

Top 3 SCI/D System Challenges in 2022

1) Insufficient Long-Term Care (LTC) Availability

- Veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D) remain in SCI/D acute units for years because there are no LTC beds available.
- Care in community LTC facilities is often not able to safely meet the needs of veterans with SCI/D.

2) Staffing Shortages

- There are nearly 600 nursing position vacancies across the SCI/D system.
- Staffing shortages impact SCI/D acute units more than any other type of acute care.
- Depending on the function level of an acute SCI/D patient, a nurse may spend an hour or more each time they enter a veteran's room doing physical transfers, repositioning, wound care, feeding assistance, bowel and bladder care, and other tasks. Nurses in other areas of work may be in and out of a patient's room in a matter of minutes.
- Despite the increased care that veterans with SCI/D require, not all SCI/D nursing staff (including licensed practical nurses and nursing assistants) receive specialty pay, which leads to turnover.

3) Social Isolation of Patients

- The COVID-19 pandemic is evolving into a mental health crisis from strict isolation.
- Veterans with SCI/D have endured stricter pandemic-related isolation precautions. Most LTCs have not re-opened fully and still impose strict isolation requirements for residents.
- Essential programs, like peer mentoring, in-person support groups, and therapy offerings (i.e. gym hours and off-site recreation activities) remain very limited or unavailable.
- Visitor restrictions also remain in place and change frequently.

Veteran Snapshot

Veterans with SCI:

- Roughly 450 veterans are newly injured each year
- Of the nearly 18K veterans on VA's SCI/D registry—95.5% are male and 4.5% are female, as of Oct. 1, 2022

Veterans with MS:

- Of the nearly 20K veterans who receive VA health care for MS ea. year, over 4,800 are on VA's SCI/D registry, with 77.4% male and 22.6% female, as of October 1, 2022*
- Female to male ratio for all MS diagnoses is 3:1

Veterans with ALS:

- Over 1K veterans are newly diagnosed with ALS each year
- Of the nearly 4,600 veterans who receive VA health care for ALS each year, over 1,700 veterans with motor neuron diseases (most common form is ALS) are on VA's SCI/D registry, with 94.7% male and 5.3% female as of October 1, 2022*

*Some VA SCI/D centers add veterans with MS and ALS only to the Neurology registry.

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).

Veterans with SCI/D by Age*

Age Category	Primary Qualifying Diagnosis			All Diagnoses
	Spinal Cord Injury	Multiple Sclerosis	Motor Neuron Disorders	
34 or Younger	567	119	11	697
35-49 Years	1,914	865	101	2,880
50-64 Years	5,389	1843	467	7,699
65-79 Years	8,669	1838	912	11,419
80 or Older	1,274	185	210	1,669
Total	17,813	4,850	1,701	24,364

*Veterans on the SCI/D registry as of October 1, 2022