



Welcome to the Elks
National Veterans
Service Commission
Convention
Seminar!

Agenda



Introductions

ENVSC Staff in Attendance:

Mary Morgan, Director

**Nadezh Mulholland,
Programs Associate**

**Rene Villalobos,
Programs Associate**

But first, celebration!

Information

Today's Topic: How Your Lodge can be a Resource for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans.

A lot has changed since Vietnam Veterans came home. Learn about what's different and what has stayed the same as we review some of the top issues affecting Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans, and how your Lodge can help Veterans of all eras.



Congratulations to the
National Veteran
Service Volunteer of
the Year:

Thomas Kramin

of Willmar, Minn.,
Lodge No. 952



Looking Back

- 2.7 million American men and women served in Vietnam between February 1961 and May 1975.
- More than 58,000 servicemen and women lost their lives.
- Many Vietnam veterans returned to bad treatment from their communities.
- The Agent Orange Registry was started in 1978.
- To better serve Vietnam Veteran population, VA established Vets centers in 1979.
- Vietnam Veterans Memorial dedication in 1982.

Advocating for their Needs

- Vietnam Veterans returned to a country unprepared to offer the support they needed.
- VA hospitals had been neglected for years.
- Veterans and their advocates spent years fighting for the care they deserved.
- They gained increased funding and investment in VA hospitals.
- They fought to establish PTSD as a recognized medical condition.
- To address the growing homelessness issue amid pressure from veterans' groups, the VA began contracting with nonprofits and medical facilities to provide supportive housing and social work services to veterans in the 80s.





Taking Care of the Next Generation

2022 Veterans day message from VVA President Jack McManus

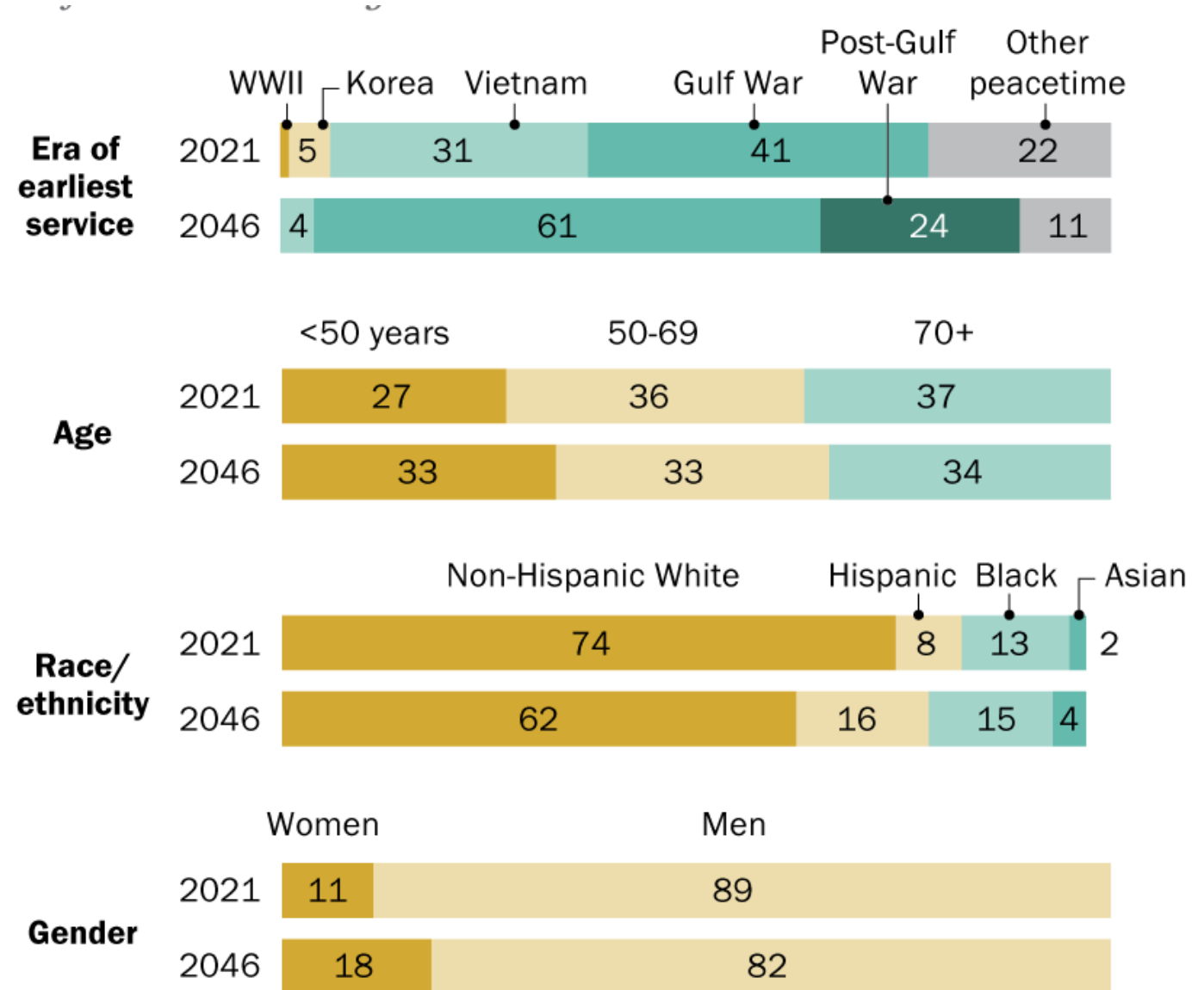
“We have lived up to our founding principle, ‘Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another.’

We are especially proud to see that our fight to change the public perception of Vietnam veterans has paid off, and that our newest generation of veterans is coming home to a warm welcome from a very supportive country.

We have come a long way. Much remains to be done.”

Today's Veteran Population

- *There are about 16.5 million veterans in the United States.*
- *Veterans represent around 6.5 percent of the US population.*
- *Forty-nine percent of the veteran population is 65 or older*
- *About 30 percent of the veteran population are currently living with a disability*
- *As of 2016, the number of Gulf War-era (August 1990-present) veterans exceeded the number of Vietnam-era veterans.*



By the Numbers

- Since 2001, about 4.1 million service members have served in post-9/11 war operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and over half of them have deployed more than once.
- Over 7,000 U.S. service members have died in the post-9/11 warzones of Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and elsewhere.
- This generation of Veterans is characterized by an increased number of Reservists and National Guard members who served in combat zones; a higher proportion of women; and different patterns of injuries, such as multiple injuries from explosions, than were seen among Veterans of previous wars.
- Veterans wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan are surviving in greater numbers than in previous conflicts due to advances in body armor, battlefield medicine, and medical evacuation transport. As a result, more Veterans are living with disabling injuries, including the often-lifelong effects of traumatic brain injury (TBI).
- Data suggests a high prevalence of respiratory symptoms and respiratory illness consistent with airway obstruction in Veterans deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, likely due to exposure to a variety of airborne hazards, including burn pits.
- 15% of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans will suffer from PTSD at some point in their lives, 3 times as high as the population of Vietnam Veterans.

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America

After extensive research and surveys of their members, these are the six policy priorities established by Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America organization, as identified by surveys of their members.

- *Combat Suicide*
 - *IAVA is committed to ending the veteran suicide epidemic*
- *Burn Pits and Toxic Exposure*
 - *Burn Pits are the Agent Orange of the IAVA generation. Members see burn pits as a critical, urgent and growing threat.*
- *Modernize VA*
 - *We must ensure that our veterans receive the best possible care.*



Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America

- *Women Veterans*
 - *As the number of male veterans is expected to decline in the next decades, the population of women veterans will continue to increase.*
- *Alternative Therapies*
 - *Civilians and veterans should have the same standard of care. Our veterans must have the same right to pursue alternative therapies while under VA care.*
- *Education Benefits*
 - *The post 9/11 GI Bill has now sent more than 1 million veterans and dependents to school. We must ensure veterans and their dependents have access to education benefits.*





Blue Star Families Top Concerns in 2022 Survey

- Three of the top five issues this year focused on family financial well-being: BAH/off-base housing concerns, military pay, and relocation/PCS issues.
- Military spouse employment remains the top concern for active-duty spouse respondents for the sixth consecutive year, and one of the top five concerns for active-duty service member respondents.
- The impacts of military service on family life continue to be a top concern for active-duty families, with time away from family as a top five issue for active-duty, National Guard, and Reserve family respondents.
- Veteran family respondents continue to report that access to military/VA health care system(s) is their top concern. As our nation's Veteran population continues to age, the health care resources and needs of Veterans and their family members may continue to be a pressing issue in the long term.

Connections are Essential

- Research indicates that veterans who feel connected to family members, friends and colleagues, other veterans, and their communities after separating from the military experience numerous health benefits, including less-severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, reduced moral injury, and increased help-seeking intentions.
- Conversely, a lack of social connectedness—also referred to as social isolation—is related to adverse health outcomes, such as suicidal thoughts and behaviors more-severe anxiety and depression symptoms, and poorer perceived cognitive functioning

Ways to Promote Social Connectedness among Veterans

- bringing people together to work on tasks as a group or team
- fostering connections between participants with common backgrounds or life experiences
- offering coaching or mentoring
- fostering a comfortable, open, and safe environment
- promoting meaningful conversations
- Providing nonverbal ways to connect
- Creating a shared mission or sense of purpose



Voluntary Service

Through the Voluntary Service program, Elks volunteers are stationed in over 360 facilities across the country, providing services and support to veterans in need.

- *Voluntary Service isn't limited to hospitals and nursing homes. Elks also serve at Veteran Centers, USOs, and clinics where they may have more contact with younger veterans.*
- *Projects or events can be designed to focus on the needs of more recent veterans.*
- *Project ideas that focus on more recent veterans and their families include baby showers, game or movie nights, camps or retreats, hunting and fishing trips, benefit/resource information and job fairs.*



- *At the Beck Center at Arkansas State University, Voluntary Service Rep Deborah Parsons provides educational support to help veterans meet their post-military service goals. This includes food, computers to access virtual appointments, and events.*
- *Port Huron Lodge No. 343, Detroit VA, and Voluntary Service Rep. to the Yale Veterans Center, Scott Harris, held a PACT Act event to share information about this new law with veterans.*

Welcome Home Kits



- Portsmouth, N.H., Lodge No. 97 purchased a Welcome Home kit for a veteran who requested cooking tools, a steamer to make healthy veggies for himself and his son, and a pizza pan so they could have fun making pizza together. He was excited to have a home to be proud of during visits with his son.
- Volunteers from El Paso, Texas, Lodge No. 2636 accompanied a veteran on every step of his journey from homelessness to housing. When they met Justin, he was living on the street. The Lodge helped him get the necessary paperwork so that he could bring his service dog with him to the shelter. When Justin entered permanent housing, the Lodge bought a Welcome Home Kit for him and his canine companion.
- Volunteers from Clovis, Calif., Lodge No 2599 used the Welcome Kit program to help a formerly-homeless Navy veteran set up her new home. It was a team effort that involved measuring the space, installing curtain rods, and assembling furniture. They also offered practical and emotional support. When the veteran smelled gas in her house, Lodge members helped her talk to her landlord and the gas company to fix the problem. Advocating for her needs with a landlord was new territory, but having the Elks in her corner made it easier.

Welcome Home Kits

This program is dedicated to help transitional veterans moving into stable housing with the essentials they will need to make it a home. With this program, Lodge's create kits tailored to help single veterans or veterans and their families with home essential needs.

- Ways to include IAVA veterans: Many younger veterans are either single and moving to their first stable housing or may have a family and are struggling financially and this is a great way to help them out.
- Include children's supplies or donations if you can!
- Many of these young veterans can be found in places like VFWs, American Legions, at the VA, and in veterans groups on college campuses like Student Veterans of America.



Elks Emergency Assistance Program

We recently assisted a veteran family with back rent. The veteran's wife was laid off during Covid, which placed the family behind on housing bills that have been trying to catch up on ever since. The also welcomed their fourth baby in Oct 2021, which further contributed to their financial struggles. The veteran's wife recently started working again full-time but the family needed help catching up on back rent.

A recent thank you note from a Long Beach veteran who is working to become financially independent again after ending a bad marriage:

"First of all, I just want to say thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for helping my daughter and I with this rent check. You have no idea how much this means to us, and how much it helps... The generosity of the Elks has taken a weight off my shoulders that I saw no relief to. I have been bearing the burden of a financial weight that has been utterly crippling for me, and catastrophically impacted my ability to provide for and care for my children. So, thank you, thank you, thank you."

Run out of the ENVSC office in Chicago, this program provides emergency financial assistance directly to veterans to help them exit or prevent homelessness. Veterans registered with and receiving services from the Department of Veterans Affairs in the 12 areas with the highest number of homeless veterans can apply for one-time monetary assistance to prevent homelessness or secure a home. Uses include rent, security deposits, and utilities.*

Grant Projects

Here are some grant examples that focus on building community and connections.

- Volunteers from Westchester, Calif., Lodge No. 2050 partner with U.S. Vets to host outdoor excursions for homeless veterans, including fishing and whale-watching trips. The events create a sense of camaraderie and belonging. When veterans transition into permanent housing, having a support system helps them maintain stability and feel at home in their communities. Volunteers credit the project's success to building trusting relationships over time with U.S. Vets and the veterans they serve.
- Last year, Fremont, Calif., Lodge No. 2121 used a grant to teach veterans living at Abode Services how to grow their own food. Together, they build raised garden beds and planted peppers, lettuce, tomatoes, and more. Now, the veterans maintain the gardens independently with occasional support from green-thumbed Elks. The veterans gained confidence and new skills, and even began cooking for each other and making social plans as a group. The veterans with young children found gardening to be a positive activity to enjoy with their families.



Grant Projects

Here are some examples of grant projects that specifically address needs of IAVA veterans.

- Help a local guard or reservist unit near you.
 - Milwaukie-Portland, OR (#142) assisted a local Army National Guard unit 141 BSB a with food and supplies to help Active/Reservist military members with food scarcity.
- Focus on veterans with young families.
 - Together, Chandler, Ariz. Lodge No. 2429 and Mesa-Buckhorn, Ariz., Lodge No. 2656 use grant funds to help low-income veterans at a nearby supportive housing complex. Many of the veteran residents are parents to young children and teenagers. This year, the Lodges will provide fresh food, pantry staples, hygiene supplies, and other essentials like diapers. They will also provide furniture and home supplies for families moving into the building.
- You don't have to think big! Small moments of connection add up and make a big difference in veterans' lives.
 - For example, a volunteer who got into a routing of sharing morning coffee over the phone with a veteran he served through a grant project.





Spread the Word

On August 10, 2022, the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act, known as the PACT Act, was signed into law. The PACT Act is one of the largest health care and benefit expansions in VA history. It expands eligibility for VA health care for Veterans with toxic exposures and Veterans of the Vietnam, Gulf War, and post-9/11 eras. The PACT Act:

- Added more than 20 new presumptive conditions for burn pits and other toxic exposures.*
- Added more presumptive exposure locations for Agent Orange and radiation.*

The passage of the PACT Act is expected to bring even more veterans into the VA Care system. Spread the word about the PACT Act at your Lodge or on social media, or host a PACT Act informational seminar at your Lodge.

Suicide Prevention

Take the free VA S.A.V.E. training to develop a general understanding of the problem of suicide in the United States; understand how to identify a Veteran who may be at risk for suicide; and, finally, know what to do if you identify a Veteran at risk.

<https://learn.psycharmor.org/courses/va-save>

**Veterans
Crisis Line**



DIAL 988 then
PRESS 1

VeteransCrisisLine.net



Thank you

Elks National Veterans Service Commission

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