



THE AMERICAN LEGION
Veterans Strengthening America



THE AMERICAN LEGION
BUDDY CHECK
PROGRAM

*A Toolkit to Offer Assistance,
Camaraderie for Veterans and their Families*



THE AMERICAN LEGION BUDDY CHECK PROGRAM

WHEREAS, At its core, The American Legion is an organization by, for, and about veterans of our United States ...

Veterans and their families need to know they are not alone.

They may be isolated from society due to public health concerns or other conditions. They may be struggling with disability, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, inclement weather or simple loneliness.

A job may have been lost.

A loved one may have recently passed.

Someone might be trying to take advantage of them financially.

It could just be they simply need to hear a friendly voice on the phone or a knock at the door.

WHEREAS, Serving those who serve is an honor and distinction not unique to The American Legion, but one Legionnaires should endeavor to serve as an example for all Americans ...

The American Legion Buddy Check program became a national initiative in March 2019.

Then-National Commander Brett Reistad called on departments, posts and members to conduct what he called a nationwide "comradeship campaign." Less than two months later, The American Legion National Executive Committee passed a resolution

encouraging the program and calling on posts to document their activities in the annual Consolidated Post Report.

By that time, American Legion departments and posts were building and mobilizing teams, using lists of local veterans from MyLegion.org and making calls in their communities.

WHEREAS, Our most sacred responsibility is to care for our fellow men and women who served this nation with honor ...

The May 2019 American Legion national resolution had called for designating mid-March and Veterans Week in November as periods for concentrated American Legion Buddy Checks. The same month that resolution passed, U.S. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, D-Texas, introduced a bill calling on VA to launch a Buddy Check program for at least one week per year "for the purpose of outreach and education concerning peer wellness checks for veterans and other purposes."

Former members were happy to hear from their friends and comrades.

"We learned of members who were in poor health, needed assistance with VA benefits, and wanted to attend meetings but had no means of transportation, and were home bound and lonely and could use a visit/camaraderie," explained Somers, Conn., Post 101 Public Affairs Director Sherri Marquis soon after the program launched in 2019. "There is nothing much better than connecting with others and letting them know that you care."

WHEREAS, Legionnaires are naturally inclined, through demonstrated commitment to serve something greater than self, to extend hearts and hands to others ...

Then, COVID-19 happened.

The global pandemic made Buddy Checks more urgent than ever.

Just days following that declaration in March 2020, The American Legion was on the phone, sending e-mails and text messages across the country and beyond.

"One 84-year-old Legion member told us that he was having a difficult time getting to the grocery store," said Len Crosby, finance and legislative officer for American Legion Post 154 in Rathdrum, Idaho. "We arranged for other Legion members to pick up a shopping list, do his shopping and return the groceries to his home. Additionally, our Legion has offered this service for both groceries and medications to other members and have also offered rides to medical appointments, if that was needed."

WHEREAS, Our duty is to consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness ...

As the pandemic progressed, American Legion Family Buddy Check teams were working on regular and often continuous schedules, reaching out to veterans in need and helping them. They were not waiting for a dedicated week in November or March.

WHEREAS, Only with servant leadership and direct contact can we uncover needs and priorities of our warriors and avert any crisis ...

"The importance of checking in hasn't been lost on our members," Weehawken, N.J., Post 18 Commander Chris Page said as he and his fellow veterans were making Buddy Checks daily in May through phone calls, emails, text messages and socially distanced visits. "We'll all be up in age one day, and all of us find comfort in knowing that someone will be calling us, checking in on us then."

Post service officers became involved, to see if veterans needed referrals to VA services or accredited American Legion claims experts. Some posts themed their programs to focus on World War II and Korean War veterans in certain Buddy Check call sessions, younger veterans, caregivers and military families in others.

Buddy Checks became monthly, weekly and even daily for some posts and members.

One Pennsylvania Legionnaire, Leroy Lippi Jr., completed 438 Buddy Checks in less than one month after the pandemic was declared. His post commander, Rod O'Connor, recorded 162 in that time.

WHEREAS, Legionnaires shall conduct veteran outreach as part of their daily routine ...

The American Legion's annual Consolidated Post Report data arrived June 30, 2020, and 3,683 Buddy Check activities were recorded.

In September 2020, U.S. Sen. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa, introduced a Senate companion to the May 2019 Buddy Check Week bill, and The American Legion worked to push the legislation to a vote before the end of the 116th Congress.

WHEREAS, Legionnaires at all levels join together at least twice per year to contact all members both active and expired with a health and welfare check to be known as "Buddy Check" ...

As the general election neared, and restrictions were placed on voters at polling places, American Legion Family members called on veterans to help them understand the changed processes.

In the winter months, the focus shifted to mental health and well-being. The pandemic had revealed a spike in crisis calls and mental health inquiries from veterans.

WHEREAS, "Buddy Check" is not a membership drive or attempt to solicit participation in, or donations for, American Legion programs, it is solely a health and welfare check or offer of assistance ...

The program was successful in its first year and potentially life-saving in 2020.

In 2021, the American Legion Family's Buddy Check program enters a new era, propelled by two years of success. The following guidance is offered to help post teams conduct the program and continue serving veterans and their families.

BUDDY CHECK: THE AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY'S NATIONAL OUTREACH PROGRAM

As Legionnaires, our most sacred responsibility is to look out for each other and our fellow veterans. The American Legion National Executive Committee passed Resolution 18 during Spring Meetings in May 2019. The resolution called for “Buddy Checks” to be conducted Legion-wide during the weeks of The American Legion’s birthday, March 15, and Veterans Day. The success of the “Buddy Check” program exceeded expectations and proved to be a valuable year-round method to provide assistance and resources for veterans in need. Participation in the program was remarkable, and the results helped confirm that The American Legion is in an ideal position to fill the critical gap between separation from military service and where they

seek the needed treatment from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Veterans today face the existential crisis of finding new purpose after transition, and coping with post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury and other social, economic, mental or physical stressors. This critical time in a veteran’s life is when they are most vulnerable to suicide or other self-harm and The American Legion seeks to be a partner with the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs to preserve and protect the lives of our veterans. Suicide awareness and prevention is the most consequential responsibility of our generation of Legionnaires, and the “Buddy Check” is just one of the many ways we hope to address the crisis.