

**For Immediate Release**



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## **Time for Congress to Get Back to Work on Mental Health and Suicide**

*Congressional Inaction, Support of the Status Quo, Will Cost Veterans Lives*

**AMVETS NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS, May 20, 2020** - Numerous experts are predicting a mental health care crisis emerging as a result of COVID-19.

“We were already amidst a mental health care and suicide crisis prior to COVID-19, and nothing significant or meaningful was accomplished on Capitol Hill,” said Jan Brown, National Commander of AMVETS. “It is critical for members of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee to get back to work on this issue, immediately.”

“Our members across the nation are feeling the impact,” said Joe Chenelly, Executive Director of AMVETS. “We have lost members to COVID, and thousands of veterans and their families are dealing with employment issues, access to healthcare issues, and so much more. Our nation’s mental health system was already fundamentally broken, and struggling to adequately serve veterans. Now we are in need of a surge, and only have programs proven to not be all that great. Continued Congressional inaction is going to cost lives.”

Chenelly is highlighting concerns with the facts that our nation is at an 80 year high in its suicide rate, while veterans have continued to take their lives in excess of 6,000 veterans annually. Massive budget increases to “evidence-based treatments” have been provided at VA, only to have those treatments highlighted

as largely ineffective by reviews published in The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) and by VA 3rd party reviews required by Congress.

“Never in our history have we been in a more dire situation with regards to VA mental health,” said Brown. “Congress continues to fail to move to action, and is still stuck arguing the merits of healthcare approaches that have been proven to be highly ineffective. In the interim, disaster strikes, and Congress is still sitting on its duff.”

“I hope that Congress realizes they have a choice here: continue the same behavior of throwing good money after bad, and suggest that access to ineffective treatments will move the needle, which we don’t think will change a thing and more vets will die. The second option is to be brave and use this opportunity to make a seismic shift and truly revolutionize our Nation’s mental health approach by pursuing more promising novel approaches that veterans are asking for, and are proving to be more effective,” said Chenelly. “We are hopeful Congress makes the obvious choice.”

On February 26th, before a joint Congressional hearing, AMVETS recommended spending the totality of the proposed \$683 million budget increase for VA Mental Health on a VA/DOD Mental Health Center for Innovation to incubate, test, and scale approaches that are proving to be effective. Such an approach would fund alternative, novel, and non-pharmacological approaches such as Post Traumatic Growth, recreational therapy, yoga, and others that VA has not fully embraced, tried or tested, while continuing to fund “evidence-based approaches” at levels that were previously provided.

AMVETS also supports passage of S. 1906/H.R. 3495 the Improve Well-Being for Veterans Act, S. 785 the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act, and S. 3235/H.R. 1997 the Veterans Post-traumatic Growth Act.

The bottomline is we need Congress to get back to work on programs that will move the needle. Congress should know that the strategy of the last ten years of more funding for the same ineffective programs, is not the recipe for success. Things are only getting worse, not better, and it’s time to try something new.

***AMVETS***, which is also known as *American Veterans*, is the most inclusive Congressionally-chartered veterans service organization open to representing the

*interests of 20 million veterans and their families. We are veterans serving veterans since 1944. [amvets.org](http://amvets.org)*

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