



Washington Update

Check out the [PVAAction Force](#) page to view alerts and a list of key legislation.

PRESIDENT ISSUES EXECUTIVE ORDERS AND ACTIONS ADDRESSING THE GOVERNMENT'S WORKFORCE AND FUNDING

Following his inauguration on January 20, President Trump has issued a number of executive orders (EO) and actions directed at federal employees and funding. The effect of these and other EOs and actions has resulted in some uncertainty about their effect on VA and other agencies and programs important to PVA members.

On Inauguration Day, the President ordered a hiring freeze that included the VA. Subsequent notification clarified that many VA health care-related positions were exempt from the freeze. Vacancies in the Veterans Benefits Administration, however, will need to be reviewed on a case by case basis to determine whether they can be filled.

On January 27, the President issued an EO freezing federal program funding until it could be reviewed for compliance with the President's direction for each agency. VA programs reviewed included disability compensation, specially adapted housing grants, and automobile allowance and adaptive equipment grants. Following widespread concern about the effect of the EO, and a court injunction barring its implementation, the Administration withdrew the official memo from the Office of Management and Budget. Prior to withdrawing the memo, VA announced that it had reviewed all 44 of

its financial assistance programs and deemed them compliant.

VA COMMITTEES HOLD HEARINGS ON ACCESS TO VA COMMUNITY CARE

On January 22, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) held an oversight hearing titled, "[Restoring Focus: Putting Veterans First in Community Care](#)." Paul McKenna, Sergeant Major, US Marine Corps (Ret.); William Dooley, Master Sergeant, US Army (Ret.); Lori Willis Locklear, Mother of Navy Veteran Logan Willis; Brittany Dymond Murray, Associate Director, VFW; and Kelley Saindon, DNP, RN, CHPN, Secretary/Treasurer, Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs testified during the hearing. Many of the witnesses offered testimony about delays in VA's authorizing community care in a timely manner and its impact on their lives.

HVAC Chairman Mike Bost (R-IL) has stated that one of his top three priorities this session is veterans' access to community care. Committee Ranking Member Mark Takano (D-CA) expressed concern that the hearing didn't include the witnesses necessary to allow the committee to fully explore the access problems. Specifically, the hearing didn't include any witnesses from the VA or the third-party administrators that administer the community care program.



The following week, on January 28, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) held a hearing on the same topic. Like their House counterparts, no witnesses from VA or other government agencies were asked to appear before the committee. Instead, a single panel of two veterans and three veterans-related organizations spoke with SVAC members and talked about barriers encountered when receiving care in the community. Much of the discussion focused on access to mental health care, and in particular, access to residential rehabilitation treatment programs (RRTP) which help veterans with substance use disorders (SUD), PTSD, depression, and similar conditions. Existing VA community care standards do not often extend to these programs which has prevented many veterans from receiving this level of care in a timely.

In a statement for the record, PVA pointed out that RRTPs are virtually non-existent for veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders and that we believe it is in the best interest of our members for VA to develop national procedures and protocols related to providing mental health and SUD inpatient care for these veterans. In addition, we stressed the importance of preserving and strengthening VA's specialized systems of care since it isn't available in the community. A recording of the hearing can be viewed [here](#).

SENATE VA COMMITTEE SENDS COLLINS NOMINATION TO THE FLOOR

On January 23, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee voted 18-1 to send to the full Senate the nomination of former Representative Doug Collins to serve as the next VA Secretary. Collins, who is from Georgia, served as a Republican House lawmaker from January 3, 2013 – January 3, 2021. He has served in the military as an Air Force chaplain, and he remains a member of the U.S. Air Force Reserve.

At his confirmation hearing earlier in the month, Collins told Senate lawmakers he would make it his mission to take care of our veterans and to make sure they get the benefits that they deserve. "VA will not have a stronger fighter for the employees in the workforce than this secretary, if confirmed, and also one that will make sure that we're [the department] held

accountable." He said that he would support veterans having access to private medical care but would not dismantle or privatize the current VA health system. Collins repeatedly stressed that VA medical centers will always exist and that he has no intention of pushing for privatization, but he also acknowledged that VA's direct and community care systems need to find the right balance. You can view his confirmation hearing [here](#).

INTRODUCTION OF THE CARING FOR SURVIVORS ACT

On January 23, Rep. Jahana Hayes (D-CT) and Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) reintroduced H.R. 680, the Caring for Survivors Act. This legislation seeks to improve Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) by both increasing the amount paid to the survivors of veterans and reducing the time period needed for eligibility by a seriously disabled veteran. Currently, DIC is roughly 43 percent the amount of a single 100 percent disabled veteran's compensation. This legislation would increase that to 55 percent, a monthly increase of approximately \$450. In addition, this legislation would reduce the DIC eligibility period for 100 percent disabled veterans from 10 years to 5 years. PVA has supported this legislation since its initial introduction in the 116th Congress and proudly continues this tradition. To read more about this legislation, please click [here](#).

NEWS OF NOTE

DOJ Reaches Settlement Agreement on Behalf of Disabled Veteran with Service Animal

On January 15, the Department of Justice (DOJ) [announced](#) that it had entered a [settlement agreement](#) with a subsidiary of UnitedHealth Group, OptumServe Health Services, Inc. DOJ originally filed a complaint against OptumServe for violating the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) after a disabled veteran was not allowed to attend a scheduled appointment because he had a service animal. Under Title III of the ADA, places like public accommodation, such as the clinics OptumServe operates, are required to make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, and procedures, to permit the use of service animals by persons with disabilities. Under the agreement, along with providing



additional training to staff, OptumServe will make other changes that ensure compliance with the ADA.

Homeless Veteran Population Shrinking

Last month, the VA reported a 7.5 percent reduction in veteran homelessness due to actions the agency has taken to make homelessness prevention a priority. The VA and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) annually partner for the “Point-In-Time (PIT) Count,” which is a combined effort to count the number of homeless veterans on a single night. At the end of last year, VA and HUD counted 32,882 veterans experiencing homelessness. According to the VA, this is the lowest number of homeless veterans since the PIT count began in 2009. In 2024, 46,552 veterans moved to permanent housing, and more than 95 percent of those veterans remain housed. Data shows that since 2010 there has been a reduction of 55.6 percent in veteran homelessness. You can read the official press release [here](#).

US Attorney’s Office Reaches Settlement with Mandan Parks and Recreation

On January 16, the United States Attorney’s Office for the District of North Dakota [announced](#) that it had entered into a settlement agreement with Mandan Parks and Recreation after an investigation revealed violations against the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The investigation found that sections and components of Mandan’s Starion Sports Complex were not fully accessible to individuals with disabilities. Under the ADA, public entities are required to give people with disabilities an equal opportunity to benefit from all of their programs, services, and activities. Public entities are also required to ensure that newly constructed buildings, like the Starion Sports Complex, are readily accessible to and usable by people with disabilities. Under the settlement agreement, Mandan Parks and Recreation will remedy all noted ADA violations.

SURVEYS, WEBINARS & COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

Preparing to Advocate During PVA’s Annual Testimony

Join us on February 20 at 3:00 PM ET as we prepare

for PVA National President Robert Thomas’ testimony before a Joint Session of the House and Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committees. We will start off with a warm welcome from President Thomas, followed by a breakdown of [PVA’s 2025 policy priorities](#) by Chief Policy Officer Heather Ansley and National Legislative Director Morgan Brown. Registration for the webinar can be found [here](#).

In the meantime, we need your help in pushing our priorities forward. Sign [PVA’s SCI/D System of Care petition](#) and count your voice during the hearing.

Survey to Assess Accessibility During the 2024 General Election

PVA is conducting a survey on accessible voting. The survey aims to learn more about the voting experience of people with disabilities in the 2024 general election. The feedback received from this survey will inform our advocacy on how to educate members as they face accessibility barriers in voting. To take the survey, please click [here](#).

DOJ Provides Free Webinar on ADA Web and Mobile Accessibility Rule

On January 16, the Department of Justice posted a [webinar](#) summarizing its [final rule](#) that establishes the Americans with Disabilities Act’s (ADA) accessibility requirements for public entities’ services, programs, and activities that are available to the public through web and mobile applications. The webinar summarizes the final rule and provides introductory information about the rule’s requirements.

Veterans’ Committee Activities

Please visit the [House](#) and [Senate](#) Veterans’ Affairs Committee webpages for information on previous and upcoming hearings and markups.

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