



VA SCI/D SYSTEM AT A GLANCE

Top 4 SCI/D System Challenges in 2021

1) Unavailability of Long-Term Care (LTC) Beds

- Veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D) remain unnecessarily in SCI/D acute units for years, due to unavailable LTC beds.

2) Staffing Shortages and Prolonged HR Onboarding Processes

- There are currently over 170 nursing position vacancies across the SCI/D system, forcing existing nursing staff to operate at 73 percent of what is mandated by VA Directive.
- There are universal hiring delays of three to 12 months for new employees and staff transfers within VA are unsupported and severely delayed.

3) Social Isolation of Patients

- Visitation to SCI/D units and LTC centers has been fully closed or extremely limited for two years, restricting patients and residents from exiting their units and receiving visits from their family and friends.
- Communal areas have been closed, forcing veterans to remain in their rooms and pushing outpatient (and some inpatient) care to a virtual format.
- Mental health challenges have worsened resulting in increased despair and behavioral health complications.

4) Disruption of Essential Programs

- Admissions into the SCI/D units have been postponed for all non-emergent needs, delaying critical care.
- Therapeutic programs have been closed or extremely limited, including peer mentoring, group therapy, recreational therapy, physical therapy, and sports activities. Family support is also offered virtually.

Veteran Snapshot

Veterans with SCI:

- 450 veterans are newly injured each year
- 26,290 veterans with SCI received VA health care in 2021—95.1% male and 4.9% female

Veterans with MS:

- 18,000 - 20,000 veterans receive VA health care for MS each year, at least 6,260 received treatment related to their spinal cord—77.5% male and 22.5% female*
- Female to male ratio for all MS diagnoses is 3:1

Veterans with ALS:

- > 1,000 veterans are newly diagnosed with ALS each year
- 4,616 veterans with ALS received VA health care in 2021—94.9% male and 5.1% female*

*Number reflects veterans with MS and ALS that are added to the SCI/D registry. Some VA SCI/D centers add veterans with MS and ALS only to the Neurology registry; thus the actual number of veterans with MS that have spinal cord involvement is much higher.

SCI/D Center Snapshot

- There are 123 SCI/D Spoke Centers, 25 SCI/D Hub Centers, and 6 LTC Centers.
- The largest SCI/D LTC center has 47 beds (Hampton, VA) and smallest has 12 (Long Beach, CA).

COVID-19 Snapshot

- People with SCI/D are seven times more likely to experience severe complications or death from COVID-19.
- 73% of veterans with SCI/D received one to three doses of the COVID-19 vaccine as of Dec. 2021.

*Based on data from the VA SCI/D COVID-19 Summary Report.