

RESOLUTION 1-24

WHEREAS, the persistent lack of adequate Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Health Administration (VHA) health care staffing has been a major driver of longer wait times for veterans seeking care, and the 2023 PACT Act legislation further exacerbated veterans' demand for care, and rural VA clinics are experiencing an unprecedented shortage of medical personnel, **AND**

WHEREAS, Mental Health Access and Suicide Prevention remain a top priority for Veterans Service Organizations in reducing veteran suicide, and VA's 2023 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report noted an increase in veteran suicide in 2022 - 2023 with significant increase in women veteran suicides, **AND**

WHEREAS, the PACT Act has increased new veterans' enrollment in VHA care for mental health services, primary care, women's health, and emergency medical services, all further straining VHAs ability to provide timely access to health care services, **AND**

WHEREAS, Veterans Affairs Medical Centers (VAMCs) have chronic clinical shortages of mental health providers, and VHA Directive 1165 lists only six core mental health disciplines—excluding Physician Assistants (PAs), **AND**

WHEREAS, PAs are highly educated professionals that are state licensed to diagnose, treat, and prescribe medications, and the PA profession arose from the returning Vietnam War combat medics and corpsmen in 1968, and PA education includes extensive training in psychiatry with mandatory didactic and psychiatric mental health clinical rotations as a required component of the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA) exam, and PA mental health skillsets would complement and augment VA Psychiatrists because PAs can prescribe medications, and assist psychologists with both outpatient and inpatient clinic panels, **AND**

WHEREAS, PA training programs are nationally accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for Physician Assistant (ARC-PA), and are nationally board certified by passing the Physician Assistant National Certifying Examination (PANCE) for initial board certification before state licensure, and PA training is adopted from the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), **NOW**

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Blinded Veterans Association, in convention assembled in Jacksonville, Florida, July 9, 2024, urges the VA Secretary to increase high quality Mental Health Access and Suicide Prevention, making it essential to recruit and hire the most qualified health care occupations including PAs to meet the challenges of health care access, and to include PAs in dual postings for vacancies across VHA to provide high quality, industry-leading health care services for veterans and strategically expand the appropriate diversity of professional backgrounds in clinical areas of mental health, primary care, women's health care, emergency medicine, and geriatric care, **AND FURTHER BE IT**

RESOLVED, that VHA should consider an expansion of the PA Health Professions Scholarship Program (HPSP) and double all PA Residencies along with new strategic national veterans' recruitment policy to support the expansion of veteran PAs, particularly in the realm of mental health and critical specialized care.

RESOLUTION 12-16

WHEREAS, Blind Rehabilitation Service was created within VA Central Office with authority and responsibility regarding all aspects of VA vision rehabilitation services, **AND**

WHEREAS, the relationship with BVA and BRS was mutually productive since the establishment of the collaboration, **AND**

WHEREAS, VIST, BROS, VICTORS, VISOR, and CATS are among programs and services spawned by the relationship between BRS and BVA, **AND**

WHEREAS, the BVA and BRS collaborated on the establishments of the continuum of care for visually impaired veterans and of the Vision Center of Excellence, **AND**

WHEREAS, within the last 8 years authority over blind rehabilitation services was decentralized relative to BRS, **AND**

WHEREAS, authority over VIST, VISOR, and BROS programs and blind rehabilitation centers was transferred to the individual medical centers housing each program, **AND**

WHEREAS, staff tasked with service delivery and supervision of vision rehabilitation programs at the medical centers have little or no education or other experience with blindness, **AND**

WHEREAS, clinical services for vision rehabilitation services are not or cannot be adequately provided by many stations, **AND**

WHEREAS, often the quality of vision rehabilitation services deteriorates commensurately with the lack of professional competencies and subject matter expertise of vision rehabilitation clinic service providers at many stations, **AND**

WHEREAS, visually impaired veterans are therefore losing access to benefits, services, and eligibility fostered by the relationship with centralized BRS authority and responsibility, **AND**

WHEREAS, Congressional action is required to centralize BRS in VA Central Office so that both authority and responsibility for vision rehabilitation services rest in the hands of that historically supportive service, **NOW THEREFORE BE IT**

RESOLVED, that the Blinded Veterans Association in convention assembled in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on this 26th day of August, 2016, urges that BVA work through its Legislative Director and supportive members of Congress to empower the Department of Veteran Affairs to restore centralization of vision rehabilitation services to Blind Rehabilitation Service in VA Central Office.

RESOLUTION 14-16

WHEREAS, members of BVA served their country during time of war in order to preserve the rights and privileges of life in this land of the free, **AND**

WHEREAS, one of the most precious of those rights is the right to vote, **AND**

WHEREAS, the United States Congress and the President's Administration have failed to fulfill their obligation to our Nation's blind veterans, providing inadequate funding for veterans' benefits and health care, **AND**

WHEREAS, the United States Congress and the President's Administration have targeted veterans' programs for unwarranted spending cuts and reductions under the mistaken and misguided theory that veterans do not base their vote on veterans' issues, **AND**

WHEREAS, the failure of blind veterans to register and vote will result in the perpetuation of this theory, **AND**

WHEREAS, because of their disabilities, blind veterans have more difficulty than their non-blind peers in complying with some of the more strict requirements in voter registration laws, **AND**

WHEREAS, there exists an urgent need for veterans, their families and all Americans concerned about veterans' issues to make their voice heard by becoming registered voters and exercising their vote in local, state, and federal elections, **NOW THEREFORE BE IT**

RESOLVED, that the Blinded Veterans Association in convention assembled in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on this 26th day of August, 2016, encourages 100 percent of our members to become registered to vote and thereby strengthen our organization's ability to preserve and improve our system of veterans' benefits and services, **AND FURTHER BE IT**

RESOLVED, that all BVA Regional Groups initiate and operate voter registration drives targeted at increasing voter registration among veterans and their families, **AND FINALLY BE IT**

RESOLVED, that all BVA Regional Groups, and members are encouraged to ensure that all veterans and their family members are able to get to polling locations to vote or vote by mail in absentee ballots.

RESOLUTION 15-16

WHEREAS, the United States Supreme Court, by a 5-4 decision, has ruled that public desecration of the American Flag, as a form of free speech and expression, is legal and permissible, **AND**

WHEREAS, the American Flag—“Old Glory”—is our National Ensign, the proud and beautiful symbol of our country’s precious, free heritage, **AND**

WHEREAS, this symbol, in the form of our irreplaceable “Stars and Stripes,” has been carried and defended in battle, revered and cherished by its citizens, and viewed as a beacon of hope and fulfillment by all the world since it was first unfurled at the birth of our Nation, **AND**

WHEREAS, the Constitutional First Amendment guarantee of freedom of speech was not intended by our Founding Fathers to enable individuals—who do enjoy unfettered freedom to express their views, no matter how abhorrent, in both oral and written form—to publicly and contemptuously desecrate our beloved flag, **NOW THEREFORE BE IT**

RESOLVED, that the Blinded Veterans Association in convention assembled in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on this 26th day of August, 2016, goes on record as condemning any individual or group who shall at any time publicly and willfully desecrate the flag of the United States.

RESOLUTION 16-16

WHEREAS, even though veterans' health care is funded through an advance appropriation, it is still at the discretion of Congress to provide the level of funding necessary for the veterans' health care system, **AND**

WHEREAS, the President and many members of Congress insist that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system is adequately funded, **AND**

WHEREAS, VA is recognized as the best health care system in the United States, and for providing high quality health care services, **AND**

WHEREAS, by using the VA health care system, the President, Vice President, and members of Congress would be in a better position to understand the resource needs of VA to enable it to provide timely quality health care to our nation's veterans, **AND**

WHEREAS, similar to the members of the military, the President, Vice President, and most Members of Congress are required to spend a significant amount of time away from their homes, families, and friends while Congress is in session, **AND**

WHEREAS, because of the patriotism, devotion, and sacrifices of our President, Vice President, and Members of Congress, ours is the most free nation on earth, where our citizens enjoy unequalled rights, privileges, and prosperity, **AND**

WHEREAS, the President, Vice President, and Members of Congress should therefore be granted the privilege of using the VA health care system for their medical needs, **AND**

WHEREAS, if the President, Vice President, or Member of Congress is a veteran, he or she would be classified into the proper priority group for purpose of receipt of VA medical care, **AND**

WHEREAS, if the President, Vice President, or Member of Congress is not a veteran, he or she would be classified as a non-service-connected veteran in either Priority Group 7 or 8, depending on their income,
NOW THEREFORE BE IT

RESOLVED, that Blinded Veterans Association in convention assembled in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on this 26th day of August, 2016, supports legislation to require the President, Vice President, and Members of Congress to enroll for VA medical care services and receive health care exclusively from the VA health care system.

RESOLUTION 17-16

WHEREAS, all members of the Blinded Veterans Association are legally blind or visually impaired, **AND**

WHEREAS, most members of the Blinded Veterans Association travel from time to time by air, **AND**

WHEREAS, a significant impediment (barrier) to independent travel by airplane occurs when a blind or visually impaired member must traverse the distance between the arrival curb outside of the terminal building and the airline counter inside the terminal, **AND**

WHEREAS, currently there does not exist a person or device to effectuate traversing the distance from curb to counter by the disabled person, **AND**

WHEREAS, the Federal Aviation Administration is currently gathering comments about the adoption of additional rules and/or regulations regarding assisting our members and others who are disabled in traversing the distance between the arrival curb and the airline counter, **AND**

WHEREAS, the lack of accessibility to the airline counters from the arrival curb is a current and extensive barrier to independent airline travel by blind, visually impaired or other disabled person, **NOW THEREFORE BE IT**

RESOLVED, that the Blinded Veterans Association in convention assembled in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on this 26th day of August, 2016, does hereby request the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to adopt a rule(s) or regulations requiring the elimination of the existing barrier to accessibility for blind and other disabled individuals to obtain independent access to their proposed airline counter from their arrival curb at the airport.

RESOLUTION 3-17

WHEREAS, current law provides that service connected veterans rated less than 50 percent who retire from the Armed Forces on length of service do not receive disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in addition to full military retired pay; **AND**

WHEREAS, these disabled veterans must therefore surrender retired pay in an amount equal to the disability compensation they receive; **AND**

WHEREAS, this offset is unfair to veterans who have served faithfully in military careers inasmuch as these veterans have earned their retired pay by virtue of their long service to the Nation and wholly apart from disabilities due to military service; **NOW THEREFORE BE IT**

RESOLVED that the Blinded Veterans Association in convention assembled in, Jacksonville, Florida on this 18th day of August, 2017, supports legislation to repeal the offset between military longevity retired pay and VA disability compensation.

RESOLUTION 5-17

WHEREAS, the Rehabilitation Act has been in effect since 1973; **AND**

WHEREAS, the Rehabilitation Act requires that agencies of the federal government make such modifications in programs and policies as necessary to allow full participation by people with disabilities; **AND**

WHEREAS, this law applies to employment offered by federal agencies and requires that those agencies make reasonable efforts to accommodate people with disabilities within their workforces; **AND**

WHEREAS, blind and visually-impaired individuals historically have experienced extreme difficulty in finding meaningful employment or advancing beyond entry level positions when employment is found; **AND**

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employs disabled people, many of whom are blind or severely visually impaired, **NOW THEREFORE BE IT**

RESOLVED, that the Blinded Veterans Association in convention assembled in Jacksonville, Florida on this 18th day of August, 2017, urges the VA to insure that all visually-impaired and blind employees have reasonable accommodations, including necessary training on essential access technology.

RESOLUTION 6-17

WHEREAS, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is currently authorized to provide transportation to VA appointments for veterans confined to wheelchair and those who require transportation by ambulance; **AND**

WHEREAS, Veterans Transportation Service has active plans to expand healthcare access for veterans. It has expanded the Veteran Transportation Network which is now active at eighty-seven (87) VA sites. A mobility manager who coordinates scheduling as well as identifying and joining with community partners is in place in facilities as the program expands. The program is also working closely with VA's Office of Rural Health to improve the network of transportation services that connect rural veterans and those veterans who, because of disability or infirmity, need transportation assistance to access VA services. This service provides for continuity of care for those physically infirm or disabled Veterans who often have complex medical conditions requiring healthcare services; **AND**

WHEREAS, blind veterans have significant problems with obtaining transportation to VA appointments; **AND**

WHEREAS, the disability of blindness causes significant barriers in transportation similar to those who must use a wheelchair. VA proposed legislation to extend a recently enacted provision, 38 USC & 111A that authorized VA to transport any person to or from a VA facility or other place in connection with vocational rehabilitation or counseling required by the Secretary pursuant to Chapter 34 or 35 of Title 38 or for the purpose of examination, treatment or care; **AND**

WHEREAS, this authority was enacted in January 2103 under Public Law 112-260, Section 202 of the Dignified Burial and Other Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2012 and expires one year after the date of enactment. This proposal is supported by BVA and would extend the VA authority for an additional five years; **NOW THEREFORE BE IT**

RESOLVED, that the Blinded Veterans Association in convention assembled in Jacksonville, Florida on this 18th day of August, 2017, request that the VA Veterans Travel Program (VTP) in conjunction with VHA ensures that blindness be included as a justification for VA to authorize transportation to local VA appointments when appropriate by VA mobility personnel and that VA vans, public transportation, DAV vans, or other contracted services be utilized to ensure all blinded veterans have access to local VA outpatient care and services.

RESOLUTION 7-17

WHEREAS, many of the veterans who utilize the services of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are blind or visually impaired, **AND**

WHEREAS, these veterans receive vital correspondence including, but not limited to information about their benefits, appointment reminders, surgical preparation and treatment instructions only in standard print, which they cannot read, **AND**

WHEREAS, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, PL. 93-122, requires federal agencies to make their programs and services, including communications, accessible to people with disabilities, **NOW THEREFORE BE IT**

RESOLVED, that the Blinded Veterans Association in convention assembled in Jacksonville, Florida, on this 18th day of August, 2017, urges the Department of Veterans Affairs to insure that efforts to modernize the VA's IT and communications infrastructure provide VA Central Office as well as VA hospitals, medical centers and other facilities nationwide with the capability to send correspondence and other currently written communications to veterans with visual impairments in accessible formats, including but not limited to braille, large print, e-mail, and audio format, **AND FURTHER BE IT**

RESOLVED, that this organization urges the VA to ensure all web content posted by the VA and its facilities is compliant with Section 508 accessibility standards, **AND FINALLY BE IT**

RESOLVED, that this organization requests that the VA dedicate specific funding streams to Section 508 compliance separate from general IT operational funding and increase staffing of Section 508 compliance efforts to allow timely evaluation and technical assistance to be provided to those developing and managing content for VA's internet and intranet websites, beginning with those 20 sites that have been identified by VA as used most frequently by veterans.

RESOLUTION 8-17

WHEREAS, VA is facing a potential shortage of highly qualified health care professionals as the result of the high percentage of “Boomers near retirement”; **AND**

WHEREAS, VHA Blind Rehabilitation Service (BRS) is also confronting the potential loss of a large percentage of its workforce; **AND**

WHEREAS, the NPC positions are critical in providing education, training and oversight for full-time Visual Impairment Service Team (VIST) Coordinators and Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialists (BROS); **AND**

WHEREAS, many long time VIST Coordinators are retiring and many new BROS positions have been established; **AND**

WHEREAS, the need for the NPC positions is even more critical; **AND**

WHEREAS, Veteran Integrated Service Networks (VISN) and Facilities are reluctant to fill vacant positions, **NOW THEREFORE BE IT**

RESOLVED, that the Blinded Veterans Association in convention assembled in Jacksonville, Florida on this 18th day of August, 2017, strongly urge the Under Secretary of Health to require Network and Facility Directors to begin recruitment and training programs for succession for VIST, BROS; and other vision rehabilitation staff; and continue to fill the NPC positions in a more timely matter.

RESOLUTION 10-17

WHEREAS, Section 110, Title 38, United States Code, now provides for the protection of all disability compensation evaluations that have been continuously in effect for 20 or more years; **AND**

WHEREAS, permanency should be conceded for disability compensation ratings which have been in effect for 10 years without change in evaluation with no further examination scheduled; **NOW THEREFORE BE IT**

RESOLVED, that the Blinded Veterans Association in convention assembled in Jacksonville, Florida on this 18th day of August, 2017, supports amendment of Section 110, Title 38, United States Code to provide that disability compensation evaluations continuously be in effect and protected at the same evaluation rate after a period of 10 years.

RESOLUTION 19-17

WHEREAS, the Department of Justice (DOJ) has determined that only dogs would be classified as service animals under the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) and has promulgated regulations reflecting this fact; **AND**

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) dog access policy contains language in lockstep with regulations described under the ADA for purposes of developing and employing policies governing service dog teams in VA facilities; **AND**

WHEREAS, the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) enjoys a rich heritage based on our working alongside the Department of Veteran Affairs, and in doing so, has contributed to the leadership in the nurturance of VA Blind Rehabilitation into the premier system providing those services which empower blind veterans while enhancing the lives and lifestyles of the blinded veteran experience, as well as impacting the experience of the global community of persons living with blindness; **AND**

WHEREAS, Experiences of blind veterans who have encountered a variety of serious problems in the form of aggressive animals posing serious danger for their guide dogs indicates that there is both a lack of knowledge demonstrated by VA Police and, at best, a very inconsistent application of VA policies; **AND**

WHEREAS, reports establish the fact that a large number of untrained or out-of-control dogs instigate incidents with legitimate guide dog teams and that these incidents are either ignored or mishandled by VA Police indicating that they possibly lack the proper tools and training which would enable them to respond more appropriately; **AND**

WHEREAS, it appears that the VA Police should and could be the most appropriate element of the VA to enforce policies related to service dog behavior on VA facilities; as well as to be in the position (with sufficient knowledge upon which to base conclusions) to evaluate the legitimacy of the dog presented as a service dog, **AND**

WHEREAS, action of VA Police barring ineligible or out-of-control dogs from entering VA facilities increases safety where they often pose dangers to blind veterans with guide dogs and other veterans and individuals who are often caught in the confusion of an aggression incident; **NOW THEREFORE BE IT**

RESOLVED, that the Blinded Veterans Association in convention assembled in Jacksonville, Florida on this 18th day of August, 2017, strongly urges executive management within the Department of Veterans Affairs to establish an advisory committee to research the myriad facets of the ADA related to service dogs, with the goal of revising existing VA policies on this subject; enabling a consistent interpretation of the policies accompanied by consistent application of said policies by the VA Police; **AND FURTHER BE IT**

RESOLVED, that this organization strongly urges that educational materials be developed which can be widely shared with VA staff and visitors, leading to an elimination of harmful incidents of aggression against legitimate guide dogs and their blind handlers by untrained, illegitimate or out-of-control dogs; **AND FINALLY BE IT**

RESOLVED, that this organization strongly encourages that these efforts include participation by representatives from the Blinded Veterans Association, at least two guide dog schools accredited by the International Guide Dog Federation, and a representative from each of the consumer advocacy groups dealing with guide dogs.

RESOLUTION 20-17

WHEREAS, the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) has joined with the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) in a partnership over the 72 year history of their coexistence, **AND**

WHEREAS, BVA's input to the VA has contributed significantly to the development of the premier quality Blind Rehabilitation Services (BRS) available today, **AND**

WHEREAS, that input has often been provided through resolutions adopted annually by attendees of BVA's national convention and submitted to the VA following their adoption, **AND**

WHEREAS, BVA has benefited from the guidance often contained in VA's responses to these resolutions, and this, in turn, has enabled BVA to insure that its resolutions are well informed, **AND**

WHEREAS, the VA has not responded to BVA's resolutions in recent years, which has limited dialogue on important issues and deprived BVA of the opportunity to obtain valuable guidance and increased understanding of VA's perspective, to inform our resolution process, **AND**

WHEREAS, BVA's resolutions are the means by which the membership gives direction to their officers and staff and determines the organization's legislative and policy agendas each year, **NOW THEREFORE BE IT**

RESOLVED, that the Blinded Veterans Association in convention assembled in Jacksonville, Florida on this 18th day of August, 2017, strongly urges the VA to resume its policy of years past and submit responses to resolutions submitted by BVA each year following its annual convention, in order to provide much-needed information and perspective to BVA, thereby increasing the likelihood that resolutions will be beneficial to the VA and further BVA's role as a partner in VA's effort to provide the best services possible to America's blind veterans and veterans in general.

RESOLUTION 21-17

WHEREAS, numerous previous scientific studies have revealed significant harmful effects of exposure to the ingredients of Agent Orange/Dioxin as well as other herbicides and toxic substances on humans and animals. Continued research is needed to fully understand the entire range of the possible effects of such exposure on eye cancer in Vietnam veterans, **AND**

WHEREAS, the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) review of scientific information indicated there are a number of studies that need replication in order to reach a scientifically accepted standard of significant association, **AND**

WHEREAS, data for the years 2007-2011 indicate that approximately 2,000 veterans per year received diagnoses of Choroidal melanoma eye cancer, and in each case, these veterans had previously reported exposure to toxic substances such as Agent Orange during their service in the armed forces, **AND**

WHEREAS, by contrast, there were 1,000 cases diagnosed among the civilian population of the United States in 2010, **AND**

WHEREAS, extrapolating from the percentage of veterans to civilians in the U.S. population, there should be about 115 veterans diagnosed with this form of cancer in any given year, rather than the 1,550 to 2,000 noted above, **AND**

WHEREAS, BVA is concerned that these data require full VA research review, both internally and in joint partnerships, with NIH, National Eye Institute (NEI), National Academy of Science Institute of Medicine (IOM), as well as VHA medical surveillance systems examinations, **NOW THEREFORE BE IT**

RESOLVED, that the Blinded Veterans Association in convention assembled in Jacksonville, Florida on this 18th day of August, 2017, requests that the U.S. Congress, and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and other appropriate federal agencies initiate, and Congress support an independent comprehensive health study on Vietnam War era veterans with eye cancer, which includes determination of the delayed effects of exposure to the ingredients in Agent Orange/Dioxin and other toxic chemicals used primarily in Vietnam. This research which bases its decision on scientifically accepted standards, i.e.: Standard Mortality Ratios (SMRs) determines significant associations for diseases currently recognized by the VA as related to herbicide exposure, and this research be reported to Congress.