

AGENDA TO SUPPORT OUR VETERANS



New Dem Veterans Task Force & National Security Working Group

I. Introduction

New Dems believe that when someone serves and sacrifices for our country, our government has an obligation to provide them with the care and benefits they earned. We also know that the government is not living up to the commitment we have made to the men and women who have bravely served in our Armed Forces. For too long, servicemembers have transitioned to civilian life feeling abandoned, lacking the health care and benefits promised to them when they decided to answer the call to defend the American people. That has to change.

In this agenda, we outline concrete steps Congress and the Administration should take to renew our commitment to our nation's veterans – from the very start of their transition back to civilian life to the end of their lives. That means making much-needed improvements to the transition process to set our veterans up for success in civilian life. And it means giving every veteran access to the lifetime of quality health care – including mental health care, substance use disorder services, and reproductive care – that they earned through their service, no matter their state or zip code.

This framework aligns with the goals of the New Dem [Vision for the Path Forward](#), which acknowledges that supporting our servicemembers and veterans is integral to a strong national security and defense strategy. New Dems are committed to advancing these commonsense solutions through Congress, and with anyone on either side of the aisle willing to deliver progress. We will always put the people we serve – those who've served to protect our lives and liberty – over political games to uphold our promise to American heroes.

II. New Dem Principles

1. The government must provide the proper resources for a **stable and secure transition out of military service** and into civilian life.
2. When someone signs up to serve our country, **our country commits to provide them with the health care they earn through that service**. As with any contract, we must uphold our end of the bargain by ensuring veterans receive timely and quality care they earned.
3. We owe it to our veterans to provide not only the benefits they've earned, but the **economic opportunity to thrive in civilian life**, wherever they live.

III. Goals

- **Strengthen the Transition Assistance Program (TAP)**, so that servicemembers' transition to civilian life is as smooth, safe, and streamlined as possible.
- **Strategically target investments and reforms to modernize VA facilities, research, training, and more** to ensure that veterans have access to quality lifelong services and fully funded benefits.
- **Prevent attempts to diminish the capabilities and capacities of the VA to provide services to our veterans** regardless of where they live.

IV. Policies

I: Strengthen programs to ensure a smooth and supportive transition to civilian life.

- a. **Pursue policies that encourage units to prioritize attendance for TAP**, a mandatory program for servicemembers preparing to leave active-duty, who often struggle with balancing on-time completion of the transition curriculum and carrying out on-duty mission requirements.
- b. **Personalize TAP programming** by helping servicemembers understand how the information provided in pre-transition counseling can be applied to create clear roadmaps for next steps post-separation from active-duty.
- c. **Continue to expand the Solid Start Program**, which provides three personalized check-in calls during the first year of a veteran's separation, and improve integration of VA touchpoints with recently separated veterans to meet their individual needs as they navigate the return to civilian life.
- d. **Tailor career and skills programming** to include a focus on translating skills from military to civilian opportunities and ensure that recently-transitioned veterans have a pipeline to registered apprenticeships, accredited credentialing courses, and private sector opportunities.
- e. **Improve the timeliness and accuracy of DOD data collection** on individual TAP progress and expedite the transfer of data related to transitioning servicemembers to the VA.

II: Deliver on the promise to provide quality, accessible health care that veterans have earned through their service.

- a. **Ensure veterans have access to quality, timely health care free from long wait times**, including mental health, suicide prevention, substance use disorder, and reproductive care, by investing in both direct care and community care.
- b. **Overcome barriers to physically attending health appointments**, including distance and/or lack of transportation, which disproportionately affects our rural veteran community, through innovative solutions like high-quality telehealth, rideshares, and microtransit "last mile" rides. A veteran's zip code should not impede their access to services.
- c. **Direct the VA to provide comprehensive oversight of community care** to ensure veterans utilizing these providers are receiving the same level of service as they would at direct care facilities.
- d. **Fully fund the Toxic Exposures Fund (TEF)** through advanced appropriations to ensure that the VA can continue to process claims and implement the PACT Act without veterans waiting for the treatment they need.

- e. **Provide consistent funding for VA facilities** and equipment to address both maintenance and new construction needs and to ensure that modern technologies are being utilized to the maximum extent possible.
- f. **Pursue policies to boost the recruitment and retention of high-quality medical professionals within the VA medical system** to address physician shortages. This could include tax credits that increase relative to years of continuous VA service.

III: Ensure veterans receive the benefits they have earned to help them maximize their economic opportunities.

- a. **Authorize and restore the Veterans Affairs Service Purchasing Program (VASP)**, which provided a last-resort option for veterans who were delinquent on their mortgage payments through VA-backed loans.
- b. **Support and strengthen the GI Bill** by providing adequate funding for full staffing resources to address backlogs, phoneline staffing, tuition payment processing, and Monthly Housing Allowance (MHA) late payments.
- c. **Crack down on predatory practices targeting veterans** by reinstating criminal penalties for unaccredited claims representatives who charge unauthorized fees to veterans while assisting them with filing disability compensation benefits claims.
- d. **Address the disproportionate rate at which veterans are rejected for small business loans** while continuing to minimize risk for veteran entrepreneurs by identifying factors that may serve as a better proxy of creditworthiness, given the unique lifestyle of servicemembers.

V. Next Steps

The New Democrat Coalition is renewing our commitment to America's veterans. We will continue to engage in dialogues with our colleagues regardless of party or ideological identity, because veterans should never be used as a political football. New Dems will advance and support policies that advocate for the responsible use of military force, a smooth transition to civilian life, and a lifetime of access to the highest quality care and benefits that we can provide.