

# Post-9/11 Veterans Celebrate Historic Year of Impact

**Veteran suicide and 9/11 first responders legislation book-end year of action for IAVA**

**NEW YORK (December 30, 2015)** – As 2015 comes to a close, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), the largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization representing post-9/11 veterans and their families, celebrates a year of historic victories and impact at the local and national level. In 2015, IAVA's signature [Rapid Response Referral Program \(RRRP\)](#) surpassed 5,800 veterans and families served since the one-on-one support program was established in 2012. IAVA also continued to be the leading policy advocate for veterans of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, passing the federal Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans (SAV) Act and local legislation creating a permanent Department of Veteran Services in New York City, and concluding with the passage of the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act.

"This year has been a landmark year filled with tremendous successes on many of the most difficult issues facing veterans today. From veteran suicide and mental health to women veterans and VA reform, IAVA did not flinch when tackling the hardest issues," said Paul Rieckhoff, Founder and CEO of IAVA. "We may not be the largest organization in terms of revenue, but what we are is the most determined, focused and skilled organization representing post-9/11 veterans and their families. The result of our efforts was real action and tangible change in moving the needle on these pressing concerns and, along the way, highlighting the strength and potential of America's new greatest generation."

Major victories for IAVA in 2015 include:

- A year long campaign to make veteran suicide and mental health care top priorities for Congress, the president and America, culminating in a White House bill signing of the [Clay Hunt SAV Act](#) in February. The act, named for Marine veteran Clay Hunt who died by suicide in March 2011 at the age of 28, aims to reduce military and veteran suicides and improve access to quality mental health care.
- Unveiling the [The Wait We Carry 2.0](#) website in March at TED2015. This data visualization tool captures the experiences of veterans using VA health care and those who have submitted disability claims for combat-related injuries.
- In the fall, IAVA joined College Factual to re-launch the [NewGIBill.org](#) website, an innovative, free online calculation tool designed to help veterans determine their best, most affordable education options. To date, more than one million veterans have utilized IAVA's GI Bill calculator to make informed decisions about their education goals.
- IAVA's 2015 [Policy Agenda](#) was delivered to members of Congress and the

president in October, providing an 11-point comprehensive blueprint for how all branches of government, the private sector, nonprofits and communities can support veterans. As the 2016 presidential race got underway, IAVA used the agenda to push all candidates to provide concrete plans for supporting veterans and their families.

- During Veterans Week, post-9/11 veterans, families and supporters of IAVA participated in a record 145 “VetTogethers” across the nation. In New York City, more than 800 IAVA members marched in the New York City Veterans Day parade. IAVA’s [Ninth Annual Heroes Gala](#) capped off a historic Veterans Week with special guest Stephen Colbert and host Willie Geist.
- For nearly two years New York City-area IAVA members and peer organizations battled with Mayor de Blasio to take action to support the city’s 230,000 veterans and their families. On December 10, IAVA celebrated the long-sought victory to establish a city [Department of Veteran Services](#) in New York City.
- Finally, on December 18, the [James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Reauthorization Act](#) permanently extended the World Trade Center Health Program and re-authorized the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund in the final act of Congress for the year. The reauthorization of the act will impact many veterans who were called to serve in the aftermath of 9/11 and later went to war in Iraq and/or Afghanistan. The legislation was pushed through in part thanks to the more than 4,100 letters sent to Congress by IAVA members and supporters.

Throughout the year, IAVA also:

- Hosted more than 660 “[VetTogethers](#)” across the country, reaching over 7,000 veterans and their families.
- The #GoSilent campaign allowed for a shared, nationwide experience on Memorial Day. An unprecedented 9,182 individuals pledged to simultaneously participate in a one minute of silence across the nation. The campaign went viral, and mirrored the growth of IAVA’s social media presence. During the year, Facebook “likes” increased by 23,314, Twitter by 7,042 new followers and Instagram gained 4,592 new followers.
- In December, IAVA received a Force for Change grant from Salesforce.org, the philanthropic arm of Salesforce. These funds will be used to help build a 21st century virtual veterans hall supported through the expansion of IAVA’s innovative “[myIAVA](#)” platform.
- IAVA was the only veteran service organization to be selected as a My LA2050 Grants Challenge recipient. These funds will provide at least 180 of LA’s 320,000 veterans and their families with support as they transition to civilian life through referrals to critical resources and support systems.
- IAVA welcomed 16 dynamic individuals to the Board of Directors: Joe Abruzzese, president of advertising sales at Discovery Communications; Bonnie Carroll, President and Founder, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS); Adam Clampitt, President, The District Communications Group; Steve Costalas, Senior Vice President, General Counsel and Secretary, Vencore, Inc.; Eli Elefant, CEO, PBC USA Investments; Scott Feldmayer, partner at Barbaricum; Kenneth Fisher, senior partner of

Fisher Brothers; Congressman Patrick J. Kennedy, former U.S. Representative; Norman Lear, producer, writer, activist and philanthropist; Ryan Manion Borek, President of the Travis Manion Foundation; Jeff Marshall, director of west coast community operations at Uber; Jose Rene "J.R." Martinez, author, actor and veteran; Bruce E. Mosler, Chairman of Global Brokerage of Cushman & Wakefield Inc.; General (Ret) David H. Petraeus, Member, Chairman, KKR Global Institute; Wayne Smith, veterans advocate; and Dan Streetman, Sr. Vice President, Strategic Sales & Operations at BMC Software.

In the year ahead, IAVA will continue to fight for veterans through targeted action. In January, IAVA will turn to members of Congress to take bipartisan action to support the 280,000 women who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan by removing barriers to care and benefits at the VA and reforming the culture of the military to accept women fully in their ranks.