

How Indiana state can better care for vets

Indiana can take several legislative and policy actions through the State House to improve care for veterans. These actions can target healthcare, housing, employment, education, mental health, and benefits access. Hoosiers pride themselves on the love and respect we have for the vets of this country, while our legislators take them for granted and use them as political pawns. Unfortunately, we can't help every vet, but we can focus on helping those in our state's borders. Some of the ways we can show our respect for vets are,

## Expand Access to Healthcare and Mental Health Services

Indiana's 380,000+ veterans face persistent gaps in healthcare access, housing stability, employment transitions, and benefits navigation. The Indiana Veterans First plan is a modular package of eight bill ideas designed for introduction upon my first 30 days in office to close those gaps through targeted investments, streamlined administration, and outcome-based accountability. The package emphasizes rural access, suicide prevention, credential recognition, and whole-family supports for spouses and dependent

### **Increase Funding for VA Clinics & Telehealth**

Partner with federal VA programs and allocate state funds to open more community-based outpatient clinics and expand telehealth for rural veterans.

To give better access and better quality of care we can implement comprehensive Veteran Care Access Guarantee programs. State-contracted network must offer an intake appointment within 14 days and ongoing care within 30 days of request. Contracts include liquidated damages for non-compliance.

We also need to implement Telehealth Infrastructure Grants to ensure the viability of these crucial outlets for veteran mental and physical health. \$25M/year competitive grants to FQHCs, rural health clinics, and nonprofit providers for tele-mental health buildout (equipment, privacy pods, broadband last-mile vouchers for veteran households).

### **Mandatory Mental Health Support**

Create a statewide program that guarantees counseling and PTSD treatment within 30 days of request.

We also have to be able to meet the vets where they are with actual professionals who will provide hands-on help in an emergency. This can be done with 988 Veterans Routing & Mobile Response. This will Fund 24/7 veteran-trained call takers within Indiana's 988 system and pilot mobile crisis teams with peer specialists in 10 regions, and if successful expand to more regions for quicker access and response times.

#### **Integrate State & Federal Care**

Streamline referrals between state programs and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for continuity of care.

## Address Veteran Homelessness

#### **Housing Vouchers & Rapid Rehousing**

Expand Indiana's share of HUD-VASH programs and provide supplemental state-funded housing vouchers.

While I do have a housing plan for the whole of Indiana I do believe there should be an additional route for the homeless vets of this country as a way to show appreciation by getting them off the streets. This can be done with State VASH-Supplement Vouchers: \$20M/year to supplement federal HUD-VASH, covering security deposits, arrears, and local rent gaps.

#### **Veteran-Friendly Housing Development**

Offer tax incentives for developers to build affordable housing for veterans and their families.

Incentives for Veteran-Friendly Units: State LIHTC/QAP adders and property tax abatements for developments reserving  $\geq 10\%$  of units for veterans at  $\leq 60\%$  AMI.

#### **Transitional Housing & Support Services**

Create state-run or nonprofit-partnered transitional housing with wraparound services like job training and addiction recovery.

## Employment & Job Training

#### **Veteran Hiring Preferences**

Strengthen state laws requiring preference for veterans in public sector jobs.

Public Sector Veteran Preference Modernization would standardize a 10-point preference and interview guarantee for qualified veterans/spouses for state employment.

### **Credential Recognition**

Fast-track recognition of military experience for licenses (e.g., EMT, CDL, skilled trades).

Fast-Track Timelines with 15-day provisional license if the board fails to act within 30 days for eligible applicants.

If we implement a Universal Credit Crosswalk it would require all licensing boards to publish mappings from MOS/ratings to license requirements with automatic credit and provisional licensure where safe.

### **Apprenticeships & Skill Training**

Fund programs for veterans to transition into tech, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing roles.

Apprenticeships & OJT Grants will also help by distributing \$12M/year for employers/union JATCs to place veterans/spouses in paid apprenticeships (healthcare, advanced manufacturing, CDL/EV fleet, IT/cyber, utilities).

## **Expand Education Benefits**

### **Full Tuition Waivers**

Extend Indiana's tuition waiver programs to cover more dependents of disabled or deceased veterans.

### **Support for Non-Traditional Students**

Provide flexible schedules, online classes, and childcare assistance for veterans attending college.

Campus Veteran Success Centers will be crucial for veteran students by investing \$10M/year to fund advisors, tutoring, childcare slots, and mental health counselors at campuses enrolling  $\geq 200$  veterans

Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) Standardization statewide rubric requiring 45+ credits accepted for certain military training pathways where appropriate.

### **GI Bill Gap Coverage**

Offer state grants to cover costs not paid by federal GI Bill benefits.

Last-Dollar Scholarships will cover mandatory fees, books, and remaining tuition after federal benefits for veterans and eligible dependents at public institutions.

Completion Grants will help by distributing \$1,000 micro-grants for students within 30 credits of completion who encounter financial emergencies.

## Improve Access to State Benefits

### **Veteran Resource Navigator Program**

Establish regional navigators who help veterans access benefits (state and federal), housing, and health services.

Unified Portal Consolidate state veteran services (IDVA, DWD, IHCDA, CHE, DMHA) into a single sign-on with application prefill and status tracking.

Regional Navigators Fund 92 county-aligned navigators plus 16 regional leads housed in trusted community organizations.

### **Centralized Digital Portal**

Create an integrated, user-friendly portal for all veteran services in Indiana.

This would all be done under a one stop navigation app similar to the cbp one apps intent of providing a easy to use all in one place portal with live humans behind the screens to offer immediate assistance.

### **Outreach in Rural Areas**

Deploy mobile benefit units to underserved counties.

Rural Outreach Fleet 20 mobile units to deliver benefits intake, telehealth pods, and legal clinics to rural towns and tribal communities

## Mental Health Crisis & Suicide Prevention

### **24/7 Veteran Crisis Line Integration**

Expand Indiana's 988 hotline to have veteran-specific operators.

### **Peer Support Programs**

Fund veteran-to-veteran counseling networks statewide.

### **Mandatory Suicide Prevention Training**

Require training for state employees working with veterans.

## Legal and Justice Support

### **Veterans Treatment Courts**

Expand these courts to all Indiana counties for nonviolent offenders with service-related conditions.

**Debt Relief Assistance**

Provide financial counseling and relief programs for veterans struggling post-service.

## Strengthen Oversight & Accountability

**Annual State Veteran Care Report**

Mandate a public report on veteran homelessness, unemployment, mental health, and benefits access.

**Veterans Affairs Oversight Committee**

Create a bipartisan legislative committee dedicated to monitoring Indiana veteran programs.