



H. James Gooden
Chair

October 4, 2010

Albert A. Rizzo, MD
Chair-Elect

The Honorable Cliff Stearns
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Mary H. Partridge
Past-Chair

Dear Representative Stearns:

Christine L. Bryant
Secretary/Treasurer

The American Lung Association is pleased to support H.R. 5596, legislation to improve the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of veterans with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease takes a tremendous human and financial toll on the Department of Veterans Affairs. An estimated 8 percent of veterans in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Health Care System have been diagnosed with COPD. COPD ranks as the fourth most common reason for hospitalization in the VA patient population. It is the fourth most common cause of death in the United States, and it is projected to become the third leading cause of mortality by 2020.

Ross P. Lanzafame, Esq
Speaker
Nationwide Assembly

Geri Reinardy, MPA
Speaker-Elect
Nationwide Assembly

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

Charles D. Connor
President &
Chief Executive Officer

H.R. 5996 will require the development of treatment protocols and related tools for the prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and management of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. The legislation also will bolster biomedical and prosthetic research programs regarding this disease. These steps are urgently needed to help improve patient outcomes.

1301 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Suite 800
Washington, DC 20004-1725
Phone: (202) 785-3355
Fax: (202) 452-1805

Between 80 and 90 percent of all COPD cases are caused by smoking. The best way to prevent COPD and many diseases the VA healthcare system manages is to quit smoking or not to smoke in the first place. H.R. 5996 will help address this by directing the VA, in conjunction with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to develop improved techniques and best practices for assisting veterans with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease in successfully quitting smoking.

14 Wall Street, Suite 8C
New York, NY 10005
Phone: (212) 315-8700
Fax: (212) 315-8800

www.LungUSA.org

According to the *2008 Study of Veteran Enrollees' Health and Reliance Upon VA*, over 70 percent of VA enrollees report that they have smoked at one time in their lives. Currently 19.7 percent smoke. This is down from 22.2 percent in 2005 and 21.5 percent in 2007 and shows some important momentum in the right direction. Among the 70 percent of the VA population who has ever smoked, over twenty five percent (25.5) say they've recently quit smoking, again, a step in the right direction.

Sadly, the VA will continue to battle this problem for some time to come. The current smoking rate for active duty military is 30.4 percent, with smoking rates highest among personnel ages 18 to 25 – especially among soldiers and Marines. The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that more than 50 percent of all active duty personnel stationed in Iraq smoke.

H.R. 5596 is an important step to address COPD and the toll of tobacco on our nation's veterans. We look forward to working with you to pass this lifesaving legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "C. Connor".

Charles D. Connor
President and CEO

cc. The Honorable John Lewis