

## Improve Access to Transportation for Catastrophically Disabled Veterans

### VA Automobile Allowance Grants

Access to an adapted vehicle is essential to the mobility and health of catastrophically disabled veterans who need a reliable means of transportation to get them to and from work and attend medical appointments, as well as meet family obligations.

The current, one-time Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Automobile Allowance Grant of roughly \$21,500 covers anywhere from one-half to one-third of the cost to procure a vehicle to accommodate certain disabilities that resulted from a condition incurred or aggravated during active military service. The substantial costs of modified vehicles, coupled with inflation, present a financial hardship for many disabled veterans who need to replace their primary mode of transportation once it reaches its lifespan. Due to the high cost to procure replacement vehicles, veterans often retain them beyond their reliability point.

### Automobile Adaptive Equipment

VA's Automobile Adaptive Equipment (AAE) program helps physically disabled veterans enter, exit, and/or operate a motor vehicle or other conveyance. VA provides necessary equipment for veterans with service-connected disabilities such as platform wheelchair lifts, UVLs (under vehicle lifts), power door openers, lowered floors/raised roofs, raised doors, hand controls, left foot gas pedals, reduced effort and zero effort steering and braking, and digital driving systems.

The program also provides reimbursements (to service-connected veterans) for standard equipment including, but not limited to, power steering, power brakes, power windows, power seats, and other special equipment necessary for the safe operation of an approved vehicle. Support for veterans with non-service-connected disabilities is limited to assistance with ingress/egress only. Veterans need the independence AAE provides, allowing them to transport themselves to and from work, medical appointments, and other obligations.

### **PVA Position**

- PVA supports the **AUTO for Veterans Act (H.R. 1361/S. 444)**, which would allow eligible veterans to receive an Automobile Allowance Grant every ten years for the purchase of an adapted vehicle.
- Congress must direct VA to reimburse the cost of items on the Department's current AAE list as well as modern driver assistance technologies to broaden opportunities for veterans with catastrophic disabilities to drive more comfortably and safely.
- Congress must pass legislation that allows veterans who have non-service-connected catastrophic disabilities to receive the same type of adaptive automobile equipment as veterans whose disabilities are service connected.