure to burn pits during Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom. DAV Resolution No. 237 supports improvement of care and benefits for veterans exposed to toxins and environmental hazards, including a rigorous research agenda to identify any associations between such exposures and adverse health outcomes.

VA's website states that exposure to toxins found in the burn pits may be associated with skin, eye, respiratory, cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, or internal organ problems. Exposure to burn pits is generally associated with short-term effects, such as eye irritation, acute respiratory symptoms, and skin itching or rashes. However, according to a 2011 Institute of Medicine report, fine dust particles and pollution in Iraq and Afghanistan may actually be more responsible for respiratory illness claimed by veterans who served there.

VA has established a registry for veterans who were exposed to burn pits. The Center would be charged with using data from the registry to study whether exposure is associated with long-term health effects in veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan in addition to improving diagnosis and treatments for those exposed. Veterans interested in registering should click [here](#).

Please write your elected officials to urge their co-sponsorship and support for passage of S. 319. Thank you for your continued efforts and participation in the Commander's Action Network.

Click [HERE](#) and send your message!

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## Military Appreciation Month Begins

Military Appreciation Month honors those who are serving and have served in the U.S. military, along with their spouses and families. For a rundown of all the important events occurring during this month, as well as discounts for service members and military families that are being offered, visit the [Military Appreciation Month section](#).

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## President Signs VA Choice Program Extension

President Donald J. Trump recently signed the Veterans Choice Program Extension and Improvement Act on Tuesday, ensuring military veterans can continue receiving health care in the civilian sector when care is not easily accessible from a Veterans Affairs Department provider. 'This bill will extend and improve the Veterans Choice Program so that more veterans can see the doctor of their choice ... and don't have to wait and travel long distances for VA care,' he said. 'This new law is a good start, but there is still much work to do.' For more information, read this [article](#).

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## Support SBP/DIC Offset Repeal Legislation

Senator Nelson (FL) has introduced legislation (S. 339) and Congressman Joe Wilson (SC) has introduced identical legislation in the house (HR 846) that repeals the SBP/DIC offset for survivors, sometimes referred to as the "Military Widows Tax.". Please use this action center contact your legislators to ask them to support this important legislation.

[Take Action!](#)

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## AF Offers Teen Aviation Camp

Thanks to the Air Force Services Activity, teens are getting the opportunity to explore careers as aviators or astronauts through 2017 summer camps. A Teen Aviation Camp is set for June 24-30, 2017, at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado; and a Space Camp is planned for July 30 to Aug. 4 at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama. The deadline to apply for the Teen Aviation Camp is May 5. The deadline to apply for the Space Camp is May 18.

For more Air Force news, visit the [Air Force section](#).

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## Business Grant for Military Spouses

A recently formed foundation is offering three grants to military spouse small businesses in honor of Military Spouse Appreciation Month — and all you need to do is apply. For more information, see this Spousebuzz [post](#).

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## Proposal to Tax Post 9/11 GI Bill Runs into Headwinds

In the last few weeks several veteran service organizations have begun quietly pushing for a "GI Bill 3.0," which would expand some educational benefits for those that use the Post 9/11 GI Bill. However, the \$3 billion in new spending planned over the next decade would be paid for by servicemembers themselves, with \$100 a month taken out of their paychecks for the first 24 months of service. While \$100 a month might not be much if you're a brand-new lieutenant, it can be a huge burden for junior enlisted servicemembers (E-1s to E-4s).

Starting at the end of this year new servicemembers will have to contribute money towards their own retirements. Additionally, there are annual threats to the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) and the commissary, not to mention efforts last year to make active duty families pay for access to the TRICARE system. TREA: The Enlisted Association is skeptical of any rush to placed additional financial burdens on those who have committed to defend us.

While it is clear that the current Post 9/11 GI Bill contains loopholes and antiquated practices that need to be fixed (the fact that the Montgomery GI Bill program exists at all is a problem), last year TREA: The Enlisted Association rejected any attempt to force veterans to "rob Peter to pay Paul." We do not support reductions to certain veterans' programs, or increased costs to servicemembers, their families, veterans or survivors in order to fund new programs, no matter how important they are. If Congress deems them important enough, they will find the money somewhere else.

A hearing on this legislation, scheduled for April 26, was postponed.

Here are some of the loopholes that the bill attempts to fix and which, taken individually, TREA supports:

- removing the 15-year "use it or lose it" time limit on benefits to make them redeemable over a lifetime;
- offering benefits to vets with other-than-honorable and general discharges;



- expanding support for vets in science, technology, and engineering programs that take longer than four years to earn a degree;
- restoring assistance to students who were enrolled in ITT, Corinthian, or other discontinued educational programs;
- greater access for rural and nontraditional students;
- the option to use benefits on "microdegree" or non-degree certification programs in tech;
- opening full benefits to all combat vets, closing loopholes that omit some reservists and Purple Heart recipients;
- and increased IT support.

Source: TREA

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## **To Contact your Members of Congress**

**To Call your Representative: 202-225-2305**

**To call your Senator: 202-224-3841 or 202-224-3553**

**To call different members of Congress: 202-224-3121**

**Toll FREE Number: 866-272-6622**

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## **DOD Inspecting Groundwater at 400 US Installations**

Late last month news broke that nearly 400 military bases in the continental US are being tested for drinking water contamination.

A nationwide review of water on or around bases has begun, especially targeted towards bases that used a firefighting foam containing toxic chemicals. DOD has confirmed water contamination at or near more than three dozen.

Click [here](#) for a map of the locations where contamination has been found.

While this process plays out, the chemicals in soil or groundwater could continue to leach into drinking water, experts say, meaning the problem could grow.

The chemicals causing the contamination are PFOA and PFOS, known collectively as perfluorinated compounds (PFCs). They are unregulated and little understood. Used in manufacturing and in military firefighting foam, they have been linked to health problems including testicular and kidney cancers, thyroid disease, and high cholesterol. Research on other potential health effects is ongoing, and some experts contend even water below the EPA's health advisory level is unsafe. The chemicals are commonly found around military air bases, civilian airports, manufacturing plants and fire stations.

Local and state officials around the country are pressing the Department of Defense to step up and pay for clean up efforts wherever contamination linked to military activity is found. TREA: The Enlisted Association will keep you updated as more information becomes available.

Source: TREA



## S. 681, the Deborah Sampson Act to Improve VA Services for Women Veterans

On March 21, the Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, Senator Jon Tester, introduced S. 681, the Deborah Sampson Act. This comprehensive measure addresses gender disparities and would improve and expand programs and services for women veterans provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

The bill would establish a pilot program for peer-to-peer counseling and authorizes group retreat counseling for women veterans recently separated from military service. It would expand the capabilities within the VA Women Veterans Call Center and extend the number of days, from seven to 14, VA can cover the cost of care for newborns of women veterans and authorize medically-necessary transportation for newborns.

The legislation aims to eliminate barriers to care by ensuring every VA medical facility has at least one full-time or part-time women's health provider, as well as a Women Veterans Program Manager and a Women Veteran Program Ombudsman. Additional resources are authorized for mini-residency training in women's health for clinicians, and retrofitting VA facilities to enhance privacy, safety and improve the overall environment of care for women veterans.

S. 681 would provide support services for women veterans seeking legal assistance and authorizes additional grants for organizations supporting women veterans and their families. Finally, The Deborah Sampson Act would require data collection and reporting on all VA programs serving veterans, by gender and minority status, including a report on the availability of prosthetics for women veterans and would better coordinate outreach by centralizing all information for women veterans in one easily accessible place on VA's website.

DAV's 2014 report, *Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home* identified many of these gaps in VA programs for women and has long advocated for a more comprehensive provision of VA women's health services that appropriately recognizes and honors their service and sacrifice.

Please contact your elected representatives to urge co-sponsorship and passage of S. 681. A letter has been prepared for this purpose or you may write your own to express your personal views. Click the link below to log in and send your message:

As always, thank you for your support.

Click [HERE](#) and send your message!

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## Dog Tag, Inc. Helps Vets Prep for Careers

Dog Tag, Inc. was founded to ensure veterans with disabilities are business ready, competitive and employable upon transitioning into civilian life. Dog Tag is a five-month entrepreneurial program that offers experiential learning as well as a tailored curriculum at Georgetown University's School of Continuing Studies. The linchpin of the program is Dog Tag Bakery, which provides a vehicle for veterans to put their newly acquired skills into context. The curriculum serves as an introduction to business from an academic perspective. For more information, visit the Dog Tag, Inc. [website](#).

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## COLAs vs. Pay Raises

It's still far too early to know what the COLA will be next year, or even if there will be one. For the curious, if a COLA were given today, it would be 1.1 percent.

However, it's important to remember that a COLA is not the same as a pay raise. The COLA, or Cost of Living Adjustment, is just that. It's an adjustment in the amount of retired pay to compensate for the effects of inflation that eat away at retirement pay. Without a COLA retirement pay would end up impoverishing many retirees because it becomes worth less and less as the years go by.

Since 1975, Social Security general benefit increases have been cost-of-living adjustments or COLAs. Prior to 1975, Social Security benefit increases were set by legislation.

A complicated formula is used in determining what the COLA will be and many argue it's not fair to seniors because the current formula does not take into consideration the kinds of increases in costs that seniors experience, as opposed to younger workers.

Pay raises; on the other hand, must be given each year by Congress, if there is to be one. That's why there is usually a difference between the amount of a pay raise and the amount of a COLA. In addition, Congress can decide to give workers a pay raise even if retirees don't get a COLA.

Source: TREA

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## Naval Station Norfolk Walk-In Clinic

The Branch Health Clinic Naval Station Norfolk has opened the first Walk-In Contraception Clinic for military beneficiaries in Hampton Roads, Va. It is an open-access clinic for women who need contraception. The clinic serves all female beneficiaries who have been abstinent for two weeks. Same-day services offered include birth control prescriptions and renewals; Intra-Uterine Device (IUD) insertions and IUD string checks; Nexplanon; Depo Provera; contraception counseling; and emergency contraception/Plan B. Currently, the clinic is open for business every Tuesday from 7 to 10:30 a.m. and 12:30 to 2:30 p.m., and it is located within the Branch Health Clinic's OB/GYN area. If the clinic experiences high patient volume, it will be offered more days of the week.



## Ensure All Veterans are Provided Timely Access to Care

The House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC) has approved the “Eliminating the Sunset Date of the Choice Act” (H.R. 369), legislation that eliminates the sunset (expiration date) on the VA Choice law. The bill now goes to the House floor for further consideration.

FRA supports this act because the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) first priority must be to ensure that all Veterans currently waiting for treatment are provided timely access. This law gives Veterans who have waited more than 30 days for an appointment—or who live more than 40 miles from a VA medical facility—the choice to seek VA-funded care outside of the VA system.

Please use the [Action Center](#) to ask your U.S. Representative to support continuing the VA Choice program.

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## Vets Don't Need a Pass for This Hard-to-visit D.C. Museum

If you're hoping to visit the new African American museum in D.C., you better plan months in advance or be prepared to wait in really long lines — unless you're a veteran or active duty service member. The National Museum of African American History and Culture, which opened in 2016, requires that visitors who want to guarantee entry snag timed entry passes several months in advance. But veterans, active duty service members and first responders have an easier way to gain admission — for more details, see this [Spousebuzz post](#).

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## **U.S. Government Accountability Office Reports**

- 1) **Border Security: Additional Actions Could Strengthen DHS Efforts to Address Subterranean, Aerial, and Maritime Smuggling.**
- 2) **Department of Energy: Use of Leading Practices Could Help Manage the Risk of Fraud and Other Improper Payments.**
- 3) **Foot-And-Mouth Disease: USDA's Evaluations of Foreign Animal Health Systems Could Benefit from Better Guidance and Greater Transparency.**
- 4) **International Air Travelers: CBP Collaborates with Stakeholders to Facilitate the Arrivals Process, but Could Strengthen Reporting of Airport Wait Times.**
- 5) **Medicaid Managed Care: Compensation of Medicaid Directors and Managed Care Organization Executives in Selected States in 2015.**
- 6) **Medicaid Personal Care Services: More Harmonized Program Requirements and Better Data Are Needed.**

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## **VA Caregiver Program**



The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Caregiver Program aims to support caregivers who in turn support veterans in ways VA cannot. Caregivers play an important role in the health and well-being of veterans, and caring for a wounded, ill, or injured Veteran is not easy work. Without family caregivers, many of these veterans could not remain close to family and in their communities. For more information, read the [VA VAntage Point Blog](#), visit the VA Caregiver Support [website](#) or call the Caregiver Support Line at 1-855-260-3274. You can also contact your local Caregiver Support Coordinator located at every VA medical center across the United States.

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## **Veteran Crisis Resources**

**Veterans Crisis Line 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1**

**Military Crisis Line 1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

**National Call Center for Homeless Veterans**

**1-877-4AID-VET (424.3838)**

**VA Caregiver Support Line 1-855-260-3274**

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## **VA Looks at More Telemedicine Options**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is researching how to improve the quality of care for veterans in rural areas with serious or chronic conditions. A telehealth collaborative care study is surveying about 800 veterans in rural areas in Texas and Georgia who have been diagnosed with human immunodeficiency virus, or HIV. The survey focuses on regions where VA has an HIV specialty clinic. The study claims that approximately 18 percent of the 24,000 veterans in care for HIV infection in the U.S. Live in rural areas and have limited access to specialized health care for their disease. An abstract of the study is available on the VA [website](#). For more information, read this [article](#).

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## **Veterans-For-Change Web Site**

The Veterans-For-Change website has been under construction since day one back in 2009 and every day since then. The looks pretty much stay the same, but in the background constant improvement and change is being done to make our website the most user friendly “One-Stop-Shop” website to find almost everything you might have tried to find searching the internet.

Almost a hundred people have been involved; collecting web links to documents now houses on the VFC website, collecting thousands of web links for various issues, illnesses and benefits. Creating forums for all eras of service and two forums one just for men and one just for woman where you can go question, comment, share medical and personal concerns, what ever you'd like it to be.

We also have a forum with a licensed Mental Health Worker, again where you can seek help or just ask questions.

We average 1,700 hits per day, and downloads average 1,000 per day with a total 3,271,285 visitors as of Friday.

If you subscribe you will have full access to the entire website and best of all it's FREE of charge! You just need a valid E-mail address so the system can send you a confirmation E-Mail. Once received, click on the link to be

authorized automatically.

[www.veterans-for-change.org](http://www.veterans-for-change.org)

- Documents Library with over 15,905 documents on-line (Updated: 12/12/16)
- FAQ's with more than 1,600 FAQ's and answers
- Multiple Forums
  - o Afghanistan Veterans
  - o FMP - Foreign Medial Program
  - o Gulf War & Desert Storm Veterans
  - o Iraq Veterans
  - o Korean Veterans
  - o Men Veterans Forum
  - o Mental Health for Veterans
  - o Political Issues
  - o Suggestion Box
  - o The Mess Hall
  - o VA Hospitals and Medical Centers
  - o Veteran Affairs
  - o Vietnam Veterans
  - o Welcome Mat
  - o Women Veterans Forum
  - o WW II Veterans
- Job Postings
- Memorial Pages (Updated: 10/10/16)
- News (Articles On-Line: 6,433)
- Polls
- Web Links, more than 3,548, Added 5 New Links (Updated: 05/05/17)

If you have a submission for the memorial pages, E-Mail:

[Jim.Davis@veterans-for-change.org](mailto:Jim.Davis@veterans-for-change.org)

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**Hearing Held on Agent Orange,  
Radiation**

Multiple residents of Guam recently offered oral testimony at a public hearing on Agent Orange contamination and radiation exposure. On April 4, the Guam Legislature's Committee on Culture and Justice convened a hearing to discuss Resolution 25-34 related to supporting the Fighting for Orange-Stricken Territories in Eastern Regions (FOSTER) Act, and Resolution 40-34 related to recognizing the radiation exposure of Enewetak Atoll cleanup veterans and including them in the Mark Takai Atomic Veterans Healthcare Parity Act. Frustration over Guam's leaders' inaction was a common theme for many who testified. For more information, read the article from the Pacific [Daily News](#). Read Resolution 25-34 ([http://www.guamlegislature.com/COR\\_Res\\_34th/STATUS Res. No. 25-34 \(COR\).pdf](http://www.guamlegislature.com/COR_Res_34th/STATUS Res. No. 25-34 (COR).pdf)) and Resolution 40-34 ([http://www.guamlegislature.com/COR\\_Res\\_34th/STATUS Res. No. 40-34 \(COR\).pdf](http://www.guamlegislature.com/COR_Res_34th/STATUS Res. No. 40-34 (COR).pdf)).

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<https://twitter.com/Veterans4Change>

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## Paycheck Chronicles: Nine Ways to Go Broke

Sometimes you have to think about the worst-case scenarios to help you plan how to do the right thing — and our expert at the Paycheck Chronicles blog, J.J. Montanaro, has a rundown of [nine ways](#) you can go broke, and what you can do to avoid them.

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[Links to Other Stories](#)

- 1) American Legion invites Veterans to share VA experiences at Washington, D.C. town hall meeting
- 2) Department of Veterans Affairs announces hiring-freeze changes
- 3) Marine Veteran is VA's Male Volunteer of the Year
- 4) Mesothelioma Victims Center Now Offers Diagnosed Navy Veterans Who Were Over-Exposed to Asbestos at a Shipyard Instant Access to the Nation's Top Compensation Lawyers
- 5) Military Dog Reunited with Former Air Force Handler After Three Years Apart
- 6) President Donald J. Trump visits VA and signs executive order 'Improving Accountability and Whistleblower Protection at the Department of Veterans Affairs'
- 7) VA Modernization Initiative Reduces Processing Time for Veterans' Claims, Saves Future Taxpayer Dollars
- 8) VA rehabilitation scientist recognized for work with Veterans affected by upper-limb loss

You can help VFC by reading articles posted and commenting at the bottom and rate the articles. If you don't have an account, sign up today, it's FREE. Your comments and rankings tell us what type of information you want most.

Check us out today: [www.veterans-for-change.org](http://www.veterans-for-change.org)

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Military Personnel & Families~**

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**VA Reduces Processing Time**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently started digitizing older, inactive paper records. This new 'paper-extraction' process ensures that when a claim is filed, the veteran's electronic record is already available in VA's computer systems, reducing processing time for benefit claims from veterans and their survivors. As of April 14, 2017, more than 500,000 files have been collected from eight regional offices for scanning. The agency plans to remove and scan paper claim records from the remaining regional offices by the end of 2018. For more information about VA's benefits, visit the Veterans Benefits Administration [website](#) or call 800-827-1000.



## **Complementary and Alternative Medicine at VA Medical Centers**

Like other Americans, veterans have grown increasingly interested in alternative treatment options to enhance wellness or address symptoms that are not well managed with conventional medicine. A 2014 study found that service members experienced chronic pain post combat at a much higher rate (44%) than the general population (26%). They were also far more likely to be prescribed opioids (15% v. 4%) to manage pain. Many veterans view complementary and alternative treatment approaches as a means to limiting or avoiding the use of opioids and other pharmaceuticals that may have adverse side effects.

Based on these findings, Representative Julia Brownley (CA) introduced two bills aimed at expanding veterans' access to complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) in VA medical centers. The first measure, the Expanding Care for Veterans Act, H.R. 102, would require VA to develop a plan for expanding delivery and integration of CAM in at least 15 VA medical centers and evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions for veterans with mental health issues, chronic pain and other debilitating conditions.

The Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act of 2017 (H.R. 103) would require VA to offer chiropractic care at every VA medical center by the end of 2019. VA currently offers chiropractic services as part of its medical benefits package. However, only about 65 VA medical centers have chiropractors who are integrated into primary care, rehabilitation and other specialized care teams.

Please write your Representative today to urge co-sponsorship and enactment of H.R. 102 and H.R. 103. As always, thank you for your advocacy by participating in the Commander's Action Network.

Click [HERE](#) and send your message!

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**Veterans-For-Change, Inc.**

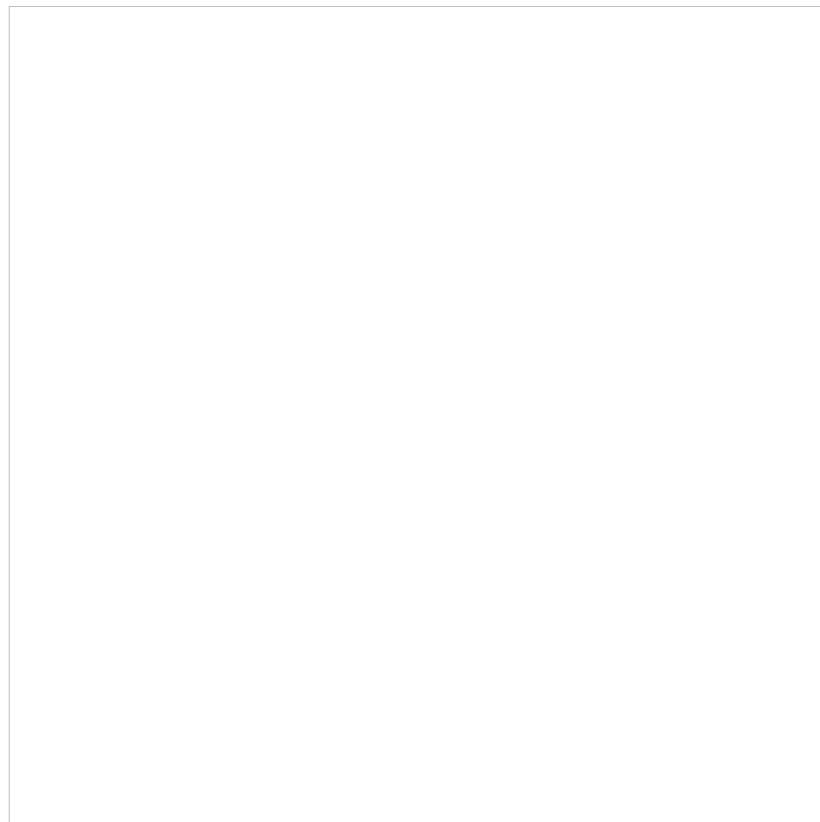
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**Serving those who served!**

**Please pass on to all your Veteran Friends and Family**



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please send all correspondence to: [Jim.Davis@veterans-for-change.org](mailto:Jim.Davis@veterans-for-change.org)

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