

## Preserve Access to VA's Specialized Services

PVA members require specialized health care and rely on the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Spinal Cord Injuries and Disorders (SCI/D) System of Care to meet their specialized health care needs. VA's specialized systems of care follow higher clinical standards than those required in the private sector. Preserving and strengthening VA's specialized systems of care—such as SCI/D care, blinded rehabilitation, amputee care, and polytrauma care—remains our highest priority. This includes access to high-quality prosthetics through VA's Prosthetics and Sensory Aids Service.

If VA continues to shift care to the private sector and woefully understaff and underfund its facilities, the Department's capacity to treat veterans will be diminished, and could lead to the closure of facilities and reductions in services offered to catastrophically disabled veterans. PVA is very concerned about efforts to permanently reduce inpatient beds in some SCI/D Centers, including at facilities that provide specialized long-term care. The capacity of the system to provide a continuum of care must be preserved and strengthened to meet the needs of paralyzed veterans.

Staffing problems tend to have a direct impact on the SCI/D System of Care. According to VA's Fourth Quarter MISSION Act Section 505 data, the Veterans Health Administration reported having 30,578 vacancies across the entire VA health care system. Within the SCI/D System of Care, lengthy, cumbersome hiring processes and a high cost of living in some locations make it difficult to hire and retain staff which prohibits SCI/D Centers from meeting adequate staffing levels necessary to care for this specialized veteran population. SCI/D Centers with nursing shortages limit bed availability for admission to an SCI/D Center. This limits access to care for specialized care delivery.

### PVA Position

- Congress must increase oversight to ensure that VA retains the capacity in its system for specialized services such as those provided by the SCI/D Centers.
- Congress must ensure sufficient funding is allocated to meet the needs of veterans requiring specialized services such as SCI/D.
- Congress must ensure proper staffing of VA's specialized services by ensuring the Department has the authority to provide additional pay, compensation, and retention incentives to make VA service more competitive with the private sector.