

[#CannabisForVets Launches With Groundbreaking Ads in Washington Post, USA Today](#)

NEW YORK, NY (October 4, 2018) Today, for Day 3 of a historic [Storm the Hill](#) grassroots advocacy activation week in Washington, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), the leading advocacy voice for post-9/11 veterans in America, launched a groundbreaking new non-partisan grassroots campaign focused on changing antiquated federal policies that prohibit wounded veterans from having access to medical cannabis. The #CannabisForVets effort follows a powerful [veteran suicide awareness activation on the National Mall yesterday](#) that generated [headlines nationwide](#).

The hard-hitting new ads, created pro-bono by IAVA's agency-of-record, [David&Goliath](#), premiered this morning with a print advertisement in the Washington Post, with digital ads run by USA Today, and on all IAVA social media platforms.

The copy of the ad reads: The federal government is making cannabis treatment for veterans hard to find. If they can handle weapons, explosives and ammunition, then they can handle medical cannabis. Demand change now. [Visit iava.org/cannabis](#)

"Veterans have fought for our nation and often sustained injuries as a result of their service. Our government allowed our men and women to handle weapons, warships and the most incredible technology in the world, but it prohibits them from having access to cannabis to treat their wounds. It's backward and harmful that regressive federal policies still ridiculously prohibit our veterans from having access to something that can lessen their pain, treat their symptoms, and improve their lives. IAVA members nationwide have spoken loudly and clearly. We need change now. This is a non-partisan issue that requires clear and immediate support from everyone in America, from the average citizen to our Commander-in-Chief. We encourage all Americans to stand with our veterans community to demand change. We call on all patriotic Americans to support IAVA's #CannabisForVets campaign and sign on to help us pass the bipartisan *VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act of 2018* ([H.R.5520/S.2796](#)). The critical bill authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs to conduct and support research on the efficacy and safety of certain forms of cannabis and cannabis delivery for veterans enrolled in the VA health care system diagnosed with conditions such as chronic pain or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The bill has bipartisan support from Congress including Senator Dan Sullivan (R-AK), Senator Jon Tester (D-MT), Representative Tim Walz (D-MN), Representative Phil Roe (R-TN) and many more. We call on every single member of Congress, the President and VA Secretary to join them. We expect every candidate for any office across America to do the

same. Together, we can make positive change this year that will change lives for decades to come,” said **IAVA CEO and Founder, [Paul Rieckhoff](#)**.

IAVA veterans and veterans of all generations have sounded off and clearly demanded: 2018 is the year we will be heard on the important and emerging health issue of utilizing cannabis to treat injuries of war. Veterans consistently and passionately have communicated that cannabis offers effective help in tackling some of the most pressing injuries we face when returning from war. [In our latest Annual IAVA Member Survey, the youngest of the Post-9/11 generation are most supportive; with about three-fourths of IAVA members under 35 supporting the allowance of medical marijuana](#). Across party lines, medical cannabis is now largely unopposed. Yet our national policies are outdated, research is lacking, and stigma persists. In 2018, IAVA members have set out to change that and launch a national conversation underscoring the need for bipartisan, data-based, common-sense solutions that can bring relief to millions, save taxpayers billions and create thousands of jobs for veterans nationwide. Those solutions must include the approval of medical cannabis for every veteran in America who needs it.

Our nation is rapidly changing on this issue, and thirty-one states now permit medical cannabis. Yet, as with many innovative solutions to veteran needs, progress on this issue within the VA has been slow and lags behind the needs of veterans and the changing reality of state-level laws. **Stunningly, VA physicians still cannot refer patients to legally sanctioned state medical cannabis programs because of the federal prohibition. Moreover, patients are not allowed to have any cannabis on VA property, even if it is medically prescribed to them and the state they are living in allows it.** And VA employees are still barred from using any form of cannabis, including medical cannabis, while roughly one-third of VA employees are veterans themselves, and generally support access to cannabis as a treatment option.

In opposition to strong, bipartisan and rising popular opinion across the veterans community, the VA Secretary announced in early 2018 that the VA will not conduct research into whether medical cannabis could help veterans suffering from PTSD and chronic pain. This is despite protest from many in the veterans community who posit medical cannabis could serve as an alternative to opioids and antidepressants. [A 2017 National Academy of Sciences study](#) stated: there was “conclusive or substantial” evidence that cannabis is effective in treating chronic pain, moderate evidence that cannabis helps with sleep (there is additional research that shows the link between lack of sleep and suicidal ideation), limited evidence in improving anxiety symptoms, and limited evidence in improving PTSD symptoms.

“Ever since I was a young kid, I’ve always championed the rights of veterans, heroes who bravely protected us even at their own peril”**said David Angelo, Founder of David&Goliath and IAVA Board Member** . “My father was one of them. He was a highly decorated Marine who also suffered from a severe case of PTSD. Watching him go through his pain was heartbreaking. That’s why I am so committed to helping veterans get the support they need and deserve.”

IAVA’s #CannabisForVets Campaign Goals:

1. Drive Congress to cosponsor and pass the bipartisan [VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act of 2018 \(R. 5520/ S. 2796\)](#) that states that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) can conduct research into the efficacy of medical cannabis as a treatment for veterans with chronic pain, PTSD, and other conditions. This would be the first cannabis-related legislation in history impacting VA.
2. Drive Congress to remove marijuana (cannabis) as a Schedule I drug.
3. Close the loopholes in VA policy which inhibit the discussion of cannabis usage between veterans and VA clinicians.
4. Press the VA and private medical community to conduct research into the use of medical cannabis as a treatment option for chronic pain and mental health injuries.
5. Advocate to update current VA medical cannabis policy to allow for VA clinicians to provide recommendations and opinions to patients regarding medical cannabis programs.
6. Maintain ability for states to continue cannabis access, including for medical purposes, without federal government prohibitions.
7. Monitor and share [IAVA members opinions](#) on all elements of evolving cannabis policy-to include the growing, nonpartisan, national support for the allowance of recreational use.
8. Where permitted, continue to connect, unite and empower post- 9/11 veterans seeking legal cannabis support options through our digital resources, our local VetTogether events and our [nationally-recognized Rapid Response Referral Program \(RRRP\)](#).

#CannabisForVets is among [IAVA's Big 6 Advocacy Priorities for 2018](#) . The Big 6 contains the challenges and opportunities that IAVA members care about most – and see as areas where we can uniquely make an impact. IAVA members are poised to educate the public, design solutions for positive impact, and lead the way to the future. That starts with our 2018 Big Six. Each Big 6 Priority will drive toward outcomes in 4 key areas: 1) Public Awareness 2) Executive Action 3) Legislative Change 4) Local Support. IAVA's broader and comprehensive Policy Agenda covers issues ranging from homelessness to employment to a national memorial for post-9/11 veterans and [can be found online here](#) .

Time Magazine has called IAVA "...the most important organization representing the new generation of veterans."