

Written Informed Consent

The VFW's Concern:

Veteran suicide remains a crisis. Data from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) indicates 6,398 veterans died by suicide in 2023, which is an average of 17.5 deaths each day. It was the second-leading cause of death among veterans under age 45. Suicide rates remain substantially higher among veterans than non-veteran adults and are especially elevated among veterans ages 18-34.

Recent research found that 48 percent of veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) experience the concurrent use of two or more antidepressant, antipsychotic, or mood stabilizing medications, known as psychotropic polypharmacy, compared to 22 percent of veterans without PTSD. Some commonly prescribed psychiatric medications also carry a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) boxed warning identifying serious risks, making careful monitoring and clear communication essential. VA's Office of Inspector General has repeatedly identified gaps in the documentation of required informed consent discussions about the risks and benefits of newly prescribed medications. These findings underscore the need to strengthen communication and ensure veterans are fully informed about their treatment.

Psychiatric medications can be appropriate and life-changing when properly prescribed and monitored. But like any serious medical treatment, they require honest conversations and shared decision making. VA policy requires providers to discuss the risks, benefits, and alternatives of prescribed medications with veterans, yet the VA Office of Inspector General has identified gaps in compliance with and documentation of these requirements. Providing this important information in writing would strengthen the informed consent process and give veterans clear information they can review when making decisions about their care. Transparency builds trust, supports continued engagement in treatment, and reinforces a simple truth—mental health care is health care. For these reasons, the VFW supports strengthening written informed consent to ensure veterans receive safe, informed, and high-quality care.

The VFW Urges Congress to:

Pass H.R.4837 / S.3314, *Written Informed Consent Act*, to expand written informed consent requirements to ensure veterans receive clear, written information about the benefits, risks, alternatives, and expectations associated with long-term psychiatric medications.

Note: For H.R.4837 cosponsorship, please email Georgios Karides at georgios.karides@mail.house.gov.
For S.3314 cosponsorship, please email Julian Tucker at julian_tucker@sheehy.senate.gov.