

Eric Goepel, Founder & CEO, Veterans Cannabis Coalition



Eric Goepel is the founder and CEO of the Veterans Cannabis Coalition, a non-profit advocacy group dedicated to ending cannabis prohibition and guaranteeing equal access to cannabis for veterans and all Americans.

Eric grew up in southern California, enlisting in the U.S. Army at the age of 18. He served for seven years, providing communications and intelligence support in the special operations community. During that time, Eric deployed twice to Iraq and once to the Philippines. After the end of his enlistment, Eric worked as a defense contractor in Afghanistan before returning to the U.S. to complete his bachelor's degree. Through the

Post-9/11 GI Bill, Eric was able to attend and graduate from the University of California, Berkeley with a B.A. in political science.

During and following college, Eric worked in various policy analysis and advocacy roles in Washington, D.C., including as a legislative fellow in the office of Senator Kirsten Gillibrand. Prior to founding the Veterans Cannabis Coalition, Eric was the assistant director of the American Legion's National Security Division. In that position, Eric developed positions for the country's largest war-time veteran association on the opioid crisis, cybersecurity, and transnational organized crime. His national security writing has been featured in *U.S. News and World Report*, *Defense One*, and *The National Interest*.

It was during his work on federal opioid response policies that Eric became convinced of the need to make cannabis available as a treatment alternative to everyone, especially veterans at risk of suicide and overdose. After months of discussion with fellow Iraq veteran and D.C. hand, Bill Ferguson, Eric and Bill decided to strike out independently and create the Veterans Cannabis Coalition to specifically bring the veterans community together to effectively push for cannabis reform.

Today, VCC works in Washington, D.C., California, and with other veteran leaders around the country, to organize, educate, and advocate on behalf of veterans and all patients. Veterans issues are American issues--the physical, mental, and social challenges in the community may be amplified, but they are not unique. Veterans offer a way to unite fragmented groups around a message of compassion and access--something that VCC aims to ensure happens across the country.