November 18, 2026

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate
412 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate
825A Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Chairman Moran and Ranking Member Blumenthal:

In light of the Committee's November 18 hearing, VA Accountability and Transparency: Examining the Current and Future Path of VA's Electronic Health Record Modernization Program, attached please find Western Governors' Association (WGA) Policy Resolution 2026-09, Veterans.

Western Governors urge Congress to pass legislation requiring the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DOD) to modernize their electronic health record systems and requiring VA to upgrade its overall technology infrastructure. Governors also support increased data sharing between VA and state departments of veterans services to help connect veterans with state and federal benefits. These improvements would streamline access to critical health information, strengthen coordination between VA and DOD, and improves the veterans' benefits claims process.

I request that you include this document in the permanent record of the hearing, as it articulates Western Governors' collective and bipartisan policy on these important issues.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Please contact me if you have any questions or require further information.

Sincerely,

Jack Waldorf
Executive Director

Attachment

Policy Resolution 2026-09

Veterans

A. BACKGROUND

American military personnel often return home to a hero's welcome after completing their service, but they face a series of complex challenges. Veterans, whether they volunteered or were drafted, commonly confront a range of issues such as food insecurity, homelessness, unemployment, physical and psychological wounds, and bureaucratic barriers when seeking support services. Western Governors recognize the need to support veterans and address the challenges they face. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimates there are approximately 18 million veterans in the United States as of 2025, with just over 9 million enrolled in the VA health care system, suggesting that a substantial share of veterans are not currently connected to VA-provided services. With one-third of the known veteran population residing in western states, Governors recommend federal regulatory and statutory changes to foster an environment that facilitates access to support services for veterans and encourages further investment in initiatives tailored to assist them.

B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT

1. Western Governors urge VA to prioritize the integration of peer support services and behavioral health services for Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) into mental health care models. Additionally, Western Governors urge VA to address staffing models to support the increasing health concerns for memory care (Dementia, Alzheimer's) and other neurological disorders. VA should also provide continuous training and support for peer specialists and focus on developing and retaining the behavioral health care workforce. Western Governors have highlighted substantive health care workforce recommendations in our health care policy resolution. Ongoing evaluations should be conducted to ensure effective implementation of these practices, which should be disseminated across all VA health care settings to ensure broad access to peer support services for all veterans.

2. Western Governors recognize the importance of addressing veteran suicide and encourage the federal government to sustain and strengthen support for veteran suicide prevention efforts.

3. Recognizing the need to improve health program services for women veterans, Western Governors urge VA to take urgent action to address gaps in the VA health care system. Improving the promotion of, access to, and the quality of health care for women veterans is essential and requires timely and effective measures to be implemented across VA. Western Governors recommend that VA initiate research programs to study health issues specific to women veterans.

4. Western Governors recognize the significance of expanding access to health care and mental health care services for veterans, especially those residing in remote areas. To better meet this need, VA and Congress should prioritize strategies that strengthen provider participation in VA programs. In addition, VA should take action to increase the

accessibility of telemedicine services, which is a vital tool that can help bridge the gap in accessing health care services.

5. Western Governors recommend that VA seek consultation and input from tribal leaders and communities to inform the development and administration of its programs and services for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian veterans.

6. To ensure that veterans have timely access to high-quality health care, Western Governors recommend that Congress prioritize providing VA and State Veteran Homes with the necessary resources, authority, and flexibility needed to recruit, hire, train, and retain health care professionals. This includes physicians, nurses, mental and behavioral health providers, long-term care professionals, and administrative staff. In addition, Western Governors encourage the federal government to support efforts to streamline hiring processes, offer competitive salaries and benefits, and provide ongoing training and professional development opportunities for health care professionals to help VA facilities and State Veterans Homes maintain the workforce needed to deliver quality care to veterans.

7. Western Governors urge VA to collaborate with states and territories to improve and expand the Highly Rural Transportation Grants program, including by reviewing and updating the definition of rural and highly rural areas to better reflect geographic realties. Governors recommend identifying counties that require assistance, simplifying the application and implementation process, and consulting early with Governors to incorporate state-specific needs and expertise. VA should also reevaluate and expand eligibility criteria to ensure more veterans can benefit, which would improve access to benefits and services in rural communities.

8. Western Governors urge VA to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the Veteran Transportation Services (VTS) exam and implement necessary revisions to reduce its complexity, facilitating the process for individuals to obtain a license to transport veterans to VA health care facilities and authorized non-VA health care appointments.

9. Western Governors call on VA to improve community care for veterans by enforcing timely referrals and appointments, particularly for programs like VA Community Care. VA should also streamline reimbursement processes for third-party health care providers in line with industry standards and ensure prompt access to services and increased provider participation.

10. To ensure that our nation's veterans receive the benefits and services they are entitled to in a timely and efficient manner, Western Governors urge VA to continue to improve and streamline the claims process, especially with the new Sergeant First Class (SFC) Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act (Pub. L. 117-168) claims.

11. Western Governors recommend that VA implement a policy allowing veterans to select their own care providers, including those who are not affiliated with VA health care facilities. By doing so, veterans would have greater flexibility and choice when seeking health care services.

12. Western Governors recognize the necessity of conducting a comprehensive review of VA regulations regarding payments for State Veterans Homes and urge VA to consult with states to identify the unique needs of each state. Additionally, Western Governors recommend expanding coverage to include all specialty care services. Reimbursement models for State Veterans Homes are not adequate to meet the needs of the growing number of veterans requiring geriatric psychiatric care.

13. Western Governors recommend that VA authorize and prioritize the expansion of VA programs to provide comprehensive financial support for third-party assisted living and nursing facilities, which offer varying levels of care for long-term care services to our nation's veterans.

14. Western Governors urge Congress to pass legislation that requires VA and the Department of Defense (DOD) to modernize their electronic health record-keeping systems and mandate VA to upgrade its overall technology infrastructure. These upgrades are necessary to streamline access to critical health information, enhance coordination between the two departments, and improve the claims process for veterans, which is a priority for the Governors.

15. Western Governors recognize the critical role of state, tribal, and federally accredited Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) in helping veterans access benefits, especially as federal laws expand available programs. Governors urge VA to ensure VSOs have timely access to the systems and information needed to support claims and to provide clear, timely guidance on congressionally authorized programs and grants, including those under the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act, so resources can be delivered efficiently to states, territories, tribal governments, and community partners. Governors also encourage Congress to review accreditation and oversight frameworks for entities assisting with VA disability claims to strengthen accountability and protect veterans.

16. Western Governors recommend that VA expand its dental services to all veterans enrolled in the VA health care system, regardless of their service-connected dental issues or other narrow criteria.

17. Western Governors support the idea that service members should be given the opportunity to receive credit or professional credentials for the training they undergo in the military, which can then be transferred to the private sector or educational institutions. This initiative will help veterans transition into civilian careers by providing them with the necessary credentials and recognition for the skills developed through their military service.

18. Western Governors urge Congress to provide diligent oversight over VA and DOD and encourage improved coordination with state veterans agencies to ensure that transitioning service members receive comprehensive information about VA benefits at least twelve months prior to their transition to civilian life. This includes ensuring that service members are aware of the full range of programs and support services available to them through federal, state, and community providers. Western Governors further emphasize the importance of strengthening outreach during the first 18 months following separation from military service, a critical period for connecting veterans with support services, including suicide prevention resources.

19. Western Governors recommend that VA conduct a comprehensive study on their efforts to reduce homelessness and identify those programs that have provided the highest return on investment.

20. Western Governors recommend that VA implement a policy allowing increased data sharing between VA and state departments of veterans services. By doing so, states could connect veterans to both state and federal benefits, as well as enhance programs for veterans that do not qualify for federal benefits.

C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE

1. The Governors direct WGA staff to work with congressional committees of jurisdiction, the Executive Branch, and other entities, where appropriate, to achieve the objectives of this resolution.

2. Furthermore, the Governors direct WGA staff to consult with the Staff Advisory Council regarding its efforts to realize the objectives of this resolution and to keep the Governors apprised of its progress in this regard.

This resolution will expire in June 2029. Western Governors enact new policy resolutions and amend existing resolutions on a semiannual basis. Please consult http://www.westgov.org/resolutions for the most current copy of a resolution and a list of all current WGA policy resolutions.