



THE AMERICAN LEGION
Veterans Strengthening America



THE AMERICAN LEGION
BUDDY CHECK
PROGRAM

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



Preamble

to The American Legion Constitution

FOR GOD AND COUNTRY, WE ASSOCIATE OURSELVES TOGETHER FOR THE FOLLOWING PURPOSES:

To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America;

to maintain law and order;

to foster and perpetuate a 100-percent Americanism;

to preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in all wars;

to inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation;

to combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses;

to make right the master of might;

to promote peace and good will on earth;

to safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy;

to consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness."



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.

HOW DO I ORGANIZE A BUDDY CHECK?

Gather up a team to call or, if possible, personally visit members and former members of The American Legion and other veterans in your community. If each member in a team of 10 calls just 10 Legionnaires or veterans, 100 veterans can be reached in one sitting.

Use MyLegion.org to get contact information. The American Legion is currently limited in the amount of veteran information that can be attained without the aid of VA, but rolls of members and former members available on MyLegion.org can always produce names and referrals to other veterans. Most posts have rosters of current and expired members at their fingertips. If posts can legally obtain other veteran names, they are urged to do so.

Save the file of members, and those whose memberships have expired, onto a spreadsheet or copy and paste into a Word file to distribute among Buddy Check team members. **Print several copies of the lists.**

Divide up the call list among your team members. Some may have personal connections with members or former members and would be best suited to make that particular Buddy Check.

Make a list of local resources that includes services like financial aid, employment opportunities, veterans services, home and auto repair, caregiver



services, transportation services and any other known benevolent resources for veterans and their families. Having these resources at your fingertips will give the caller confidence to address the needs of veterans, whatever they may be.

Start calling, either from a quiet place inside the post home or from your own residence – to see how members and former members are doing. Ask if they need anything, and invite them to any post event or activity coming up on the calendar.

Use the spreadsheet to record Buddy Check calls, and identify those who haven't been members for several years.

If you are making it a group effort, where many members of a Buddy Check team are calling on a particular night or time,

invite the local media to show The American Legion reaching out to veterans and their families in the community. This not only shows The American Legion in a positive light; it also spreads awareness of the Buddy Check program for those in need or wishing to assist.

Make sure you **thank the member or former member** in the beginning and end of your call.

If the member or former member wishes to renew, be sure to **have your post's payment procedure at your fingertips,** the address to send a check or offer to stop by in person to pick up the dues, which is another opportunity to connect.

Leave contact information in case the member or former member can't take the call or needs anything in the future.

AMERICAN LEGION BUDDY CHECK SAMPLE SCRIPTS

The following scripts can help you and your American Legion Family team make Buddy Checks on members and former members. Use these, modify them, or draft your own before reaching out.

Remember, the most important part of the call is to see if the veteran and family are OK, if the Legion can assist and to invite them to events or activities that may be of interest.

FOR MEMBERS and FORMER MEMBERS:

Hi, [MEMBER'S NAME]. This is [YOUR NAME] from your American Legion Post [XYZ]. I want to thank you for your service to this great nation and your [PAST/CURRENT] membership in the organization ... also to see how things are going for you and your family.

The American Legion is doing its part to help the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs provide information and resources, as well as a welcoming environment to all veterans.

I'm calling to see if there is anything that your American Legion Family can assist you or your family with, or if there are any resources that I may be able to help you with?

Remember, your fellow Legionnaires are always here for you.

And I also wanted to let you know that we're getting ready for our [NAME OF EVENT] event [DATE/EVENT] and want to invite you and your family to celebrate with us.

Thanks again for your service.

If you need anything, call me anytime at [PHONE NUMBER] or email me at [EMAIL ADDRESS]

If you know of any other veteran in need, please let me know!

Let's stay in touch!

FOR NON-MEMBER VETERANS:

Hi, [Veteran's NAME]. This is [YOUR NAME] from your American Legion Post [XYZ].

I'm calling to see if there is anything that your American Legion Family can assist you or your family with. The American Legion is joining forces with the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide information and resources, as well as a welcoming environment to all veterans.

Remember, your fellow veterans are always here for you.

Less than 1% of all Americans will ever serve in the United States Armed Forces, so we veterans understand each other's needs perhaps better than anyone else.

I may be able to direct you to resources that aid in critical matters such as health care, counseling, financial assistance and VA claims if you need them.

It is my honor to continue serving this nation by serving those who served, so if you ever need anything from The American Legion, do not hesitate to ask. We may not personally be able to solve your problem, but we can get you to the right resources.

Thanks again for your service.

If you need anything, call me anytime at [PHONE NUMBER] or email me at [EMAIL ADDRESS]

Let's stay in touch!

SAMPLE SCRIPTS FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

When sharing information about the Veterans Crisis Line, it should be relayed sensitively. You are spreading the word that free, confidential help is available and not suggesting the person you are talking with is the one who needs the help. Remember, the most important part of the call is to see if the veteran and family are OK and if The American Legion Family can assist them in any way.

MEMBER:

Hi, [MEMBER'S NAME]. This is [YOUR NAME] from your American Legion Post [XYZ]. I want to thank you for your membership and to check in on you and your family.

During these trying times, I'm calling to see if there is anything that your American Legion post can do to assist you or your family. Remember, your fellow Legionnaires are always here for you. If you, or a member of your family, need anything, please let me know and I will do my best to help.

The other reason I am calling is to enlist your support in helping The American Legion spread the word about the Veterans Crisis Line. The number is 1-800-273-8255 and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Veterans Crisis Line is a free, anonymous, confidential resource that's available to any veteran, even if they are not registered with VA or enrolled in VA health care. Please help us get the word out.

Thanks again for your service and know that you can call me any time at **[PHONE NUMBER]** or email me at **[EMAIL ADDRESS]**.

Let's stay in touch.

VETERAN / NON-MEMBER:

Hi, **[NAME]**. This is **[YOUR NAME]** from American Legion Post **[XYZ]**. I am calling to check in on you and your family.

I'm calling to see if there is anything that American Legion Post **[XYZ]** can assist you or your family with, as we all have been going through some trying times.

I am also calling to enlist your support in helping The American Legion spread the word about the Veterans Crisis Line. The number is 1-800-273-8255 and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Veterans Crisis Line is a free, anonymous, confidential resource that's available to any veteran, even if they are not registered with VA or enrolled in VA health care. Please help us get the word out.

Thank you for your service and know that you can call me anytime at **[PHONE NUMBER]** or email me at **[EMAIL ADDRESS]**.

Let's stay in touch.

IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT A VETERAN'S WELL-BEING:

Here are some sample talking points you can work into a conversation with a fellow veteran you are concerned about.

Sample 1:

It's good to talk with you. These past few months have been challenging for me, and I doubt that I'm alone in feeling this way. I was talking with a friend at my post who shared information about the Veterans Crisis Line. It's a really great resource that anyone can call. It's free, confidential and operated 24/7. I'm calling all my friends to make sure they know about this resource.

Can I give you the number? Thinking it's best for us veterans to stick together and want to be sure you have it in case someone you know might want to talk with them. It's 1-800-273-8255. When it picks up you just press the number one.

Sample 2:

Have you heard about the Veterans Crisis Line? It's a toll-free, confidential resource that connects veterans in crisis and their families and friends with qualified, caring VA responders. I'm telling all my veteran friends about it because I know it's a difficult time and we need to look out for each other. It can't hurt to spread the word that help is available and just one phone call away.

Can I give you the number? Thinking it's best for us vets to stick together and want to be sure you have it in case someone you know might want to talk with them. It's 1-800-273-8255. When it picks up you just press the number one.

Sample 3:

It's been good to talk with you. I have just one more thing to share. It's sad news but the loss of veteran and active duty lives to suicide has been on the rise in recent months. As a Legionnaire, I take pride in knowing that we are veterans serving veterans so I'm trying to spread the word that help is just a phone call away. There's a Veterans Crisis Line that you can call even if you're not registered with VA or enrolled in VA health care.

Can I give you the number? Thinking it's best for us veterans to stick together and want to be sure you have it in case someone you know might want to talk with them. It's 1-800-273-8255. When it picks up you just press the number one.

QUICK ANSWERS TO WHAT THE LEGION DOES

NATIONAL

- 1. Stands as the nation's largest and most prominent voice for effective VA health care and disability benefits, GI Bill education and career opportunities.** More than 3,600 American Legion service officers are handling over 700,000 veterans' cases at any one time, across the country and around the world. No other organization provides as much free service for veterans and their families.
- 2. Mentors thousands of children and youth** through healthy, educational, competitive and patriotic programs, including Boys Nation, Oratorical Competition, American Legion Baseball, Junior Shooting Sports, flag education, Scouting, Junior ROTC and more.
- 3. Supports our nation's troops and a strong Department of Defense** through innumerable programs and services for active-duty, National Guard and Reserve components, as well as resources for military families and advocacy for military retirees.

DEPARTMENT

1. What the Department does in support of veterans

2. What the Department does in support of children and youth

3. What the Department does in support of troops/national security

POST

1. What the Post does in support of veterans

2. What the Post does in support of children and youth

3. What the Post does in support of troops/national security
