

Lawmakers: Connecticut must assure all veterans have all basic health care

By [Rep. Jaime Foster](#) | Rep. Jaime Foster, D-Ellington, East Windsor, Vernon is former House Vice Chair of the Energy and Technology Committee, [Rep. Chris Poulos](#), [Sen. Paul Honig](#) and [Sen. Jeff Gordon](#)

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Dennis Taricani, DAV Hardware City Chapter 8, Commander salutes the flag during the National Anthem during the Veterans Day Ceremony at Central Park in New Britain on Monday, Nov. 11, 2024. (Aaron Flaum/ Hartford Courant)

Across Connecticut, we regularly meet with veterans, clinicians, hospitals,

and community partners who share a simple conviction: When someone has served our country, we have a responsibility to ensure they can live with dignity, health, and stability when they return home.

That is why we have been working together to advance a plan to expand access to dental care for Connecticut's veterans.

Routine dental care is often not covered through the federal VA system. In most cases, veterans must have a 100-percent, service-connected disability or a specific dental condition tied directly to their service to qualify for comprehensive dental benefits. As a result, thousands of veterans who honorably served our nation still struggle to access even basic preventative care or care programs offered through the federal VA.

Dental care is not cosmetic; oral health is closely tied to overall health. Untreated dental disease can lead to infection, chronic pain, difficulty eating, lost work productivity, and costly emergency department visits. Research has also linked poor oral health with serious conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes complications, and stroke.

For veterans living on fixed incomes or transitioning back to civilian life, untreated dental issues can affect employability, nutrition, and quality of life. Too often, veterans must choose between dental care and other essential needs.

Connecticut has the opportunity to address this gap.

The legislation, HB 5413, would establish a Veterans Dental Care Access Program, designed to help veterans who do not qualify for federal dental benefits. The program would focus on preventive services and essential treatment, while leveraging partnerships with nonprofit dental outreach programs, community health centers, volunteer clinicians, dental schools, and private providers across the state.

Connecticut already has much of the infrastructure needed to make this work. Our state's dental community, hospitals, nonprofit providers, and veterans' advocates have demonstrated a strong willingness to collaborate to ensure that veterans receive the care they deserve. Funding for emergency dental service already covered by the currently undersubscribed and well-funded [Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines fund](#).

Throughout this process, we have been encouraged by the broad support from across the health care community and veteran service organizations. Even beyond this legislation, providers and advocates have stepped forward with ideas and partnerships aimed at expanding access to care.

That spirit of collaboration matters. Expanding veterans' dental care should not be a partisan issue or a sector-specific issue. It is about honoring service and ensuring that those who protected our nation are not left without basic health care once they return home.

We have been honored to have the opportunity to work with these impassioned advocates on addressing these needs. We are optimistic for broad legislative support and urge the community to reach out to your legislators in support of HB 5413.

Rep. Jaime Foster, D-57; Sen. Paul Honig, D-8; Sen. Jeff Gordon, R-35; and Rep. Chris Poulos, D-81. All serve on the Veterans' and Military Affairs Committee.