

AMVETS Hawaii Legislative & VA Affairs Update

June 2026 / Vol 1



Commander's Message



Donovan A. Lazarus (US Army, Retired)

Aloha AMVETS Family,

June is a month that calls us to reflect on the values that unite us as Americans and as veterans. It is a month rich with patriotic significance, beginning with Flag Day on June 14, when we honor the Stars and Stripes as the enduring symbol of our nation's freedom, sacrifice, and resilience. It is also the 251st Birthday of the United States Army, a reminder of the generations of Soldiers who have defended our nation since 1775 and continue to stand watch today.

Just days later, we celebrate Father's Day, a time to recognize the fathers, grandfathers, mentors, and father figures who have shaped our lives through their leadership, service, sacrifice, and unwavering commitment to family. Many of our veterans and servicemembers carry those same values into their homes and communities every day.

As we celebrate these important occasions, June also serves as National PTSD Awareness Month. This observance reminds us that the invisible wounds of war and service are just as real as physical injuries. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder affects many veterans, servicemembers, first responders, and family members. By raising awareness, reducing stigma, and encouraging those in need to seek support, we honor the courage it takes to ask for help and begin the journey toward healing.

Today, our nation faces challenges that extend beyond the battlefield. Americans are becoming increasingly isolated, fragmented, and anxious. Many individuals spend more than 8.5 hours each day in front of screens, disconnected from meaningful human interaction, physical activity, and the natural world around them. While technology keeps us connected digitally, it can often leave us disconnected personally.

As veterans, we understand the importance of camaraderie, purpose, and belonging. Whether it was serving alongside our fellow servicemembers, supporting our families, or volunteering in our communities, we know that strong relationships are essential to both physical and mental well-being.

This month, I encourage every member of the AMVETS Hawaii family to take deliberate steps toward improving both your physical and mental health:

- Get outside and reconnect with nature.
- Spend quality time with family and loved ones.
- Reach out to a fellow veteran you have not spoken with recently.
- Participate in community events and volunteer opportunities.
- Stay physically active through exercise, recreation, or adaptive sports.
- Seek support if you are struggling and offer support to those who may be silently suffering.

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Legislative & VA Affairs Update

AMVETS Hawaii continues monitoring federal veterans policy developments impacting Hawaii House Veterans Affairs Technology Modernization Subcommittee Hearing

Overview

On June 12, 2026, the House Veterans Affairs Technology Modernization Subcommittee examined how technology modernization can improve veterans' access to health care through VA community care programs. Witnesses from the Department of Veterans Affairs, Government Accountability Office, veterans organizations, and community health systems discussed barriers to timely care and solutions to improve access.

Why This Matters to Hawaii Veterans

The issues discussed closely mirror challenges experienced by veterans throughout Hawaii and the Pacific. Geographic isolation, provider shortages, inter-island travel, and limited specialty care access often create barriers similar to those faced by veterans in rural communities on the mainland.

Key Findings

Community care scheduling remains overly complex and often delayed. Witnesses highlighted the promise of the External Provider Scheduling (EPS) system, which allows VA schedulers to directly book appointments with participating community providers. However, the program's success depends on significantly increasing provider participation.

Rural and Underserved Veteran Concerns

Witnesses described long travel distances, transportation barriers, appointment delays, and disruptions in continuity of care. These challenges closely resemble issues encountered by many Hawaii veterans, particularly those living on neighbor islands.

Information Sharing and Care Coordination

Community providers reported communication gaps and limited information sharing between VA and civilian health systems, often resulting in duplicate testing, repeated evaluations, and treatment delays.

Congressional Perspectives

Republicans emphasized expanding access to community care and permanently authorizing EPS. Democrats generally supported modernization efforts while emphasizing oversight, accountability, provider participation, and maintaining a strong VA health care system.

What to Watch

AMVETS Hawaii will continue monitoring expansion of the EPS program, provider participation, electronic health record modernization, appointment wait times, specialty care access, and initiatives affecting rural and geographically isolated veterans.

AMVETS Hawaii Perspective

AMVETS Hawaii supports efforts that improve timely access to high-quality health care, reduce unnecessary travel, strengthen community care partnerships, and improve coordination between VA and civilian providers. These initiatives have the potential to significantly improve access to care for veterans across Hawaii.

SERVICE ★ PATRIOTISM ★ FELLOWSHIP ★ COMMUNITY

At AMVETS Hawaii, we remain committed to building stronger, healthier communities through our programs in adaptive sports, fitness, wellness, community service, youth engagement, and veteran support. Together, we can combat isolation, strengthen resilience, and ensure that no veteran, servicemember, or family member feels alone.

As we honor our Flag, celebrate the Army's 251 years of service, recognize the fathers who guide and inspire us, and raise awareness for PTSD, let us renew our commitment to the principles that define our nation: service, patriotism, fellowship, and community.

May we continue to serve with pride, support one another, and leave a lasting legacy for future generations.

For God and Country,

Donovan Andrew Lazarus (US Army, Retired)
State Commander
AMVETS Department of Hawaii

2026 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES HONORING SERVICE • STRENGTHENING AMERICA

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #1: MAJOR RICHARD STAR ACT

Issue: Combat-disabled veterans medically retired with less than 20 years of service continue to face an unfair offset between military retired pay and VA disability compensation.

AMVETS Position: Support passage of the Major Richard Star Act to allow these veterans to receive both their earned military retirement pay and VA disability compensation.

Impact: Restores earned benefits, Corrects a long-standing inequity, Supports wounded warriors and their families

AMVETS ACTION: Contact Congress and support passage of the Major Richard Star Act.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #2: TOXIC EXPOSURE & PACT ACT IMPLEMENTATION

Issue: Many veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange, radiation, and other toxic substances continue to face barriers to care and benefits.

AMVETS Position: Ensure full implementation, oversight, and funding of the PACT Act.

Impact: Expanded healthcare access, Faster disability claims processing, Improved long-term health outcomes

AMVETS ACTION: Protect and strengthen toxic exposure benefits.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #3: VETERAN MENTAL HEALTH & SUICIDE PREVENTION

Issue: Veteran suicide remains a national crisis.

AMVETS Position: Increase funding and access to mental health services, peer support programs, crisis intervention, and community-based resources.

Impact: Saves lives, Expands treatment options, Supports veterans and families

AMVETS ACTION: Invest in prevention, treatment, and recovery programs.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #4: HOMELESS VETERANS & HOUSING SECURITY

Issue: Thousands of veterans continue to face housing instability and homelessness.

AMVETS Position: Expand affordable housing initiatives, supportive housing programs, and housing assistance grants.

Impact: Reduces veteran homelessness, Improves quality of life, Supports family stability

AMVETS ACTION: Increase housing resources for veterans nationwide.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #5: MILITARY RETIREMENT & TAX RELIEF

Issue: Many military retirees continue to face unnecessary tax burdens.

AMVETS Position: Support federal and state legislation that provides tax relief for military retirees and surviving spouses.

Impact: Keeps more income in veterans' households, Supports economic security, Honors military service

AMVETS ACTION: Expand tax exemptions and retirement protections.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #6: VETERAN EDUCATION & CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Issue: Veterans need continued access to education, workforce development, licensing, and certification opportunities.

AMVETS Position: Protect and expand GI Bill benefits, apprenticeship programs, and workforce training initiatives.

Impact: Increased employment opportunities, Higher earning potential, Stronger transition outcomes

AMVETS ACTION: Invest in veteran education and career success.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #7: CAREGIVER & SURVIVOR SUPPORT

Issue: Family caregivers and survivors often face financial and administrative challenges.

AMVETS Position: Expand eligibility and support for VA caregiver programs, Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), and survivor benefits.

Impact: Supports military families, Strengthens caregiver networks, Improves survivor assistance

AMVETS ACTION: Protect those who continue serving after service.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #8: ADAPTIVE SPORTS & RECREATION

Issue: Adaptive sports and recreation programs improve physical and mental wellness for disabled veterans.

AMVETS Position: Increase federal support for adaptive sports, recreation therapy, and community-based wellness programs.

Impact: Improved health outcomes, Enhanced quality of life, Greater community engagement

AMVETS ACTION: Expand access to adaptive sports opportunities.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #9: VA HEALTHCARE ACCESS & MODERNIZATION

Issue: Veterans continue to face challenges accessing timely healthcare services.

AMVETS Position: Strengthen VA healthcare staffing, infrastructure, telehealth, and specialty care programs.

Impact: Reduced wait times, Improved healthcare outcomes, Increased access in rural and island communities

AMVETS ACTION: Ensure world-class healthcare for every veteran.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #10: VETERAN SERVICE OFFICERS & CLAIMS ASSISTANCE

Issue: Veterans often require expert assistance navigating benefits and claims systems.

AMVETS Position: Increase funding, training, accreditation, and support for Veteran Service Officers (VSOs).

Impact: Faster claims processing, Improved claim accuracy, Increased access to earned benefits

AMVETS ACTION: Strengthen veteran advocacy services nationwide.



Membership Visit www.amvets.org

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