

## STS Headquarters

633 N Saint Clair St, Suite 2100  
Chicago, IL 60611-3658  
312-202-5800  
sts@sts.org



## Washington Office

20 F St NW, Suite 310 C  
Washington, DC 20001-6702  
202-787-1230  
advocacy@sts.org

---

### Ask: Cosponsor the “Prohibit Smoking in VA Facilities Act”

*The “Prohibit Smoking in VA Facilities Act” (not yet introduced) would ban smoking in and around Veteran Health Administration (VHA) facilities by October 2019.*

#### **What Does the Bill Do?**

This bill bans smoking areas at VHA facilities. The Veterans Health Care Act of 1992 required the VHA to create designated areas for smoking. In June 2019, the Veterans Administration (VA) issued a directive that will ban smoking in and around VHA facilities. However, without codifying this ban within statute, there is a risk that smoking may be reinstated at VHA facilities in the future. Exposure to secondhand smoke puts patient’s health at risk. Banning smoking at these facilities would create a healthier environment and bring the VA’s policies into line with the private sector.

#### **Why Do We Need the Bill?**

Currently, there are 971 outdoor and 15 indoor spaces for smoking at VHA facilities. The VHA has written about the harmful effects of secondhand smoke including increasing epidemiological evidence that laws to enforce smoke-free worksites and public places are associated with a reduced incidence of admissions for heart attacks.

Previous Surgeons General determined that there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. People with heart and lung disease are at higher risk for health complications when exposed to secondhand smoke.

Veterans are 25% more likely to be diagnosed with lung cancer than civilians. Besides lung cancer, many veterans suffer from Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), hypertension, and coronary artery disease (CAD), all of which are exacerbated by secondhand smoke. 300,000 veterans have COPD; 1.5 million have hypertension; and 439,000 have CAD. COPD is the fourth most common diagnosis among hospitalized veterans, and veterans are four times more likely than civilians to have COPD.

Currently, smoking is prohibited at non-VA federal facilities, indoor military facilities, and in most private-sector national healthcare systems. Over 3,940 private and state hospitals and four national health care systems have a 100 percent smoke-free grounds policy.

Smoking areas at VHA facilities put veterans at increased risk of exposure to second-hand smoke, and could be viewed as an endorsement of smoking. It is time to protect those who protect us by ensuring the ban on smoking is included in the statute to ensure the ban on smoking is made permanent.