



Legislative Agenda and Primary Issues For 2007 – 2008

VA nurses' primary concern is adequate resources to provide care:

1. **Budget:** The 2006 membership survey identified patient safety as the legislative issue most important to NOVA members, followed by concerns regarding the VA budget.

Specific issues are:

- Adequate budget for VHA
- Pay comparable to private sector: Specific issues of concern are:
 - Pay cap for Nurse V RNs needs to be revised to be equitable to GS 15
 - Consistency of data collection process among medical centers
- Nursing shortage – recruitment and retention of staff. Specific issues are:
 - Need direct hire authority for nursing assistants
 - Need to eliminate the disparity in the cost of health care benefits for part time employees. The current system results in a significant financial penalty for working 3-4 days per week with the cost of health care benefits exceeding that of the nurse that works 1-2 days per week.
 - Restore the Health Professional Scholarship Program (38 USC Chapter 76 – Health Professionals Educational Assistance Program, Subchapter II – Scholarship Program)
 - Restructure pay grades for RNs from the current 5 grade system to a 7 grade system. This would eliminate the current compression of 3 grades in Nurse I.
 - Revise current legislation governing employee travel pay to allow implementation of a VA Travel Nurse Corps.

NOVA supports the 2008 Independent Budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

This includes the following VHA critical issues:

- Recommended appropriation of \$36.3 billion to include enrollment for Priority 8 Veterans
- Reform VA funding from discretionary to full mandatory or a combination of discretionary and mandatory
- Funding for 4 emergency centers to fulfill VA's 4th mission of homeland security
- Funding of CARES initiatives to include Long Term Care and Mental Health
- Seamless Department of Defense to VA transition for servicemen and women separating from active duty
- Funding to support accountability for performance standards

2. **OIF/OEF Veterans:** As of August 2006 there were 589,000 OIF/OEF veterans who are eligible for VA health care, and 31 percent (184,000) of these individuals have sought some level of care. VA nurses are very concerned that the current budget does not and will not provide adequate resources to provide care for these veterans. Of particular and specific concern is provision of mental health services and continued rehabilitation services.