

Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America (AVVA)

Legislative and Policy Priorities

115th Congress, Session 1 and 2

Introduction

Each year, dedicated Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America Inc. (AVVA) members volunteer hundreds of thousands of hours in support of Vietnam Veterans of America Inc., veterans of all wars and their families. Our membership consists of veterans from all wars, their families and citizens committed to the welfare of veterans and their families.

Leading with a formidable curriculum comprised of printed materials, on-site educational seminars and forums, nationwide Agent Orange Town Hall Meetings, secondary post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD 2), and our Veteran Service Officer Program. Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America is now the premier service organization dedicated to serving veterans and their families.

When a veteran endures war related traumas or illnesses, physical or psychological, the family also suffers. A primary focus of Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America is the procurement of entitlements through our Veteran Service Officer (VSO) program, education, and secondary PTSD program and grassroots legislative advocacy for our veterans and their families.

Purpose Statement

The Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America Legislative Committee is committed to providing timely information on issues that are specific to veterans and their families requiring support and advocacy. This Committee keeps pertinent legislation in the forefront of our congressional leaders, encouraging our members to become proactive by contacting their elected officials via phone or e-mail, keeping the needs of our veterans and their families in the limelight as relevant legislation impacting our members are considered. AVVA members are voters, and together we are nearly 9200 members strong.

The Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America have adopted the following 2017 Legislative and Policy Priorities to engage members of Congress in the House and Senate during the first and second session of the 115th Congress of the United States of America.

The Toxic Exposure Research Act S.901 is now P.L. 114-315. This legislation was signed into law by the President on December 16, 2016. The Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America [as policy] will ensure that implementation of the new law is enacted as written, supporting epidemiological research and covers the progeny of veterans of all deployments and all eras, including those never deploying overseas, that were exposed to an array of toxic substances, from El Toro Naval Air Station (California), Fort McClellan (Alabama), Camp Lejeune (North Carolina), Natick Labs (Massachusetts), Fort Detrick and Aberdeen Proving Ground (Maryland).

Support introduction of legislation supporting Military and Veterans Caregivers

Public Law 111-163, the “Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010, stated that the Department of Veterans Affairs provide comprehensive benefits as part of the Caregiver Support program. Under current law, such eligibility is limited to only those veterans who incurred disability on or after September 11, 2001. AVVA implores our legislators to apply benefits with parity to all veterans and their families. The absence of parity is insulting and displays a lack of gratitude for their sacrifice.

The Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America supports legislation that would extend to all veterans with serious service-connected disabilities, enabling them to participate in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) program of comprehensive assistance to family caregivers. If passed, all caregivers of seriously disabled veterans would be allowed to receive a tax-free monthly stipend, reimbursement for travel expenses, health insurance, mental health services, counseling, training, and respite care.

The Associates of Vietnam Veterans upholds the critical need for caregiver support services regardless of the date of disability. We recommend that Congress pass legislation to expand this Act to include VA caregiver assistance to those veterans who became seriously disabled prior to September 11, 2001. It is crucial we continue to assess the veteran's disability and its impact on the family. When a veteran is disabled by their service, the family as a whole is affected. Family caregivers more often than not, will live below poverty level, suffer loss of wages, loss of family owned businesses, health insurance, retirement savings or investments, lowered Social Security (SSI), and other job related benefits by the disease process and the entire health care experience. These losses have profound consequences on the caregiver and all other family members.

The majority of veteran caregivers are females. These families often have young children residing in the home. Research evidence has suggested that children can often take on the duties of caregiver because of parental illness or disability. When children take on this role, their educational, social and emotional, well-being is seriously put at risk. These added responsibilities are perpetuated if the parental caregiver does not receive the support necessary. Numerous studies on children of disabled parents conclude; children are at risk for parentification when they assume adult positions before they are mentally developed.

The Department of Veteran Affairs definition of a veteran is "a person who served in the active military, naval or air service and discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable". The VA's five core values underscore the obligations inherent in the VA's mission: Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence. The VA states the core values on which they stand, define who they are, their culture and how they care for Veterans and eligible beneficiaries. The Association of Vietnam Veterans does not segregate these core values based on what era the veteran served, nor should the VA.

Gulf War Veterans

The Gulf War Health Research Reform Act of 2014 (H.R. 4261) did not make it out of committee, yet this era of Veterans suffer without recognition of their illnesses and lack of targeted treatment due to the VA's prevaricated tactics and restraints levied on the Research Advisory Committee (RAC). Research is defined as the systematic investigation into the study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions. An estimated one quarter of the 700,000, U.S. troops who deployed to the Persian Gulf to liberate Kuwait have medical symptoms related to service in the region.

The premise of Gulf War health research, either basic or applied, conducted by the Federal Government to improve any ill health of Gulf War veterans should answer central questions on the nature, causes, and treatments of the health consequences of military service in the Southwest Asia theatre of operations during the Gulf War.

According to The Institute of Medicine of National Academies following the 1990-1991 conflict in the Persian Gulf, many Gulf War veterans have experienced various unexplained symptoms such as fatigue, muscle and joint pain, memory loss, and gastrointestinal disorders that many associate with service in the gulf region, although no specific exposure has been definitely associated with symptoms. While the exact cause of the symptoms has not been determined, a list of potentially harmful exposures has been evolving for the past two decades. It now includes smoke from oil fires; chemical and biological warfare agents; prophylactic agents against chemical and biological warfare, such as pyridostigmine bromide pills and anthrax vaccine; multiple vaccinations; depleted uranium; pesticides; endemic infectious diseases; and psychological and physical stresses of deployment.

Research of children of Gulf War veterans show they have a birth defect rate greater than seven percent (7%) at birth. The normal birth defect rate, according to Mekdeci is 2 to 3% at birth. The 2008 report concedes that Gulf War illness is a serious physical disease affecting a 'minimum' of 175,000 veterans of the 1990-1991 Gulf War.

Continued research and effective treatments for Gulf War illness could also lead to treatments for other exposure-related occupational health problem. AVVA supports a comprehensive scientific federal policy initiative to monitor and improve the health of Gulf War veterans, with the identification of treatments for Gulf War illness the highest priority.

We make mention of the necessity of further studies on Gulf War illness research so that biomarker procurement could detect genetic conveyance of toxic exposure to their offspring and to protect the health of current and future American servicemen and women at risk of similar exposures.

In addition, AVVA support the Legislative Agenda and Policy Initiatives established by the Vietnam Veterans of America as they put forward for the 115th Congress, which includes.

- The fullest accounting possible of our POW/MIAs
- Blue Water Navy Veterans
- Homeless Veterans
- Incarcerated Veterans
- Minority Veterans
- Women Veterans
- The Newest Veterans
- The Veterans Health Council

Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America (AVVA) is a national, nonprofit Membership and Service Organization dedicated to advancing the awareness of issues affecting Vietnam Veterans, their families, and their communities. Visit us on the web at www.avva.org