**EXPAND ELIGIBILITY FOR THE VA COMPREHENSIVE CAREGIVER PROGRAM**

**The Issue**

The current VA Comprehensive Family Caregiver Program is only available to a veteran seriously injured due to their military service on or after September 11, 2001. Congress must eliminate the unjust date of injury requirement and include “service connected illness” as a criterion for the program. Doing so will give the majority of veterans’ caregivers access to critically needed support services.

Caregivers are the most important component of rehabilitation and eventual recovery for veterans with catastrophic injuries. Their well-being directly impacts the care veterans receive. No reasonable justification, other than cost considerations, can be provided as to why pre-9/11 veterans with a service-connected injury or illness should be excluded from the caregiver program.

The program currently provides respite care, a monthly stipend, paid travel expenses to attend veteran’s medical appointments, and healthcare through CHAMPVA. Without these services, caregivers are likely to exhaust their savings, experience burnout, or suffer their own injury or illness. This means the veteran is more likely to be placed in an institutional setting that is far more costly to the taxpayer. Both the exclusion of “serious illnesses and diseases,” and the use of the “date of injury” as eligibility requirements for such an important benefit are unjust. As a result, the veteran suffers.

As the largest cohort of veterans (Vietnam era) ages, the demand for long term care resources will continue to grow significantly. Catastrophically injured veterans will require the most intensive and expensive institutional care. By providing their caregivers the means to care for them at home with family, they will have the opportunity to live a more normal life while also delaying the costs of institutional care. PVA urges Congress to introduce and pass legislation that would open eligibility to before September 11, 2001, and also include as eligible those veterans whose catastrophic illnesses are a result of service.

**PVA’s Position:**

* Congress must introduce and pass legislation that would expand eligibility for VA’s comprehensive caregiver assistance benefits to seriously ill and injured veterans, regardless of the era in which they served.