

# Veterans Build Momentum on Campaign to Combat Suicide in Lead up to National Day of Action

**WASHINGTON, DC (March 25, 2014)** – Today, as momentum continued in the build-up to Thursday's historic National Day of Action on the National Mall, post-9/11 veterans from across America met with senior military officials at the Pentagon to discuss the Department of Defense's efforts to combat troop and veteran suicide. Thirty-two veterans from across the country are in Washington with Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) for the 10th annual Storm the Hill advocacy trip, which is also the launch of its year-long "We've Got Your Back: IAVA's Campaign to Combat Suicide."

At Thursday's National Day of Action, which starts at 11 a.m. veterans and supporters will place American flags on the National Mall in Washington to represent each of the estimated 1,892 veterans and servicemembers who have died by suicide this year and share the stories of friends and families lost. Press are highly encouraged to attend this powerful event.

"Combating suicide is the top issue of the new veteran community in 2014 – we intend for the whole country to see that and participate during Thursday's National Day of Action. But in order to make a big impact and start to solve the problems that surround this issue we need to enlist the support and action of several government agencies and departments. That's why today's meeting at the Pentagon is so important," said IAVA Founder and CEO Paul Rieckhoff.

"With an estimated 22 veterans dying by suicide every day, this is an issue that requires a national response and focus," Rieckhoff added. "IAVA's 2014 Policy Agenda, which we unveiled this week, lays out concrete ways that the DOD can work with VA, Congress and the White House to ensure no servicemember falls through the cracks when transitioning from military to civilian life. Their leadership is critical to start reversing the trend of suicide in our community. And just as the DOD supports our troops while they're overseas, we also need to make sure they're supporting them once they're back home."

## *Policy Agenda*

IAVA's 2014 Policy Agenda is a blueprint for combating suicide and is driven by data from member veterans nationwide, partner organizations, and a decade of experience. The Policy Agenda also includes recommendations for keeping the VA on track to end the disability claims backlog by 2015, protecting the Post-9/11 GI Bill, reducing unemployment, and fighting military sexual assault. It contains recommendations for Congress, the White House, the DOD and VA, as well as mayors, governors, business leaders, and philanthropic organizations. The full Policy Agenda can be read [here](#).

## *Storm the Hill*

This week, 32 veteran leaders from nationwide are participating in Storm the Hill, IAVA's advocacy program that brings the stories of the more than 2.5 million veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan to Washington. The veterans come from 16 states and represent IAVA's diverse, dynamic and rapidly-growing national membership. All have been affected in some way by suicide, including knowing family and friends who have faced mental health challenges. Throughout the week, they will meet with members of Congress, the VA, the Department of Defense and the White House, urging policymakers to adopt IAVA's recommendations to bridge the gaps in care and ultimately break through the negative stigma that is too often associated with seeking help.

Now in its 10th year, Storm the Hill puts IAVA's top issue for the year on the map and has jumpstarted historic changes, including the passage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, advanced funding for health care at the VA, the VOW to Hire Heroes Act, and last year, a national focus on the high VA disability claims backlog.

## *Campaign to Combat Suicide*

As part of its Campaign to Combat Suicide, all year long IAVA will activate every element of its membership, programs and partners – both on-the-ground and online. IAVA will incorporate this effort into everything we do from our monthly VetTogethers to our over 500,000-person strong social media community. We will empower our almost 300,000 members and supporters to serve as a ground force for outreach, support and advocacy. And we will travel the country, turning public attention to the issue of veteran suicide and promoting solutions.

IAVA connects veterans to mental health services, including partnering with the Veterans Crisis Line to ensure that every servicemember, veteran, family member and provider knows that there is free and confidential help available 24 hours a day through phone, text and online. Veterans, or those concerned about veterans, can call 800-273-8255 and press 1 to be directly connected to qualified responders.

Visit [IAVA.org](http://IAVA.org) to learn more about IAVA's efforts to combat suicide, Storm the Hill and our 2014 class of Stormers. All week, IAVA will be posting photos, videos and personal stories on social media and with the #StormtheHill and #CombatingSuicide hashtags on Twitter.