



April 5, 2017

The Honorable Brad Wenstrup
Chairman
Subcommittee on Health
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
337 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Wenstrup:

We write in support of H.R. 1662, which would make facilities of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) smoke-free. Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death in the United States and exposure to secondhand smoke has a significant impact on Americans' health.

The Surgeon General has determined there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke, and sick and disabled veterans should not be subjected to secondhand smoke in order to receive medical care. As a nation, we must do more to improve and protect the health of our veterans. Providing a smoke-free VHA system for our veterans is an important step in the right direction.

Cigarette smoke contains more than 7,000 chemicals and compounds. Hundreds are toxic and at least 69 cause cancer. A December 2016 U.S. Surgeon General report found that "e-cigarette aerosol is not harmless and can contain harmful and potentially harmful constituents, including nicotine." The only effective way to protect people from secondhand smoke is to provide 100 percent smoke-free air. Designated smoking rooms, expensive ventilation systems and similar partial approaches do not protect people from the dangers of secondhand smoke.

People with heart and lung disease are at higher risk for health complications if they are exposed to secondhand smoke. According to a 2015 health survey of veteran enrollees' health, of the 5.7 million users of VHA services in 2014, 5.2 percent, or nearly 300,000, had COPD; 25.5 percent, or nearly 1.5 million, had hypertension; and 7.7 percent, or nearly 439,000, had coronary artery disease. These former service members will benefit more than most as a result of your bill.

Our organizations are pleased that your bill's definition of 'smoke' includes the smoking of cigarettes, e-cigarettes, cigars, pipes, and any other combustible tobacco products. While we are strongly supportive of your proposal to make VHA facilities smoke-free, we encourage you to consider expanding the legislation to prohibit smokeless tobacco products. Many hospitals go tobacco-free in recognition that tobacco use harms health and to create an environment supportive of quitting tobacco. In addition, we are concerned about the lengthy five year

implementation date regarding the smoke-free outdoors policy at VHA facilities, and we urge you to consider a quicker implementation date.

We look forward to working with you to enact H.R. 1662 into law, and we look forward to the improved health that veterans will enjoy as a result of this legislation.

Sincerely,

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
American Heart Association
American Lung Association
American Thoracic Society
Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids