

CARING FOR AMERICAN VETERANS

EVER MINDFUL OF THE NATION'S DEBT TO SERVICE MEMBERS, SENATOR MCCAIN WORKED TIRELESSLY TO ENHANCE VETERANS' HEALTH CARE, PROVIDE VETERANS WITH THE BENEFITS THEY HAVE EARNED, EASE THEIR TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN LIFE, SUPPORT MILITARY FAMILIES, AND HONOR THE FALLEN.

Helping Veterans in Arizona & Around the Country

As a well-known veteran in Congress, Senator McCain enjoyed a special standing among American service members and veterans from all across the country, including many who regularly sought his assistance. His staff responded to all who reached out regardless of their home state, and as a result, Senator McCain's office worked far more veterans-related cases than any other office of the Senate. Following the 2014 crisis in veterans' health care, Senator McCain's team handled more than 17,000 cases for veterans around the globe. Many received long-overdue health care, and many cases led to the instatement or reinstatement of millions of dollars' worth of benefits owed to veterans, seniors, students and taxpayers.

Reforming Veterans' Health Care

In 2014, Senator McCain led a bipartisan effort to address the scandal of inadequate care at VA hospitals in Phoenix and around the country. He worked with Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) to write and pass, by a vote of 93-3 in the Senate, the [Veterans' Access to Care through Choice, Accountability and Transparency Act of 2014](#). This legislation enacted some of the most significant reforms to the VA in decades. A hallmark of the bill was the Veterans Choice Program, which Senator McCain first proposed when he ran for president in 2008. The Choice Program enabled veterans who lived far from a VA health care facility or who could not get a timely appointment to visit a doctor in their own communities.

These important options for veterans were protected and expanded in 2018 with the passage of the [John S. McCain III, Daniel K. Akaka, and Samuel R. Johnson VA MISSION Act](#). Based upon legislation co-sponsored in the Senate by Senator McCain and Senator Jerry Moran, the law made it far easier for veterans to access care in their own communities through a consolidated community care network.

Combating Veterans Suicide

Senator McCain was a leader in improving care for veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). He was the original cosponsor of the [Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act](#), legislation that was passed unanimously by the Senate and signed into law by the President in February 2015, which reformed and strengthened veterans' suicide prevention programs at the Department of Defense and the VA. Senator McCain also helped spearhead the "Be Connected" program, which brings together local VA hospitals, state agencies and a variety of organizations across the state of Arizona to identify veterans who are at risk of suicide and get them the peer-support and care they need. The program is now being replicated in states across the country.

Easing the Transition to Civilian Life

Senator McCain strongly supported programs to help service members successfully transition to civilian life. Throughout his career, he worked to expand educational and job counseling programs, service member transition assistance programs, and helped extend vocational training benefits. He worked to provide new educational assistance for reservists, fought to extend the availability of G.I. bill education benefits to Vietnam veterans, and expand flight training benefits to more veterans.

In 2015, he led passage of the [Border Jobs for Veterans Act](#), which expedited the hiring of veterans as Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers at understaffed U.S. ports of entry. He also supported numerous bills to help veterans escape homelessness by providing them with counseling, independent living training, and residential treatment programs. In Arizona, Senator McCain was a major backer of the Department of Defense's SkillBridge program, which allows employers to begin training service members up to six months prior to their departure so that they are ready to join the civilian workforce immediately.

Caring for Disabled Veterans

Senator McCain championed several bills to ensure that veterans with service-connected disabilities receive the benefits and care they have earned. For example, he successfully pushed for an [amendment](#) to permit retired disabled veterans to receive retirement and disability compensation benefits. He also supported higher payments to disabled veterans and survivors of veterans who died because of service-related injuries. Furthermore, Senator McCain spearheaded an effort to establish a [Blind Rehabilitation Center](#) in Tucson, Arizona, to help the 1,200 veterans on waiting lists for rehabilitation services.

Providing Tax Relief for Service Members, Veterans and Military Families

In 2003, Senator McCain championed legislation providing comprehensive [tax relief](#) to service members, veterans and families. Specifically, the bill eased restrictions on some previous credits that were unavailable to service members. It also increased in the amount of death benefits paid to surviving family members of service members killed in action. Further, the bill provided a new deduction for travel expenses incurred by members of the National Guard.

Honoring the Fallen

Senator McCain long worked to provide for the families of service members who have been killed or wounded in combat. Since the early 1990s, Senator McCain cosponsored legislation to [double the death gratuity payment](#) for service members, and to increase the death gratuity payment and double the soldier and [veterans' group life insurance](#). Senator McCain also sponsored [an amendment](#) to the Senate-passed [National Defense Authorization Act for 2016](#) that would ensure that no American family ever has to pay out-of-pocket to witness the dignified transfer of a loved one's remains. The amendment was inspired by Marine Lance Corporal Jacob Hug of Phoenix, Arizona, who was killed while on a humanitarian relief mission following the devastating earthquake in Nepal.