



## MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

- ★ **Ensure community alignment:** Continue to pursue a public health approach that coordinates action from all government as well as public-private partnerships. Programs to help veterans address invisible wounds from service, including the Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program, Mission Daybreak, and the Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide, should be sufficiently funded and aligned.
- ★ **Increase focus on opioid and substance use disorders:** Promote stronger care and coordination for opioid and substance use disorders, as well as co-occurring mental health disorders, by enhancing internal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) capacity, post-care planning, and referrals to community providers.
- ★ **Improve access to residential care:** Ensure that veterans in need of inpatient residential care can access it in a timely and efficient manner. VA case coordination services should promote efficient connection to VA and community-based resources when veterans are ready to enter treatment.
- ★ **Continue to leverage telehealth:** Connect more veterans to care by addressing issues such as broadband access, IT infrastructure, VA care access points, and interstate medical practice rules for community mental health providers. Ensure that veterans can still choose how to receive their care as telehealth services expand.



## WOMEN VETERANS

- ★ **Expand and promote access to gender-specific care:** Pass legislation that would expand access to gender-specific services in VA and through Community Care providers, as well as empower women veterans in decision-making processes related to health care. Strengthen implementation and outreach of programs targeting women veterans, including the Women Veterans Health Care program through VA.
- ★ **Support efforts related to the military transition:** Invest in mentorship and transition support services for women veterans, including in areas such as financial wellness and social health. Expand awareness and eligibility for educational opportunities and scholarship benefits upon exiting from the military. Encourage collaboration with the veteran service organization community, the Department of Defense (DoD), and VA to familiarize women veterans with community-based services that can ease challenges during the transition to civilian life.
- ★ **Improve mental health care and benefits for women veterans:** Develop stronger efforts related to destigmatizing accessing mental health services, including through women-focused cultural competency programming for Veterans Crisis Line operators, as well as also exploring new opportunities for non-pharmaceutical-based mental health treatment options. Additionally, enacting greater coordination across government agencies and disciplines to improve awareness, access to benefits, and quality of care for military sexual trauma survivors in mental health programs as well as across other health programs.



## FINANCIAL SECURITY

- ★ **Pass the Major Richard Star Act:** In 2004, Congress passed a law allowing military retirees with at least 20 years of service who are rated at least 50 percent disabled to collect their full DoD retired pay and their full VA disability compensation benefits with no offset. The Major Richard Star Act would allow veterans who were retired for combat-related injuries with under 20 years of service to do the same.
- ★ **Maximize the impact of VA's Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program:** Pass legislation that would allow VR&E to operate at its highest potential and expand access to more disabled veterans. These improvements should include veteran-friendly policies for when the program can be used, transparency about eligibility determinations, and more consistent training for VR&E counselors.
- ★ **Increase wounded warrior employment:** Create opportunities throughout the federal government to help place veterans in positions that leverage skills and experience developed in the military. The federal government can immediately fill hiring needs with experienced candidates by creating employment programs to place veterans in stable jobs. While providing mental, physical, and financial health benefits, positions in the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture, and Homeland Security can be filled by veterans with the desire to continue to work in support of our nation's environmental, agricultural, and security needs.



## TOXIC EXPOSURE

- ★ **Ensure full PACT Act implementation:** Work with Congress and VA to support full implementation of the recently passed Honoring Our PACT Act, the WWP-championed toxic exposure law that represents the largest expansion of veterans' health care and benefits in decades.
- ★ **Mitigate harm from domestic toxic exposure:** Ensure that Service members and veterans struggling with the harmful health effects of exposure to materials like per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) that are associated with certain military occupations and installations have access to appropriate health care.



## BRAIN HEALTH

- ★ **Expand research on traumatic brain injury (TBI):** More can and should be known about the expected course of neurological and cognitive functioning after TBI and how veterans can rely on VA for long-term care and support. Committing to research and policies to identify and expand access to effective treatments and community-based supports is an effective step we can take now to better prepare for the future.
- ★ **Promote long-term care and support:** Support policies to promote the utilization and success of VA's long-term care programs for younger veterans, including those who have suffered TBIs in service.



## CAREGIVERS

- ★ **Monitor caregiver program eligibility and appeals:** Support the continued expansion of the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers to veterans of all generations. Continue to monitor program changes to ensure that veterans and caregivers in need of heightened support receive the resources and care they require to live healthy and fulfilling lives.
- ★ **Address caregiver needs:** Being a caregiver for a veteran often takes a toll on the caregiver's mental health. Advance policies to ensure that caregivers are provided with adequate services for mental health and wellness, as well as resources to ensure that they can support themselves should their caregiving roles change.
- ★ **Plan for financial future:** Many caregivers place their career ambitions on hold to support their loved ones and face long-term financial uncertainty, particularly into typical retirement age. Advance policies to help caregivers establish financial security as their caregiving roles evolve over time.



## QUALITY OF LIFE

- ★ **Increase support for rural veterans:** Improve the ability of rural veterans to access quality care and receive preventive care by improving access to broadband, increasing accessibility to quality community care, providing innovative health care delivery models, and decreasing IT burdens.
- ★ **Reduce health care disparities for underserved populations:** Ensure that underserved veterans have equitable access to care and preventive services by focusing on social determinants of health, reducing health care disparities, and improving outreach to underserved veterans.
- ★ **Encourage independent living and accessibility:** Make air travel more accessible by supporting policies that improve the ability of veterans and other people with disabilities to travel on commercial airlines with dignity and safety. Promote the creation of adaptive trails and recreational opportunities at National Parks and public lands. Remove barriers for warriors accessing adaptive recreational sports equipment through VA to help them improve their physical fitness and overall well-being. Modernize VA home improvement grants to ensure warriors are able to adapt their homes to accommodate their disabilities.



## DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS WORKFORCE & MODERNIZATION

- ★ **Support VA workforce improvements:** Support policies that allow VA to recruit and retain high-quality talent to improve veterans' experiences at VA and improve health outcomes.
- ★ **Improve case coordination services:** While the number of Service members catastrophically injured in service has decreased in recent years, the needs of severely injured Service members and veterans have not diminished over time and will, in many cases, grow. Support policies to help these individuals navigate the health system and promote a broad community effort to address overlapping resources and nonuniform availability of federal, state, and local resources.
- ★ **Electronic health record and infrastructure modernization:** As VA's health system continues to care for millions of veterans and aspires to serve even more, its information systems and brick-and-mortar facilities must be fully optimized to deliver the best care possible. Congressional oversight of these processes is essential.