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MEDIA CONTACT:
Jennifer Rate
Marketing and Communications Manager
(813) 400-2394
jrate@aakp.org

NATION'S LARGEST KIDNEY PATIENT GROUP HONORS VETERANS

Watch AAKP Discussion with VA Dr. Paul Palevsky

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The American Association of Kidney Patients (AAKP), the oldest and largest independent kidney patient organization, honors Veterans Day 2021 and National Veterans and Military Families Month by renewing its pledge to expand grassroots efforts in support of greater funding for kidney disease research and policies that accelerate innovations and access to new kidney diagnostics, biologics, and devices for the nation's veterans. AAKP is staunchly committed to making veterans' voices heard in all national kidney care discussions and defends choice and access to the care veterans have earned and are legally entitled to at the VA and elsewhere.

AAKP launched new research and advocacy capacities targeted toward the veteran community in 2017 with the launch of its [Veterans Health Initiative](#) (VHI), which was announced at the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs' 2017 Kidney Innovation Summit. Through the [AAKP Veterans Health Initiative](#), based within the AAKP Center for Patient Engagement and Advocacy, the VHI monitors and advances policies aimed at safeguarding the highest standards in kidney care, treatment, and consumer care choice for veterans managing kidney diseases both inside and outside the VA medical system.

AAKP membership has a deep representation among veterans across all U.S. Armed Services, including veterans with recent military service during the Global War on Terror and extending back through the Gulf War, Cold War, Vietnam, Korea, and World War II. The prevalence of chronic kidney disease (CKD) in the veteran population is estimated to be 34 percent higher than in the general population due to demographic differences and the existence of significant co-morbidities associated with CKD in the veteran population—diabetes mellitus and hypertension. It is also estimated that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs currently cares for over 600,000 veterans with kidney disease¹. AAKP's VHI offers a number of educational resources for veterans and their families navigating the kidney care ecosystem and other issues, including the COVID-19 pandemic ([Watch OnDemand](#)).

[Edward V. Hickey, III](#), a USMC veteran and kidney patient who serves as AAKP Vice President and the [Chair of AAKP's Veterans Health Initiative](#) stated, "For fifty years, AAKP has been heavily involved in veterans' health in part because of the large numbers of veterans who suffer from multiple chronic conditions like kidney diseases as well as acute kidney injuries. The Veterans Administration has been a leader in kidney care innovation throughout its history, and our Veterans Health Initiative supports veterans and the VA by making certain Congressional funding for research and consistent access to cutting-edge treatments are fully available to every veteran. AAKP is honored to work with VA kidney care leaders Dr. Susan Crowley and Dr. Paul Palevsky and their teams because they consistently place veterans and their families at the center of care decisions and are tireless advocates for elevating kidney patients and their insights into policy and medical deliberations both within the VA and across the national landscape."

AAKP and Mr. Hickey recently hosted a discussion on the VA and kidney care innovation during its 46th Annual National Patient Meeting featuring Dr. Paul Palevsky, Professor of Medicine at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and Deputy Director of the VA Kidney Disease and Dialysis Program. Dr. Palevsky is also President of the National Kidney Foundation. Watch the session entitled "*Disease Management: Veterans Affairs Responds to Kidney Disease*" [here](#).

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs recently named Hickey to an executive committee overseeing new clinical trials to assess cardiovascular outcomes of veterans on dialysis. He is the son, nephew, brother, and father of military veterans. He held senior staff roles on Capitol Hill and under two presidential administrations and is the Director of Staff Attorneys at the international law firm of O'Melveny & Myers. His work in the federal government included multiple positions that intersected with national security and veteran issues. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, Hickey was tapped to serve as the Senior Advisor for Homeland Security for the Director of the Office of Personnel Management under President George W. Bush and had a direct role in the establishment of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. DHS was the largest restructuring of federal agencies since World War II and drew heavily upon the veteran's community for critical staffing needs, especially those with high-level security clearances. As Senior Advisor, Ed was also liaison to Veteran Service Organizations nationwide and worked closely with the Vietnam Veterans of America, AMVETS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the American Legion to protect veterans from illegal federal hiring discrimination, efforts which won him the Silver Helmet Award from AMVETS. For AAKP, Ed provides ongoing expertise on veterans' health concerns to Executive Branch officials and Congressional leaders and is among a team of AAKP leaders who volunteer as kidney research program analysts in support of the U.S. Department of Defense's Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP).

AAKP is nationally and internationally known for its aggressive advocacy on behalf of all kidney patient consumers, including U.S. veterans facing this condition, and an individual's right to treatment care choice in consultation with the doctors they choose to care for them. AAKP defines high-quality kidney care as timely patient access, without interference, to prevention and treatment innovations that empower patients to remain healthy, independent, and fully able to pursue their aspirations, including meaningful work and a career, homeownership, starting and supporting a family, and a secure retirement. AAKP utilizes sophisticated social media and grassroots technologies to engage patients, veterans, allied medical professionals, and the public and to voice their concerns among policymakers.

In 2019, AAKP declared 2020-2030 [The Decade of the Kidney™](#) to prioritize investments in kidney disease research and to support the development of new diagnostics, devices, and biologics to combat the disease, which impacts nearly 40 million Americans, including 400,000 on dialysis and over 100,000 waiting for a kidney transplant. Since 2018, AAKP has organized the largest non-partisan voter registration drive within the kidney stakeholder community, [KidneyVoters™](#), which aims to identify 500,000 KidneyVoters™ by 2024. Both [The Decade of the Kidney™](#) and [KidneyVoters™](#) efforts are designed to encourage elected and appointed leaders nationwide that kidney patients and their families expect major changes to status quo kidney care, which is currently characterized by outdated technologies, in-center kidney care, and high mortality rates.

To learn more about AAKP's VHI, visit <https://aakp.org/veterans-health-initiative/>, or if you are a veteran with kidney disease, sign-up to receive VHI alerts at <https://bit.ly/AAKPVHIAAlerts>. You may also make a tax-deductible donation to support the work of the VHI at <https://bit.ly/AAKPVHIDonate>.

Source:

1. National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, Veterans Affairs (VA) Activities: <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/about-niddk/advisory-coordinating-committees/kuh-icc/kicc/federal-ckd-matrix/veterans-affairs-va-activities>

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About the American Association of Kidney Patients (AAKP): Since 1969, AAKP has been the premier patient-led organization driving policy discussions on kidney patient consumer care choice and treatment innovation. By 1973, AAKP patients had collaborated with the U.S. Congress and White House to begin American dialysis coverage for any person suffering kidney failure, a taxpayer-funded effort that has saved over one million lives. In 2018, AAKP established the largest U.S. kidney voter registration program, KidneyVoters™. Over the past decade, AAKP patients have helped gain lifetime transplant drug coverage for kidney transplant recipients (2020); new patient-centered policies via the White House *Executive Order on Advancing American Kidney Health* (2019); new job protections for living organ donors from the U.S. Department of Labor (2018); and Congressional legislation allowing HIV positive organ transplants for HIV positive patients (2013). Follow AAKP on social media at [@kidneypatient](#) on Facebook, [@kidneypatients](#) on Twitter, and [@kidneypatients](#) on Instagram, and visit www.aakp.org for more information.

Sources

1. National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, Veterans Affairs (VA) Activities - <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/about-niddk/advisory-coordinating-committees/kuh-icc/kicc/federal-ckd-matrix/veterans-affairs-va-activities>