



## Veterans Group

For more information, go to [nalc.org/veterans](http://nalc.org/veterans)

## Veterans legislative update

**D**espite the challenges of virtual legislating due to COVID-19, the 117th Congress has been an active one, especially when it comes to prioritizing the needs of the nation's veterans during this public health emergency. While numerous bills have been introduced nearly seven months into the new Congress, perhaps the legislation with the most significant impact for veterans is the American Rescue Plan (Public Law No: 117-2), which was signed into law in March.

As letter carriers recall, this \$1.9 trillion package provides sick and family medical leave for postal employees and deemed a COVID-19 diagnosis for postal employees as work-related with regard to workers' compensation benefits. It also provides another round of targeted stimulus payments, child tax and dependent care tax credits, unemployment benefits, health insurance subsidies due to job loss, funding to states and municipalities, and investment in vaccines, testing, schools, transit/rail/aviation, restaurants, small businesses, food and nutrition benefits, housing and expanded Medicare programs.

While all those important top lines support letter carriers and Americans during the pandemic, what was not widely reported was what the American Rescue Plan contains to support the nation's veterans during this critical time.

To address slow processing of claims and appeals by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) due to COVID-19, the law provides additional funding to support staffing and overtime to enable the Board of Veterans Appeals to hold virtual hearings and bolster electronic records processing into VA systems.

As the country pivoted to virtual life during the pandemic, the new law provided the Veterans Health Admin-



istration with funding to adapt and to provide resources and support for telehealth medical services, women's health issues, homelessness programs and suicide prevention during the pandemic.

With regard to the VA's supply chain, the Act invests in modernization efforts aimed at addressing future health emergencies. These efforts look to address better management and tracking of inventory of critical items such as masks, gloves, sanitization and other medical supplies to better support VA facilities.

COVID-19 took a toll on many senior and assisted-living facilities—and, unfortunately, state VA homes also have suffered during this crisis, uncovering a critical need for support at these facilities to better care for veterans, especially as they were quarantined for many months.

To provide more robust oversight of the VA's response to the pandemic, the Act also provides additional funding to the VA's Office of the Inspector General.

Finally, the surge in COVID-related unemployment left thousands of our nation's veterans without work. While unemployment benefits and stimulus payments could provide some relief during the pandemic, lawmakers funded 12 months of assistance for career retraining specifically for veterans who were unemployed because of COVID-19 and who did not already benefit from veteran education benefits.

**While not included in the American Rescue Plan**, the new Congress and administration have worked in concert to pass the "Strengthening and Amplifying Vaccination Efforts to Locally Immunize All Veterans and Every Spouse Act" or the "SAVE LIVES Act" (Public Law No: 117-4) to prioritize vaccinations for veterans. The act, which was also signed into law in March, requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to vaccinate "covered individuals" for COVID-19.

The law also prioritizes VA-enrolled veterans, followed by veterans who are not VA-enrolled but use VA medical and hospital services within 12 months of their service separation for "specified disabilities," followed by those who provide care for or spouses of prioritized veterans.

**As Congress resumes more "normal/pre-COVID"** in-person operations, legislation that affects the recovery aspect of our nation's veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to remain a top priority. NALC will continue to monitor and engage on legislation that affects our veteran members.

### Join the NALC Veterans Group

The NALC Veterans Group is designed to provide NALC members—both active and retired letter carriers—who are also military veterans the ability to connect with fellow NALC veterans and stay informed on issues of importance to letter carrier veterans. It is free to join.

Members receive a pin as a symbol of gratitude for their military service and membership in NALC.

**If you are interested in joining the group, complete the sign-up card at [nalc.org/veterans](http://nalc.org/veterans).**