

# VVA 788 NEWS

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*Vietnam Veterans of American Chapter 788*

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## **VVA LEGISLATIVE AGENDA & POLICY INITIATIVES**

There are some twenty-one-and-a-half million veterans in the United States, of which almost two-thirds never interact with the VA. Most are ignorant of the array of benefits which they have earned by virtue of their military service.

Even the one-third of vets who do interact with the VA's healthcare system and/or its benefits administration are not familiar with much of what is available to them, to their families, and to their survivors.

### **Top Priorities:**

- Gaining the Fullest Possible Accounting
- Addressing the Legacy of Toxic Exposures
- Fixing the VA
- Organizational Reform of the VA



## **VVA Urges President to Make Exception for Iraqi and Afgan Interpreters**

We're disturbed to hear that Iraqi and Afghan interpreters who worked alongside our troops through our nation's longest wars are being prevented from entering the United States," said John Rowan, National President of Vietnam Veterans of America." As a generation, Vietnam veterans have lived with decades of regret from having seen this happen before. We cannot remain silent and allow history to repeat itself."

As ISIS, Al Qaeda, and the Taliban have persisted throughout the Middle East, they have frequently targeted civilians who have cooperated with Coalition Forces. President Trump's memorandum, placing a blanket ban on immigration from Iraq and Afghanistan makes these men and women easy targets. George Washington once said, "The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by our nation." The same logic applies to our interpreters, who risked not only their own lives, but the lives of their families to protect American troops and support our mission.

"America must fulfill her promise to Iraqi and Afghan nationals who served alongside US troops that we promised safe harbor to--not only because it is a moral necessity--but because it sends a message that America keeps its promises to its allies. We strongly urge President Trump to consider the effects that this ban on Iraqi and Afghan interpreters will have on our long-term strategic goals, and to immediately create an exception for foreign nationals who have served alongside our men and women.

*Vietnam Veterans of America is the nation's only congressionally chartered veterans' service organization dedicated to the needs of Vietnam-era veterans and their families. VVA's founding principle is "Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another."*



## **VA secretary announces intention to expand mental health care to former Service members with other-than-honorable discharges and in crisis**

VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin, while testifying in a House Veterans Affairs Committee hearing March 7, 2017, announced his intention to expand provisions for urgent mental health care needs to former service members with other-than-honorable (OTH) administrative discharges. This move marks the first time a VA secretary has implemented an initiative specifically focused on expanding access to assist former OTH Service members who are in mental health distress and may be at risk for suicide or other adverse behaviors.

“The president and I have made it clear that suicide prevention is one of our top priorities,” Shulkin said. “We know the rate of death by suicide among Veterans who do not use VA care is increasing at a greater rate than Veterans who use VA care. This is a national emergency that requires bold action. We must and we will do all that we can to help former Service members who may be at risk. When we say even one Veteran suicide is one too many, we mean it.”

It is estimated that there are a little more than 500,000 former Service members with OTH discharges. As part of the proposal, former OTH Service members would be able to seek treatment at a VA emergency department, Vet Center or contact the Veterans Crisis Line.

“Our goal is simple: to save lives,” Shulkin continued. “Veterans who are in crisis should receive help immediately. Far too many Veterans have fallen victim to suicide, roughly 20 every day. Far too many families are left behind asking themselves what more could have been done. The time for action is now.”

Before finalizing the plan in early summer, Shulkin will meet with Congress, Veterans service organizations and Department of Defense officials to determine the best way forward to get these former Service members the care they need.

“I look forward to working with leaders like Congressman Mike Coffman from Colorado, who has been a champion for OTH Service members,” Shulkin added. “I am grateful for his commitment to our nation’s Veterans and for helping me better understand the urgency of getting this right.”

Veterans in crisis should call the Veterans Crisis Line at 800-273-8255 (press 1), or text 838255.



### ***Connecting the Dots: Opportunities for Recovery***

Each April since 1987, the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. has sponsored Alcohol Awareness Month to increase public awareness and understanding, reduce stigma and encourage local communities to focus on alcoholism and alcohol-related issues.

With this year's theme, "*Connecting the Dots: Opportunities for Recovery*," the month of April will be filled with local, state, and national events aimed at educating people about the treatment and prevention of alcoholism, particularly among our youth, and the important role that parents can play in giving kids a better understanding of the impact that alcohol can have on their lives.

Alcohol and drug use by young people is extremely dangerous--both to themselves and to society--and is directly associated with traffic fatalities, violence, suicide, educational failure, alcohol overdose, unsafe sex and other problem behaviors, even for those who may never develop a dependence or addiction.

Adolescence is a time of heightened risk-taking and as alcohol and drugs enter the picture, parents are faced with a unique set of challenges. They can simply sit back and hope their kids will "get through it," or they can take an active role in learning about alcohol and drugs and helping their kids do the same.

It can be daunting to talk with children about drinking and drug use, but it is well worth the effort parents put into it. In fact, research has shown that kids who have conversations with their parents and learn a lot about the dangers of alcohol and drug use are 50% less likely to use these substances than those who don't have such conversations.