



 **Pushing
Access
Forward**

2023 POLICY PRIORITIES

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For more than 75 years, PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA—the nation’s premier nonprofit of choice for disabled veterans, their families, and caregivers—has led the fight for accessibility and provided a full circle of support from the point of injury or diagnosis to all of life’s milestones. With offices inside every Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) spinal cord injury and disorder (SCI/D) center across the U.S., PVA is unmatched. Staffed with licensed architects, medical professionals, legal experts, and leaders in research and education, PVA fights to help veterans with SCI/D or diseases, like MS and ALS, receive the benefits they earned, the specialized health care they deserve, the accessible homes and vehicles they need, and the meaningful careers they want.

For these veterans to thrive, they must have access to high-quality, comprehensive health care and timely delivery of all earned benefits. They must also have equitable access to the same opportunities and freedoms available to all Americans.

Protect Access to VA’s Specialized Health Care Services

To ensure access to VA’s health care system, it must receive sufficient funding. Without it, VA will be unable to provide veterans proper care, hire and retain health care professionals and support workers, and maintain and expand VA medical infrastructure.

PVA advocates for proper funding for the SCI/D system of care through the **Independent Budget**—a partnership with DAV, PVA, and VFW. In addition to adequate funding, other reforms are needed to ensure VA can meet veterans’ health care needs.



Staffing

VA must effectively use the pay and workforce provisions approved in Public Law 117-103 (RAISE Act provisions) and the PACT Act (Public Law 117-168) to recruit and retain necessary health care professionals. VA must also increase retention incentives and reform its hiring processes, including working with Congress to make needed reforms. Congress must also take additional action to boost pay caps for other providers not included in the RAISE Act provisions and Pact Act.



Infrastructure

VA’s infrastructure processes need to be reformed and staffing increased to allow the department to effectively use needed funding. VA also must develop a nationwide infrastructure plan to better address the SCI/D system’s unique care delivery model.



Expand Access to VA Long-Term Services and Supports

VA's services span the spectrum from facility-based care to home and community-based services. Increased availability of this range of resources is crucial to the long-term health of paralyzed veterans, as well as ensuring all veterans are able to receive the care they need throughout their lives in the setting of their choice.



Facility-Based Long-Term Care

VA must adequately assess the number of veterans with SCI/D who need facility-based specialty long-term care and implement reforms needed to prioritize these types of infrastructure projects.



Home and Community-Based Services and Caregiver Supports

VA must increase access to home and community based-services. VA needs to expedite expansion of the Veteran-Directed Care program. This program provides veterans with the ability to direct their own care and hire individuals, including family members, who will help them with their everyday needs. Veterans must also be able to continue receiving VA funds that allow them to pay their caregivers, even when hospitalized. Congress and VA must also prioritize efforts to increase the direct care workforce and allow VA to provide veterans with financial support for assisted living options.

VA must reform the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC). Restrictive eligibility criteria have kept some paralyzed veterans from being found eligible for this program. For those veterans who are not eligible for the PCAFC, VA should provide them with more information about other programs available to help them, including the general caregiver program.

The Administration and Congress must improve supports for caregivers as outlined in the [2022 National Strategy to Support Family Caregivers](#), which was developed by the RAISE Family Caregiving Act and Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act advisory committees and focuses on the needs of all caregivers.



Improve VA Benefits and Health Care Services for Paralyzed Veterans and their Survivors



Veterans and Survivor Benefits

Congress must increase VA Special Monthly Compensation/Aid and Attendance benefits for catastrophically disabled veterans to offset increased costs for home care and other needed supports.

Congress must continue to improve access to services and benefits for veterans who have experienced military sexual trauma.

Congress must pass legislation ending forfeiture of military retirement pay to receive VA disability compensation.

Congress must increase the rate of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) for surviving dependents and lower the eligibility threshold. Congress must also ensure survivors of ALS veterans have access to enhanced DIC benefits.



Transportation Programs and Supports

Congress must authorize veterans who have nonservice-connected catastrophic disabilities to receive adaptive equipment from VA to drive their vehicles. VA and Congress must also provide improved transportation services and supports that help veterans access needed health care.



Life Insurance Benefits

Congress must reform VALife to allow premium waivers for catastrophically disabled veterans and ensure ALS veterans' survivors receive these critical benefits.



Home Modification Grants

Congress must raise the rate of funding available through VA's Home Improvements and Structural Alterations grant program to allow eligible veterans to access needed housing modifications due to their disabilities.



Health Care and Benefits for Women Veterans

VA must consider the unique needs of women veterans with SCI/D when delivering and developing services and benefits, including those that are gender specific.



Assisted Reproductive Technologies

Congress must repeal VA's ban on IVF and authorize VA to provide assisted reproductive technology, including IVF, surrogacy, and gamete donation at VA for any veterans enrolled in VA health care.

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Protect the Civil Rights of People with Disabilities

Protecting the civil rights of people with disabilities is important to ensuring their ability to access the opportunities and freedoms available to all Americans to allow them to live, work, travel, and fully participate in society.



Improve Access to Air Travel

Congress must make systemic changes in the next FAA Reauthorization to improve air travel for people with disabilities, particularly wheelchair users, by reforming the Air Carrier Access Act to add standards for aircraft accessibility and improve enforcement of the law. Congress must also improve paralyzed veterans' access to programs that facilitate the security screening process.



Increase Disability Access

Congress must enhance tax incentives to help businesses comply with their obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Also, the Department of Justice must investigate more individual ADA complaints and issue long-overdue regulations related to hotel bed height and accessible medical equipment standards.

Industries creating new models and forms of transportation, including electric and autonomous vehicles, must ensure disability access as a matter of equity.

Improve Access to Social Security Benefits



Congress must end the five-month wait for Social Security disability insurance benefits to ensure people with disabilities have financial support when they most need it. Veterans must receive more information about Social Security benefits and assistance in applying for them. Also, Congress must ensure that caregivers who are not in the workforce because they are providing caregiving assistance are able to receive credit under Social Security.

Increase Employment Prospects for Veterans with Disabilities



Congress must increase access to employment opportunities for veterans with significant disabilities through tax incentives for employers and improvements to supports provided to veterans through the state workforce system. VA's Veteran Readiness and Employment program must ensure veterans with catastrophic disabilities are able to fully access the services that allow them to return to work.



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