



MOPH Legislative Priorities

2017-2018

Veterans' Health Care

- Fully fund the Veterans Health Administration, to include both VA and non-VA care.
- Non-VA care must be viewed as a supplement to VA care whenever VA cannot provide care that is timely and geographically accessible; not a replacement for VA care.
- Consolidate non-VA care authorities into a single program that is fully integrated with VHA; the private sector and VHA should not be “competing” for VA funding; they should be cooperating to meet veteran health care needs.
- Oppose any proposals to pay for non-VA care programs by increasing veterans’ out-of-pocket expenses.
- Require VA to include "number of days until next available appointment" in its mandatory publishing of appointment data in order to more accurately reflect the amount of time veterans are waiting at each facility.
- Prioritize anti-suicide efforts to include establishing an “urgent care” option for mental health care, extended hours at VA medical facilities and continuing to improve the Veterans’ Crisis Line.
- Require that VHA grant enrollment to all veterans whose discharges are other than “dishonorable” as defined by DOD who are otherwise eligible.
- Expand comprehensive caregiver benefits to include veterans of all eras.
- Fully fund VA medical research programs, in areas that disproportionately affect veterans such as prosthetics, toxic exposures, and TBI.
- Ensure that VA is able to provide the full array of gender-specific services for women veterans.

Veterans' and Survivors' Benefits

- Fully staff VBA so that they have enough employees to simultaneously process claims and appeals in a timely manner.
- Require VBA to accept private medical evidence that is competent, credible, probative, and complete.

- Improve decision notification letters so that veterans and VSOs are able to fully understand why claims are denied.
- Grant disability claims on a presumptive basis to veterans who are known to have been exposed to toxic substances, to include Blue Water Navy, those suffering from Gulf War Illness, and burn pit exposure.
- Require VA examiners to use a single Disability Benefits Questionnaire when evaluating Gulf War Illness claims to reduce denials due to misdiagnoses.
- Relax the standards for those suffering from disabilities related to MST but often have no documentation in their service record due to an historically low reporting rate.
- Improve VBMS to allow VSOs to properly track claims that were brokered under the National Work Queue.
- Allow for full concurrent receipt of VA disability compensation and military retired pay.
- Eliminate the SBP/DIC offset for survivors.
- Continue to oppose any efforts that make it more difficult for veterans with illnesses related to asbestos to pursue their federal personal injury trust and tort claims.

Accountability

- Continue to support VA authorities to quickly and decisively discipline and remove employees who are not properly performing their duties; especially those who willfully or negligently put veterans at risk.
- Promote a customer service-based culture across VA; one that is veteran-centric as opposed to VA centric.
- Institute a robust "secret shopper" program in order to improve and properly monitor the level customer service provided by VA employees.
- Continue to ensure that whistleblowers are fully protected and are not subject to reprisal for coming forward.

Education and Employment

- Protect the integrity and sustainability of GI Bill benefits.
- Close the 90/10 loophole that encourages predatory schools to target veterans.
- Close the loophole that allows employers to violate USERRA with forced arbitration agreements.
- Reject proposals to diminish veterans' hiring preference in the federal government.
- Promote veterans' hiring in the private sector.
- Support opportunities for veteran entrepreneurship.

DOD and Those Currently Serving

- Ensure that DOD provides a robust, competitive compensation package, to include base pay and BAH, in order to preserve the all-volunteer force.
- Protect the integrity of TRICARE so that service members, retirees, and their families have access to the high-quality medical care they deserve.

- Eliminate arbitrary budget caps that harm military readiness, capability, and morale.
- Fully fund the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency to ensure that all those who are yet unaccounted for are finally brought home.
- Ensure that the intentions and protections of SCRA are not violated through forced arbitration clauses in financial contracts.
- Eligibility for burial at Arlington National Cemetery must continue to include Purple Heart recipients and those who may be killed in action in present and future conflicts.

Honoring Purple Heart Recipients

- Continue to oppose any effort to amend the criteria for award of the Purple Heart medal that would diminish the prestige or purpose of the award.
- Authorize the U.S. Treasury to mint Purple Heart commemorative coins, the proceeds of which would be used to support the National Purple Heart Hall of Honor.
- Support full federal recognition of August 7th as “National Purple Heart Day” in perpetuity in order to properly honor all those who were killed in action or became wounded in defense of our country.
- Prohibit the commercial sale of military-issued Purple Heart medals on the secondary market.
- Grant all Purple Heart recipients the same on-base commissary, exchange, and MWR privileges as military retirees.

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