



NACVSO Priorities for the 118th Congress

Improve support for County and Governmental VSOs:

Governmental veterans service offices (GVSOs) at the State, County, Tribal and Municipal levels are on the frontline of assisting veterans who have “borne the battle”. County Veterans Service Officers (CVSO) and their local equivalents carry a significant workload for the federal government in implementing VA policies and programs. That workload includes, but is not limited to, the filing of disability claims, advocacy, healthcare enrollment, community care coordination, utilization of educational benefits, death benefits, and everything in-between. Currently, the federal government provides no fiscal support to CVSOs or their local equivalent to carry out these duties. CVSO offices are consistently one of the lowest funded offices in county government with no unified funding support to bolster efforts. Across the nation, CVSOs face disparities in staffing levels, technology, education, and outreach occur due to the complete reliance on local funding means.

Support the Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach Act (CVSO Act) H.R. 984 and S. 106

The CVSO Act would:

- Provide grant funding for CVSOs and their local equivalents to carry out programs/services to improve outreach and assistance to veterans and eligible dependents.
- Funding may be used to hire new or additional CVSO/GVSOs and provide technical/accreditation training for existing staff to serve veterans more effectively.
- Support would aid in implementation of recent historical legislation which acts as unfunded mandates for CVSO/GVSOs.
- Funding must be used to supplement and not supplant local funding that is otherwise available.

NACVSO encourages members of Congress or VA to take the following actions:

- Provide enhanced VBA systems access to CVSO/GVSOs based on Government-to-Government partnership like what the Department of Justice and the Department of Health and Human Services provide to local Police and Human Services.
 - Currently, CVSO/GVSOs cannot access VBMS or other VA systems needed to assist veterans without the veteran having a POA with a Veterans Service Organization. This leads to blind spots or delays when a veteran requests assistance from a CVSO/GVSO.
- Arrange for intergovernmental liaisons for CVSO/GVSOs (like Congressional liaisons) at the VHA Medical Centers and VBA Regional Offices.
- Require VA contractors to communicate with the veteran’s representative when scheduling a medical disability exam

“A Veterans Service Organization, Focused on Your Benefits”



Improve/Streamline benefit processes:

CVSOs/GVSOs account for the largest share of VA's accredited veteran service officer representatives, and they understand the bottlenecks and challenges within the VA benefit application process and areas that need modernization.

NACVSO encourages members of Congress or VA to take the following actions:

- Re-instate pre-decision review authority (historical 48-hr review) for claims representatives.
 - Helps to reduce the volume of Higher-Level Reviews.
 - Mitigates the possibility of a Duty to Assist Error.
 - Ensures a proactive (vs reactive) approach to procedural mistakes in the claims process.
- Remove exams that are deemed to be inadequate or were unnecessary from veterans' VA records.
 - Currently when an exam is deemed inadequate via the Supplemental or Higher-level review processes, it remains in the veteran's claim's file.
 - Removing these exams reduces the likelihood that a future disability examiner will review or cite an exam deemed inadequate in their opinion.
- Address the VBA systematic issue of overdevelopment of disability claims by adhering to 38 CFR 3.326.
 - Veterans that submit claims with a clearly documented in-service event, current diagnosis, and a competently completed VA Disability Benefit Questionnaire with a nexus opinion, are often being scheduled for unnecessary VA disability exams.
 - This is a waste of VA staffing resources and funding and puts unnecessary burden on the veteran to attend an exam that is not needed.
 - Overdeveloping causes delays in claim adjudication but also delays some veterans access to health care.
- Overhaul Pension Survivors Pension.
 - Establish a process to determine pre-need eligibility to help expedite Pension processing.
 - Allow veterans and surviving spouses to apply before they meet the asset/income threshold.
 - Hold eligibility for 1-year in order for an applicant to provide verification to confirm they meet the asset/income threshold.
- Provide VHA and contracted providers with better access to Disability Questionnaires (DBQs) and relevant fact sheets.
 - Veterans' treating providers have more intimate knowledge of a veteran's health conditions and disabilities than Compensation Examiners.
 - Ensure VHA personnel understand their responsibility to assist veterans with DBQs.
 - Veterans should not be penalized for choosing VHA for their health care needs.



Improve Access to Care:

Ensuring veterans and their families have access to medical and mental health care is one of the most impactful services offered by VA. CVSO/GVSOs are a community point of contact for assisting veterans with VA healthcare enrollment and their dependents with CHAMPVA applications. Although VA health care is impactful, accessing it can be difficult and utilizing it can be cumbersome and stressful for the veteran. NACVSO has identified areas that would improve access to care, reduce user confusion, and reduce debt-occurring incidents of care for the veteran.

NACVSO encourages members of Congress or VA to take the following actions:

- Improve CHAMPVA enrollment processing.
 - Reduce processing time, which currently takes six months or longer.
 - Provide applicants with proof of application receipt.
- Reduce barriers to enrollment and streamline enrollment at discharge.
 - Automatically enroll discharging service members in VA health care.
 - Current enrollment is self-initiated after the veteran has been discharged.
- Allow, when feasible, transitioning service members to have a pre-discharge consult with their incoming VHA Primary Care and Mental Health Provider (can be done via tele-health consult).
 - Veterans can currently apply for disability benefits prior to discharge
- Cover costs of emergency care for veterans 60 days following VHA enrollment regardless of if they have been seen by a VHA provider before H.R. 815.
 - After initial enrollment it is not always possible for veterans to get “established” in VA health care.
 - Provide emergency medical transportation for all VHA enrolled veterans regardless of their “travel pay eligibility” status.
 - Leads to unexpected debts and hardships for veterans experiencing a medical emergency.

