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Release Date: July 11, 2025

Recreational and Creative Arts Therapy Positions at the Department of Veterans Affairs Exempted from Federal Hiring Freeze: A Major Advocacy Win

[Washington, D.C.] — In a significant victory for veterans and the professionals who serve them, **Recreational and Creative Arts Therapy positions within the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)** have been officially **added to the VA's Approved Exempt from Hiring Freeze List**. This inclusion ensures that critical therapy services will continue uninterrupted for veterans nationwide.

This accomplishment is the direct result of sustained and collaborative advocacy efforts led by ATRA and other national organizations, as well as passionate individuals across the country. Recreational therapists, creative arts therapists, veterans' service organizations, and other stakeholders united to make their voices heard. "This is an incredible win not only for our profession, but more importantly for the veterans we serve," said Dr. Dawn DeVries, ATRA's Advocacy and Legislative Affairs Director. "It shows the power of coming together to advocate around important issues related to the essential role therapy services play in the health and recovery of our nation's veterans."

A Coordinated, Nationwide Advocacy Effort

ATRA advocate for the recognition and support of recreational therapy as a key healthcare service within the VA. This success followed a robust series of actions, including:

- **Coalition Leadership:** Spearheaded collaboration among national organizations, led by ATRA and including the American Music Therapy Association and American Art Therapy Association, and others to form a united advocacy front.

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ATRA Board of Directors: Tameka Battle, President; Nancy Nisbett, President-Elect; Jennifer Hinton, Immediate Past-President; Amina Abdallah, Treasurer; Deborah Tysor, Secretary; Members at Large: Ashley Bowen, Jasmine Edwards, Kevin Enright, Lilli Higgins, Chelsea Farrington, LeAnn Wheeler



- **Grassroots Mobilization:** Launched a nationwide legislative contact campaign complete with action alerts and talking points to mobilize recreational therapists, veterans, and other supporters.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** Worked closely with **Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA)** to share stories, data, and support for Capitol Hill advocacy.
- **Legislative Engagement:** Sent letters and engaged directly with Congressional members and key committees, highlighting the proven outcomes of recreational therapy (RT) and its impact on veteran health.
- **Town Hall & Communications:** Hosted a virtual town hall meeting for VA recreational therapists, providing information, encouragement, and clarity throughout the process.
- **Media & Public Awareness:** Participated in national media interviews with **This American Life** and the **Wall Street Journal**, elevating the importance of RT to broader audiences.
- **Leadership Advocacy:** Held conversations with VA leadership and formally requested a meeting with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to discuss long-term support for these services.

A Win for Veterans

Recreational and creative arts therapies are vital components of rehabilitative care for veterans coping with PTSD, spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injuries, amputations, and other physical and mental health challenges. The continuation of hiring for these positions ensures that veterans receive comprehensive, evidence-based care that supports their recovery and reintegration.

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