

Three topics this year address the currently serving, veterans and recent retirees, Guard and Reserves, and their families.

**Topic #1: Toxic Exposure – TEAM Act** (Toxic Exposure in the American Military)

When most people hear about toxic exposure, they think of Agent Orange and Vietnam. The problem extends to those in uniform today. One of the more recent and impactful examples are from burn pits in Afghanistan and Iraq. Additionally, there are exposure risks from fire-fighting chemicals and contaminated drinking water to name a few. We seek the basics: expanded health care for those who were exposed, the creation of an advisory council, and to reauthorize the Agent Orange authorities which expired in 2015. This issue hits more than the servicemembers – it is a direct impact to the families who are or will be the caregivers.

**Topic # 2: TRICARE Young Adult (TYA)**

Military kids face unique challenges – the average military kid will move six to nine times during their school years and experience repeated family separations. Yet, current law leaves military kids transitioning to adulthood without the same health care protections afforded to families with commercial plans. Ensuring health care access and affordability is particularly important during the current pandemic. As COVID-19 impacts higher education pathways and makes it more difficult for young adults to find jobs, we must ensure military families who have sacrificed so much in support of our nation have the same health care protections for their young adult children as their civilian counterparts covered by commercial plans. H.R. 475, *The Health Care Fairness for Military Families Act of 2021* addresses this inequity and supports our military families.

**Topic #3: Basic Needs Allowance**

This allowance helps our most vulnerable servicemembers that face food insecurity—mostly junior enlisted military families. An automatic subsistence allowance for servicemembers whose gross household income (not including BAH) is below 130% of the federal poverty line is needed. This recurring struggle is exacerbated by COVID-19 layoffs which impacted spouses' contribution to the household income. While a small number of servicemembers qualify for SNAP, there are many military families that do not qualify for the program as BAH is considered income; so, they turn to food pantries instead. Armed Forces YMCA reported a 400% increase in grocery demand at their food pantries on and near military installations during the pandemic. Commanders in the field will appreciate these efforts to take care of their troops.

**Planning and preparation**

While we work on the point papers and supporting materials, you can engage your chapter members to assess interest in participating, and verify you will have coverage for the all members of congress in your area (state and/or districts). We will provide updates along the way via the MOAA Newsletter or emails. You will have all the information you need by April to start making appointments throughout the month of May.