

Assistance Program for Post-9/11 Vets and Families Expanded Across New York State

Albany, NY (March 12, 2014) – Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) today announced the New York expansion of its innovative Rapid Response Referral Program (RRRP) in Albany, New York with veterans and legislators.

RRRP (pronounced ‘rip’ like a ripcord on a parachute) is a new approach to supporting post-9/11 veterans by directly connecting them and their families to local resources and to one-on-one support with IAVA’s Veteran Transition Managers. RRRP helps cut through red tape and provides New York post-9/11 veterans and their families with access to services ranging across employment, education, housing, mental health and more.

Last year IAVA launched RRRP in New York City, where it received a great response and served more than 1,000 veterans. Recognizing the need for this program nationally, IAVA also expanded RRRP across California in January.

Veterans can contact a RRRP case manager by calling 855-91-RAPID (855-917-2743), emailing transition@iava.org, or visiting www.IAVA.org/RRRP.

“As we approach the 11th anniversary of the war in Iraq and the war in Afghanistan begins to draw down, we can’t forget the sacrifices our vets have made during these past 12 years,” said IAVA Founder and CEO Paul Rieckhoff. “Sometimes the transition home can be difficult, and finding the right resources in a timely manner can be frustrating. The Rapid Response Referral Program is an innovative assistance program that supports post-9/11 vets and their families by connecting them to critical resources. RRRP provides clients with the tools they need. From housing to the New GI Bill and mental health services, help is just a phone call or email away.”

New York veterans face a number of critical challenges. More than 368,000 veterans are stuck in the VA backlog, including more than 5,167 in the Buffalo regional office, who are waiting more than 125 days for a claim. Furthermore, last week the Bureau of Labor statistics reported a 9.2% unemployment rate for post-9/11 veterans during the month of February – a jump from 7.9% in January. New York post-9/11 veterans face a 16.6 unemployment rate.

Suicide is a top concern for new veterans: at least 22 veterans commit suicide every day, and a recent study found that the suicide rate among young male veterans rose by 44 percent in the past three years. Today, Rieckhoff [testified](#) before Congress demanding action to combat suicide.

Veterans who call RRRP work with a designated Veteran Transition Manager who considers all of their needs and goals, and will work with them on those over

the long-term. Transition Managers help veterans get connected to resources for any issues they may be confronting – from mental health issues, to financial struggles, to legal aid – and advocates on their behalf when needed, to ensure benefits are received. IAVA’s case management team includes veterans and veteran family members who have first-hand experience working with veterans in crisis.

One New York veteran was facing financial hardship when he connected with the RRRP program. He later wrote:

“After coming home from the military, I started school while receiving the post 9/11 GI bill. After I started school, my wife had a brain hemorrhage, and I was forced to withdraw and take care of my family. With two children under the age of three, we found ourselves buried in school debt. Thankfully, my wife recovered, but we soon realized that we couldn’t make it financially. We reached out to IAVA and met Ryan, a fantastic caseworker. He helped lay out options and offered us new resources. More importantly, he offered a bit of motivation. We have leaned on Ryan for help with housing and moving and he has not disappointed.”

The expansion of RRRP to New York has been made possible through the generous support of the New York State Health Foundation.