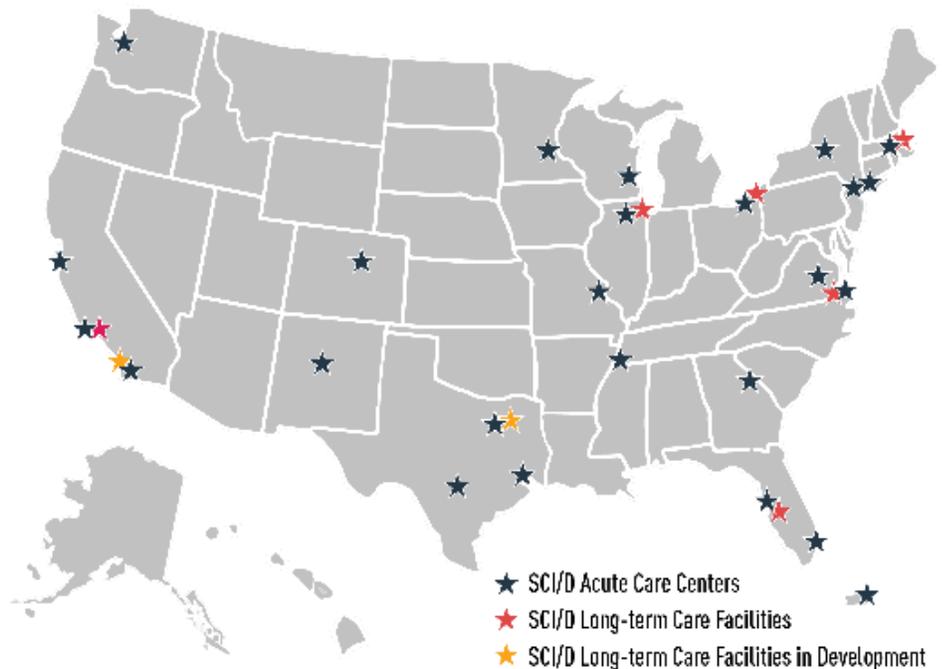


Protect Access to VA's Specialized Health Care Services

THE ISSUE

Veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D) require specialized health care and rely on the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) SCI/D system of care for their specialized health care needs. Preserving and strengthening this and other specialty systems of care, including blinded rehabilitation, amputee care, and polytrauma care, remains our highest priority. Access to world-class prosthetics is also critical.

The capacity of the VA health care system to provide a continuum of care for paralyzed veterans must be protected. If care for veterans continues to be shifted to the community and VA medical care is not sufficiently funded, the department's capacity to treat catastrophically disabled veterans will be diminished. This could harm the health of veterans as VA's specialized systems of care follow higher clinical standards than those required in the private sector.



Staffing deficiencies also have a direct impact on 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 prohibit SCI/D centers from meeting adequate staffing levels. SCI/D centers with nursing shortages limit bed availability for admission to an SCI/D center, further limiting access to care.

Finally, the Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) process required by Section 101 of the VA MISSION Act (P.L. 115-182) moves forward, the health care needs of paralyzed veterans must be carefully considered. The infrastructure supporting VA's SCI/D system of care must be maintained and expanded in line with the needs of serving veterans with SCI/D. However, VA does not currently have the staffing resources needed to efficiently manage the construction process and implement needed reforms.



PVA POSITION

- ★ Congress must preserve access to VA's specialized services, including its SCI/D system of care and provide sufficient, timely funding to ensure it continues to meet the needs of SCI/D veterans.
- ★ VA must have the authority to provide additional pay, compensation, and retention incentives to make VA's health care system more attractive to health care and related support professionals.
- ★ Congress must pass **H.R. 5575, the VA Nurse and Physician Assistant RAISE Act**, which would increase pay caps on nurse and physician assistant salaries to help VA attract and retain top health care talent to ensure veterans receive timely, high-quality care.
- ★ VA must request, and Congress must provide, sufficient funding to maintain and expand VA's health care infrastructure, including specialty facility-based long-term care, that is in line with its actual needs.
- ★ VA must also be able to hire additional staff to oversee and manage infrastructure projects and implement critical process reforms.