

Leading Veterans Service Organizations Release Annual Report Ahead of White House Budget Release

The Independent Budget Veterans Agenda for the 118th Congress lays out five critical issues facing VA and presents the funding needed to meet those challenges

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THE INDEPENDENT BUDGET
A Budget for Veterans by Veterans
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WASHINGTON – Leading veterans service organizations the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), [DAV \(Disabled American Veterans\)](#) and [Paralyzed Veterans of America \(PVA\)](#) today released [The Independent Budget Veterans' Agenda for the 118th Congress: Budget for FY](#)

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[2024-2025 and Critical Issues](#). The IB report provides funding estimates VA will require in order to adequately provide health care, benefits, and transition services to more than ten million veterans, their families and survivors. It also lists military-to-civilian transition, VA infrastructure, implementation of the PACT Act, long-term care, and mental health, among the many critical issues facing today's veterans.

“All of the Independent Budget recommendations and critical issues are of utmost importance to today's veterans, particularly PVA members with spinal cord injuries and disorders who rely on VA's specialized care to live and work,” said Heather Ansley, PVA Associate Executive Director of Government Relations. “VA vacancies and staffing shortages, outdated infrastructure, limited specialized long-term care facilities, and inaccessible home and community-based services must be addressed now as they can make the difference between life and death for those with SCI/D.”

Included in this year's IB are more than 30 key recommendations for both legislators and VA spread across five critical issues in three areas – to include health care, benefits, and employment & education.

“DAV has partnered with PVA and VFW to produce The Independent Budget for nearly 40 years,” said Joy Ilem, DAV National Legislative Director. “As an organization of veterans serving veterans, we know their issues, and we make it our mission to fight for them. This year, we recommended notable VA funding plus ups in two major areas – long-term care and construction – which are vital to both sustaining quality VA care and ensuring access to that care.”

For FY 2024, the IB recommends Congress appropriate \$161.6 billion for all VA programs and services, a 10.5% increase over FY 2023 appropriation levels of \$143.7 billion. Among the reasons for the rise in VA funding is a recommended \$1 billion plus up in long-term care due to the increase in aging and disabled veterans, inflation, and expansion of assisted living centers for veterans living with traumatic brain injury and other disabilities. Another reason for the rise is a nearly four-fold increase over the FY 2023 enacted in the recommendation for major construction to begin or resume building VA infrastructure, as well as fund repairs and maintenance on existing VA structures. Yet another reason for the increase is a \$50 million plus up for VA Call Centers to account for more full-time employees to cover VA claims which are expected to rise over one million in FY 2024 due to the PACT Act.

“Like all of our past reports, this year's Independent Budget is a vital tool to help members

of Congress and VA take the necessary steps to ensure that all veterans – regardless of branch, age, sex, and ethnicity – receive proper care and get the benefits they earned,” said Pat Murray, VFW National Legislative Service Director. “It all boils down to proper VA funding. We look forward to working alongside congressional leaders to address each of our critical issues.”

KEY FACTS, ISSUES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

While there are five critical issues and countless recommendations noted throughout this 40-page report, below are just a sample of them. To view the reports in full, visit [IndependentBudget.org](https://independentbudget.org).

- ****FACT** – VA’s health care infrastructure includes more than 5,600 buildings and 34,000 acres, much of which was built more than 50 years ago.
Issue: For more than two decades, funding for construction, repairs, and maintenance of VA’s health care facilities has lagged behind even the most conservative estimates of the actual needs. **IB Recommendation:** Congress and VA work together to develop and implement a new comprehensive strategy to build, repair, and realign VA’s health care infrastructure to meet current and future demand. ***See critical issue 1 on page 25.*
- ****FACT** – The PACT Act added more than 20 presumptive conditions related to toxic exposures, expanded health care for toxic-exposed veterans, and created a process for VA to consider additional presumptive conditions for any toxic exposure.
Issue: Veterans may be vulnerable to companies that charge high fees to assist with claims, offering promises of increased disability ratings. **IB Recommendation:** Congress conduct oversight of all disability claims and pass legislation to reinstate penalties to crack down on bad actors that charge inappropriate fees for claims assistance. ***See critical issue 3 on page 33.*
- ****FACT** – One of the higher cohorts of veterans who die by suicide are veterans who have recently separated from service.
Issue: Veterans who engage with VA benefits are less likely to die by suicide than those who do not utilize these services. Ensuring transitioning service members have access to the benefits and care they earned is critically important. **IB Recommendation:** Congress ensure pre-separation briefings be mandated in TAP curriculum to help service members successfully transition into civilian life and mitigate suicide. *** See critical issue 5 on page 37.*

The IB provides a comprehensive roadmap to help ensure VA is fully funded and capable of carrying out its mission of serving veterans and their families, both now and in the future. Throughout the year, the VSOs collaborate to promote their shared recommendations, while each organization also works independently to identify and address legislative and policy

issues that affect their respective members and the broader veteran community.

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About DAV

DAV empowers veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity. It is dedicated to a single purpose: keeping our promises to America's veterans. DAV does this by ensuring that veterans and their families can access the full range of benefits available to them; fighting for the interests of America's injured heroes on Capitol Hill; linking veterans and their families to employment resources; and educating the public about the great sacrifices and needs of veterans transitioning back to civilian life. DAV, a non-profit organization with more than one million members, was founded in 1920 and chartered by the U. S. Congress in 1932. Learn more at [DAV.org](https://www.dav.org).

About Paralyzed Veterans of America

Paralyzed Veterans of America is a 501(c)(3) non-profit and the only congressionally chartered veterans service organization dedicated solely for the benefit and representation of veterans with spinal cord injury or diseases. The organization ensures veterans receive the benefits earned through service to our nation; monitors their care in VA spinal cord injury units; and funds research and education in the search for a cure and improved care for individuals with paralysis.

As a life-long partner and advocate for veterans and all people with disabilities, PVA also develops training and career services, works to ensure accessibility in public buildings and spaces, and provides health and rehabilitation opportunities through sports and recreation. With more than 70 offices and 33 chapters, Paralyzed Veterans of America serves veterans, their families, and their caregivers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Learn more at [PVA.org](https://www.pva.org).

About Veterans of Foreign Wars of The United States

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. is the nation's largest and oldest major war veterans organization. Founded in 1899, the congressionally chartered VFW is comprised entirely of eligible veterans and military service members from the active, Guard and Reserve forces. With more than 1.5 million VFW and Auxiliary members located in over 6,000 Posts worldwide, the nonprofit veterans service organization is proud to proclaim "NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS" than the VFW, which is dedicated to veterans' service, legislative advocacy, and military and community service programs. For more information or to join, visit our website at [VFW.org](https://www.vfw.org).