

Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach (CVSO) Act

The CVSO Act will expand community-based outreach that will help veterans access services to improve their health and wellness and prevent suicides

The Problem

The number of veteran suicides nationwide continues to rise, and approximately 14 of the 20 veterans who die by suicide each day are not under Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) care. This national public health crisis requires a national approach that meets veterans where they're located. County Veteran Service Offices (CVSOs) are often the first point of contact in the community for veteran's services and they provide assistance on a range of benefits, including service-connected benefits, enrollment in VA health care, VA home loans, education benefits, and available job placement assistance. Veterans are not always aware of the available benefits, and CVSOs are often the first to inform them about their eligibility. CVSOs are local county employees who are nationally accredited by the VA to prepare, present, and prosecute VA claims. However, there is currently no federal funding directly available for CVSOs.

The Solution

The *CVSO Act* will authorize \$50 million annually for five years to expand and support CVSOs or similar local entities, who currently assist veterans in obtaining over \$50 billion in benefits annually. The VA will award competitive grants to states to create, expand, or support programs that promote health and wellness, prevent suicide and reach veterans who need help navigating the often-burdensome VA process. States can submit an application containing a detailed plan for the use of these funds, and the Secretary will develop guidance for outcome measures to determine the effectiveness of the programs. Lastly, states must show that these federal funds do not simply supplant current state or local funding. By increasing the number of CVSOs, states will be better able to leverage their local and federal resources to serve our veterans.

Additional Information

CVSOs perform much of the VA's legwork for filing claims in their counties with a modest number of approximately 1,700 accredited representatives throughout 36 states and two Native American Tribes. These employees are responsible for successfully processing more than \$22 billion in claims annually for direct compensation and pension benefits for veterans. If health care and ancillary benefits are included, that number rises to more than \$52 billion. States without CVSOs will also benefit from this legislation because it allows the Secretary to partner with comparable state, local or tribal entities, including Tribal Veteran Service Officers.

Cosponsors

The legislation is cosponsored by Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Dan Sullivan (R-AK), Jon Tester (D-MT) and Steve Daines (D-MT).

Support

The legislation is supported by the National Association of Counties (NACo), the National Association of County Veteran Service Officers (NACVSO), the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, and many individual CVSOs, local officials and stakeholders in Wisconsin and Alaska.