

AMVETS Hawaii Legislative & VA Affairs Update

May 2026 / Vol 1



Commander's Message



Donovan A. Lazarus (US Army, Retired)

Memorial Day Message

As Memorial Day approaches, we pause as a nation to honor and remember the brave men and women of the United States Armed Forces who made the ultimate sacrifice in service to our country.

Memorial Day is more than a holiday or long weekend. It is a sacred reminder that freedom has never been free. Generations of American service members answered the call to duty knowing the risks and burdens of military service. Many never returned home to their families, communities, and loved ones.

At AMVETS Hawaii, we remain deeply committed to preserving the memory, legacy, and sacrifice of our fallen heroes. Across Hawaii and the Pacific, we continue working to support veterans, active-duty service members,

military families, and surviving families through advocacy, wellness programs, adaptive sports initiatives, suicide prevention efforts, community partnerships, and direct outreach.

As we gather at ceremonies, memorials, cemeteries, and community events this Memorial Day, let us remember those who stood watch for our nation during times of war and conflict. Let us also remember the families who continue carrying the weight of that sacrifice every day.

Their courage, service, and sacrifice must never be forgotten.

Memorial Day also reminds us of our continuing responsibility to care for the living — our veterans, wounded warriors, transitioning service members, and those struggling with visible and invisible wounds of war. The best way we honor the fallen is by continuing to serve one another with compassion, unity, and purpose.

On behalf of the AMVETS Department of Hawaii and the AMVETS Hawaii Service Foundation Corp., I extend our deepest gratitude to all Gold Star Families, veterans, service members, and supporters throughout Hawaii and the Pacific region.

May we always remember.
May we always honor.
May we always serve.

Donovan Andrew Lazarus
State Commander
AMVETS Department of Hawaii

President & CEO
AMVETS Hawaii Service Foundation Corp

Founder, AMVETS West Oahu Veterans Center



Legislative & VA Affairs Update

Department of Veterans Affairs FY 2027 Budget Hearing Overview

U.S. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies

April 30, 2026

AMVETS Hawaii continues monitoring federal veterans policy developments impacting Hawaii veterans, service members, military families, rural communities, adaptive sports programs, suicide prevention initiatives, and VA healthcare access throughout the Pacific.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) presented its Fiscal Year 2027 budget request totaling approximately \$488.2 billion, representing a 7.7% increase over FY 2026 funding levels. The hearing focused heavily on healthcare access, staffing shortages, mental health services, infrastructure modernization, electronic health records modernization, community care expansion, and outreach to veterans not currently connected to the VA system.

Key Issues Affecting Hawaii Veterans Mental Health & Suicide Prevention

Suicide prevention remained one of the highest priorities discussed during the hearing. VA leadership acknowledged that most veterans who die by suicide are not currently engaged with the VA healthcare system. Expanded outreach initiatives, community partnerships, and localized engagement efforts were emphasized as critical strategies moving forward.

This directly aligns with AMVETS Hawaii's ongoing mission to provide community-based veteran wellness programs, adaptive fitness initiatives, peer support networks, camaraderie events, and outreach opportunities at the AMVETS West Oahu Veterans Center (WOVC).

The Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program was highlighted during the hearing as an important national effort to connect veterans to services before they reach crisis points.

Rural & Island Veteran Access

Several lawmakers raised concerns regarding rural healthcare access, transportation barriers, staffing shortages, and healthcare delivery challenges in geographically isolated regions.

These discussions strongly reflect conditions experienced throughout Hawaii and the Pacific Islands, where veterans frequently encounter:

- Inter-island transportation challenges
- Long specialty care wait times
- Limited provider availability
- Community care coordination issues
- Delayed prescription delivery services
- Access disparities for rural and neighbor island veterans

VA leadership acknowledged the need to improve transportation grant programs, streamline healthcare partnerships, and increase flexibility for rural veterans.

Electronic Health Record (EHR) Modernization

The VA reported progress with its Electronic Health Record modernization efforts following successful implementation efforts in Michigan. Additional deployments are planned nationwide, including improvements to interoperability between Department of Defense and VA systems.

Lawmakers continued expressing concerns about staffing support, implementation readiness, and avoiding previous system failures during nationwide expansion.

For Hawaii veterans transitioning from active duty to VA healthcare systems, improved DOD-to-VA medical record integration remains critically important.

Community Care & Staffing Concerns

A significant portion of the hearing focused on balancing direct VA healthcare services with increasing reliance on private sector community care providers.

Lawmakers questioned whether VA staffing levels—including physicians, nurses, and support personnel—would adequately meet veteran demand while community care funding continues to expand.

VA leadership stated the department is attempting to better align staffing with workload demands while accelerating hiring timelines and reducing bureaucratic delays.

Women Veterans Healthcare

The VA announced expanded direct access for women veterans to obstetric and gynecological services without requiring primary care referrals.

The department stated the policy change is intended to improve responsiveness and accessibility for women veterans nationwide.

Infrastructure & Facility Modernization

The hearing also focused heavily on aging VA infrastructure, construction backlogs, modernization projects, and future facility investments.

The VA confirmed major investments are planned for:

- ï Facility modernization
- ï Long-term care expansion
- ï Residential treatment programs
- ï Robotics and healthcare technology upgrades
- ï National cemetery expansion projects

Lawmakers also pressed the VA for greater transparency regarding clinic restructuring and facility changes.

AMVETS Hawaii Perspective

AMVETS Hawaii remains committed to advocating for:

- ï Improved veteran healthcare access throughout Hawaii and the Pacific
- ï Expanded suicide prevention and mental health resources
- ï Adaptive sports and wellness programming
- ï Rural veteran outreach initiatives
- ï Faster VA claims processing and care coordination
- ï Stronger community partnerships
- ï Infrastructure investments supporting veterans and military families
- ï Improved healthcare access for women veterans
- ï Enhanced interoperability between DOD and VA healthcare systems

Through programs hosted at the AMVETS West Oahu Veterans Center, partnerships with VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (VAPIHCS), Wounded Warrior Project, community organizations, and military installations, AMVETS Hawaii continues providing direct support to veterans, service members, and families across Hawaii.

AMVETS Hawaii will continue monitoring federal legislative and VA policy developments to ensure Hawaii veterans remain informed, supported, and represented.

Membership

Welcome to our members of AMVETS!

AMVETS was formed in WW2, a 80-year plus heritage, to look out for the needs and interests of our fellow veterans. Veterans helping veterans! We welcome your ideas to continue our work in a changing world.

Visit www.amvets.org and explore. You control your information. Login under membership. Your email is your login name, and your membership number is your password. Follow AMVETS on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). Get in the digital game and share AMVETS info on your Facebook page. Check your email for the biweekly AMVETS National Newsletter and participate in our legislative alerts. Our member benefit partners may contact you.

At the West Oahu Veterans Center at West Loch Annex (JBPHH), our mission is to empower Service members, Veterans, and their families with a warrior spirit through meaningful recreational activities, including the annual VA Veterans Games (Koa Challenge).

We equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to enhance their personal development and contribute to their communities, fostering self-sufficiency and resilience. Through hands-on training and mentorship from leaders in related fields, along with VA therapists, we provide invaluable support.

Our focus is on creating opportunities for personal growth, community revitalization, and environmental stewardship. By promoting holistic well-being, we encourage our warriors to become active contributors to a sustainable and thriving future.



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