

VETERANS & FAMILY SUPPORT AMBASSADOR



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You have probably heard that a shark must keep moving forward in order to survive. The Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary is no different. This year I am issuing a challenge to each of our members to be innovative thinkers, be creative and always **Keep Moving Forward!**

This year, ***From Our Roots to Our Branches, Extending Service to Our Veterans***, will be our theme as we advance to another year of service to our veterans, service members and their families. Veterans & Family Support is the core of everything that our organization stands for. Almost anything and everything that our membership does can fall under this Program.

Our veterans have sacrificed so much for us, and it's our time to do our part to give back to them. This year, our main focal points will be:

- National Veterans Service Suicide Prevention
- Childcare for active-duty service members
- Veterans and Military Support Programs

Veterans and Military Support Programs and National Veterans Service

It is our duty to ensure that our veterans and their family members are aware of the aid available to them in times of need, such as financial assistance with mortgage or rent payments, vehicle expenses, utilities, food or clothing. Now more than ever, we need to guide our veterans and their family members in their efforts to obtain their VA benefits by pairing them with our VFW Accredited service officers. As Auxiliary members, it's important that we educate ourselves about Veterans benefits as well. Auxiliaries are encouraged to meet with VFW accredited service officers to get a better understanding of how they can help, or perhaps even invite one to an Auxiliary meeting.

As Auxiliary members, we can help provide the comforts of home when we adopt units and send care packages to our deployed troops. While it's important to remember those serving far away, it is equally important to remember them and their families prior to and post deployment. The VFW has financial grants that are available to help with events held by our Auxiliaries and Posts to support and recognize our troops.

For more information, visit the VFW website at: vfw.org/assistance.

Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Awareness

Many veterans returning home do so with heavy hearts and minds. It's crucial that we, as an organization, take a stand against the stigma of mental health. Often things we don't think could ever be hurtful cut the deepest. Be mindful of the characteristics associated with thoughts of suicide and be watchful of our veterans' mental health. One veteran lost to suicide, is one veteran too many!

Child Care for Active-Duty Service Members

As we serve diligently toward our mission of serving veterans, we often overlook those the veterans support themselves - their children. A special focus on this year's Veterans & Family Support Program is giving back to these families. Maybe it's babysitting for a few hours each week, providing diapers for the babies and toddlers or maybe just being emotional support for the spouse left behind to take care of the family. By being a confidant for service member's family, our members are providing that much more peace for our active-duty military.

So, now begs the question, how will **YOU keep moving forward** this year for the Veterans & Family Support Program?

VETERANS & FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM

VFW National Veterans Service • VFW Veterans & Military Support Programs **Assist Veterans, Service Members and their Families** **Promote Veteran & Military Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Awareness**

Spread the Word about National Veterans Service (NVS)

The VFW's National Veterans Service (NVS) helps veterans, service members and their families obtain the benefits they deserve – at no cost.

NVS provides a nationwide network of nearly 300 VFW Service Officers who help veterans navigate the Veterans Affairs system. Those VFW Service Officers recover more than \$1 billion annually in VA benefits for veterans and their dependents.

These highly skilled professionals assist all veterans, whether they are VFW members or not, in filing claims for:

- Disability compensation.
- Rehabilitation and educational programs.
- Pension and death benefits.
- Employment and training programs.

NVS also works to ensure veterans receive quality, timely and accessible VA health care, including:

- Hospital care.
- Outpatient care.
- Specialized health care for female veterans.
- Alcohol and drug dependency treatment.
- Medical evaluation for disorders associated with military service, exposure to Agent Orange, radiation or other environmental hazards.

Donations to NVS can be made online or by mail. Donate online at vfw.org/ways-to-help, select National Veterans Service, click "Contribute."

Donate by mail by sending funds to the VFW earmarked for NVS. Mail check to:

VFW National Headquarters
Attn: NVS
406 W. 34th Street, 11th Floor
Kansas City, MO 64111

VFW Veterans & Military Support Program

Veterans & Military Support contains programs initiated by the VFW: Military Assistance Program (MAP), Unmet Needs and the VFW "Sport Clips® Help A Hero Scholarship." These programs serve active-duty and recently discharged military.

Donations to Veterans & Military Support can be made online or by mail.

Donate online at vfw.org/ways-to-help, select Veterans & Military Support, click "Contribute." Donate by mail by sending funds to the VFW earmarked for Veterans & Military Support. Mail check to:

VFW National Headquarters
Attn: Veterans & Military Support
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Military Assistance Program (MAP) Funds **Ways to Connect with Troops**

MAP helps VFW and Auxiliary members give more of their local military units. It helps forge and nurture bonds with those units by providing financial assistance for Posts, Districts and Departments to sponsor morale-boosting send-offs, homecomings and casual get-togethers. Post and Auxiliaries participating in Adopt-a-Unit and Family Readiness Group events can also receive assistance. MAP keeps care packages circulating by covering postage costs.

For guidelines to apply for MAP funds, contact the VFW Veterans & Military Support office at 816-756-3390.

Unmet Needs Can Help in a Crisis

A soldier is serving on foreign soil, but the rent is due back home. A soldier is driving a tank on alert for IEDs, and the family car needs a new radiator the family cannot afford. These are the situations Unmet Needs can address.

Grants of up to \$1,500 payable to a creditor can bridge the gap to make a mortgage or rent payment or to fund home and auto repairs, insurance, utility costs, food and clothing. To learn more, visit vfw.org/assistance/financial-grants.

VFW “Sport Clips® Help A Hero Scholarship” Program

The VFW and Sport Clips are giving the gift of scholarships to our nation’s heroes as a way of thanking them for their dedicated service to our nation. The VFW “Sport Clips® Help A Hero Scholarship” awards scholarships of up to \$5,000 to qualifying veterans and service members to help them complete their educational goals without incurring excessive student loan debt. To learn more, visit vfw.org/student-veterans-support.

Veteran & Military Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Awareness

Make a difference in the life of a veteran or service member in crisis by educating yourself and others about the warning signs of suicide.

The Veterans Crisis Line connects veterans in crisis and their families and friends with qualified, caring Department of Veterans Affairs responders through a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat, or text. Veterans and their loved ones can:

- Call 1-800-MyVA411 to access all VA departments,
- Call 988 and Press 1,
- Chat online at veteranscrisisline.net, or
- Send a text message to 838255.

Confidential support is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Support for deaf and hearing impaired individuals is available. Tip: Add the Veterans Crisis Line number as a contact in your cell phone for easy referral.

Purchase the Auxiliary Suicide Awareness Prevention Pin from the VFW Store. When someone asks you about your pin, tell them that the VFW Auxiliary is concerned about the rates of suicides among veterans and military service members; we want everyone to be aware of the unique stress they face.

Mental Wellness Support and Resources

More than 16 veterans commit suicide each day, and the VFW and VFW Auxiliary are committed to helping change the conversation and stigma surrounding mental health in the United States.

Change the stigma, improve research, support your community and explore treatment options at the resources below:

- **VFW Mental Wellness Campaign**
vfw.org/assistance/mental-wellness
- **The Campaign to Change Direction**
changedirection.org
- **Give An Hour**
giveanhour.org
- **Patients Like Me**
patientslikeme.com/join/vfw
- **One Mind**
onemind.org
- **The Elizabeth Dole Foundation**
elizabethdolefoundation.org
- **Help Heal Veterans (Therapeutic Craft Kits)**
healvets.org
- **Veterans Voices Writing Project**
veteransvoices.org

Other Resource

The VFW and VFW Auxiliary helped pass the Deborah Sampson Act that will enhance and improve VA programs and health services for women veterans and ensure they receive the care and support they need and have earned. It includes an expansion of the Women Veterans Call Center to include text messaging capability.

Women Veterans Call Center

Call or text: 855-829-6636 or 1-855-VA-WOMEN

Women Veterans Health Care

www.womenshealth.va.gov/WOMENSHEALTH/index.asp

VETERANS & FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM AWARDS

Awards for Auxiliaries

1. Most outstanding activity and/or event to increase awareness of suicide and mental health for veterans, military and their families.
 - Citation and \$25 to one VFW Auxiliary in each of the 10 Program Divisions that hosts the most outstanding activity and/or event to increase awareness of suicide and mental health for veterans, military and their families.

Entry form required and available in MALTA Member Resources. VFW Auxiliaries must send the required entry form to their Department Veterans & Family Support Chairman by March 31, 2025 for judging. The Department Veterans & Family Support Chairman must sign and send a copy of the completed Department-winning entry form to the National Veterans & Family Support Ambassador by April 30, 2025 for judging.

Citations will be mailed directly to the winning VFW Auxiliaries from National Headquarters and money will be deposited into the winning VFW Auxiliary account after the 2025 VFW Auxiliary National Convention.

Awards for Departments and Department Chairmen

1. \$25 VFW Store gift certificate to one Department Veterans & Family Support Chairman in each of the 10 Program Divisions for the best promotion of awareness of suicide and mental health for veterans, military and their families.
2. \$25 VFW Store gift certificate to one Department Veterans & Family Support Chairman in each of the 10 Program Divisions for the most outstanding activity and/or event to increase the support of veterans, active-duty service members and their families.
3. The Outstanding Performance Award and Second-Place Outstanding Performance Award will be awarded in each of the 10 Program Divisions based on the criteria listed on Page 5 and for the promotion of the Program goals listed at the top of Page 51.

Winners will be announced and awards presented at the 2025 VFW Auxiliary National Convention in Columbus, Ohio.