

EW RISINGER

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Week 28

The Veterans Gold Standard

"You served this country. This country serves you back."

1. The Problem

18 million veterans. 40,000 sleeping outside on any given night. Veterans waiting months for VA appointments while conditions worsen. 22 veterans dying by suicide every single day. The VA is the second largest federal department by budget — \$445.49 billion enacted for FY2026, a 21% increase over FY2025, per Congressional Research Service Report R48968, June 3, 2026. More money has not solved the access problem. A governing standard will.

2. The Governing Principle

You served this country. This country serves you back. Same-day care for every veteran who requests it — not within 30 days, not within 7 days. The same day. If a VA facility cannot provide it, a federally contracted private facility provides it. Zero veterans dying on a waiting list. That is the standard. Not a 10-year goal. Not a 50% reduction target. Zero.

3. The Specific Policy

Same-Day Care Standard

- **Same-day primary care for every veteran who requests it:** at a VA facility, at a federally contracted private facility, or via telemedicine. VA facility directors whose facilities miss the same-day standard in more than 5% of cases are replaced. Performance is public. Published monthly. By facility. By director.
 - **Mental health same-day access:** every veteran experiencing a mental health crisis receives same-day access — telemedicine appointment within 4 hours if no in-person slot is available. The 22-per-day veteran suicide statistic is the governing failure this standard addresses.
 - **Private care authorization — no veteran waits:** if a VA facility cannot provide same-day care, the veteran receives a same-day authorization to see any credentialed provider who will accept the appointment. VA pays. No pre-authorization call. No claim submission. No reimbursement fight.
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Benefits and Housing

- **Benefits backlog elimination:** every disability claim decided within 90 days. Every appeal decided within 180 days.

Published

processing

time by

claim type and regional office, updated

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- **PACT Act full implementation:**
expanded| VA
healthcare
eligibility for veterans exposed to burn
pits, Agent Orange, radiation, and toxic substances — fully funded. Dedicated VA case worker assigned to every PACT Act eligible veteran within 30 days of enrollment.
- **40,000 homeless veterans — zero is the standard:** HUD-VASH vouchers fully funded to cover every veteran identified as experiencing homelessness. VA outreach workers in every major metropolitan area.

Provider Pay Parity and Pipeline

- **VA provider pay parity with private sector:** VA loses physicians, nurses, and mental health providers to private sector compensation every year. Pay parity benchmarked annually to private sector equivalents in each specialty and updated to match.
- **Mental health provider pipeline:** Week 12 Career Incentive Program includes VA mental health provider track. Full tuition plus stipend for students committing to VA service.

- **Veteran-owned small business contracting:** 3% statutory set-aside enforced. Federal contracting officers whose agencies fall below 3% veteran-owned contracting face documented performance consequences.

4. Estimated Cost

Current VA budget FY2026: \$445.49 billion enacted — \$300.42 billion mandatory (disability compensation, pensions, GI Bill) and \$134.39 billion discretionary (healthcare, construction, administration). Source: CRS Report R48968, June 3, 2026. The platform previously stated \$370 billion — that figure was the FY2025 level. The correct FY2026 enacted figure is \$445.49 billion, a 21% increase. The Veterans Gold Standard requires an additional estimated \$30-50 billion per year above current discretionary appropriations to fund same-day care guarantees, full private care authorization, and provider pay parity.

5. Year 1 Implementation and Measurable Result

Year 1 measurable result: same-day care standard published as governing metric within 30 days; VA facility performance dashboard live within 90 days; private care authorization with no pre-authorization requirement within 180 days; PACT Act case worker assignments initiated within 60 days; HUD-VASH vouchers fully funded. Baseline: 40,000 homeless veterans, 22 suicides per day, \$445.49 billion FY2026 VA appropriation per CRS R48968.