

# Post-9/11 Vets: One Year Beyond Clay Hunt SAV Act, More Work to be Done

## *IAVA calls on Washington to fully implement robust suicide prevention measures*

**NEW YORK (February 12, 2016)** – On the one year anniversary of the signing into law the [Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans \(SAV\) Act](#), Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) today applauds the progress made by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) but calls for all sections of the bill to be fully implemented. IAVA led the effort to pass the historic veteran suicide prevention legislation named after Marine veteran Clay Hunt who died by suicide in March 2011.

“IAVA worked across party lines for 18 months to get this bill to the president’s desk, and we will not stop fighting until every portion of this bill is implemented,” said IAVA Founder and CEO Paul Rieckhoff. “It has been one year and we’ve seen a lot of improvements, but far too many of our brothers and sisters are still taking their own lives. While we are encouraged by the progress in data collection, community outreach, collaboration between VA and nonprofits, expanded eligibility and increased community outreach, there is still much work to be done.”

The anniversary comes at a time when renewed national attention is being paid to veterans mental health care. Tuesday, the House passed the Female Veteran Suicide Prevention Act ([H.R. 2915](#) / [S. 2487](#)), which would require the VA to include specific metrics on women veterans in its annual evaluation of mental health and suicide prevention programs, identify the programs that are most effective and carry the highest satisfaction rates among female veterans. A study released last summer found that women who have served in the military die by suicide at nearly six times the rate of those in the civilian population, adding to the growing urgency of the SAV Act implementation.

The past year has seen a more resolute national focus on veteran suicide prevention and an inclusive process of planning to thoughtfully implement the SAV Act. Over the past year the VA has made strides towards the implementation of key measures of the act, including:

- Expanding eligibility for those discharged or released from active duty who did not previously enroll to receive mental health care. This has resulted in nearly 1,000 new enrollments in the VA mental health care since the eligibility extension went into effect in February 2015.
- Creating incentives for mental health practitioners to join VA staff through the Psychiatrists Loan Repayment Pilot program, expected to go into effect in early 2016.
- Developing a comprehensive mental health portal to streamline access to care and prioritize mental health care;
- Bringing together over 150 non-federal key stakeholders and partner

organizations to enhance the nation's work of suicide prevention and enable organizations to work in better coalition with one another.

Since IAVA's Campaign to Combat Suicide launched in the spring of 2014, more veterans are seeking help to address their mental health challenges. Over the past year IAVA's [Rapid Response Referral Program \(RRRP\)](#) program has seen a 39 percent increase in the number of clients approaching the organization for support with mental health care. IAVA continues to call for the key components of the act to be fully implemented in order to better serve every veteran seeking mental health assistance.

"Veteran suicide is a complicated issue that requires every resource available to support those who are in a difficult place," added Rieckhoff. "The veteran community should feel pride in knowing that their hard work is beginning to payoff. This is just the beginning of a long fight against veteran suicide and IAVA will continue to work with Congress and VA as we move forward in implementing this historic law."

IAVA has urged the chairs of the Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees to hold oversight hearings on VA's implementation of the SAV Act.