

Winning The War Within

BACKGROUND

The American Legion is a national leader in advocating for improvements in mental health care and peer support, through the Be the One mission to prevent veteran suicide, risk-detection training, Buddy Check programs and advocacy.

The veteran suicide epidemic continues to be the No. 1 concern of The American Legion. Veteran suicide rates have increased by 52% since 2001, now more than double that of civilians.

Veterans grappling with mental health issues are more likely than others to take their own lives. The American Legion is actively combatting the “broken veteran” narrative and believes trauma can be a source of strength. Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) is a recent theory exploring alternative outcomes for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) treatments, but PTG therapies have been difficult for VA to implement.

Through public private partnerships, organizations like the American Legion have the ability to implement peer-support programs for veterans. Many peer-support programs are eligible to apply for the Staff Sergeant Parker Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program which provides funding from VA to these organizations to accomplish their mission and the unique circumstances veterans face.

The American Legion supports alternative options for pain medication; opioid-dependent veterans are 90% more likely than others to die by suicide. The Legion also advocates for an improved Military Sexual Trauma claims process; veterans who have experienced sexual trauma have a 75% higher suicide rate than others.

Another emerging suicide comorbidity is Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE), a type of brain injury often caused by multiple mild Traumatic Brain Injuries.

The American Legion urges Congress to continue exploring and expanding alternative and breakthrough therapies, especially those that affect the veteran community such as TBIs, CTE, PTSD and chronic pain.

KEY POINTS

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among veterans under 45.
- VA reports 17.5 veterans a day die of suicide, but it may be as high as 44.
- Mental health treatments reduce veteran suicide rates in veterans by 39.77%.
- The American Legion encourages the use of peer-support programs to address feelings of isolation within the veteran community.

WHAT CONGRESS CAN DO

- **Pass S. 800 – Precision Brain Health Research Act**, or similar legislation, to advance knowledge on how military brain injuries affect veteran suicide.
- **Pass S. 3346 – Freedom to Heal Act** to improve alternative therapy access
- **Pass H.R. 2623 – Innovative Therapies Centers of Excellence Act of 2025** to designate centers of excellence for complimentary alternative medicine and breakthrough therapies.
- Permanently authorize the **Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program**
- Pass legislation which fast-tracks non-opioid alternatives for chronic pain.



THE AMERICAN LEGION'S LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Scan the QR code to read the full list of legislative priorities of The American Legion.

