

Access to VA Caregiving Benefits for Veterans with Disabilities

Presented by



a program of United Spinal Association

Presenters

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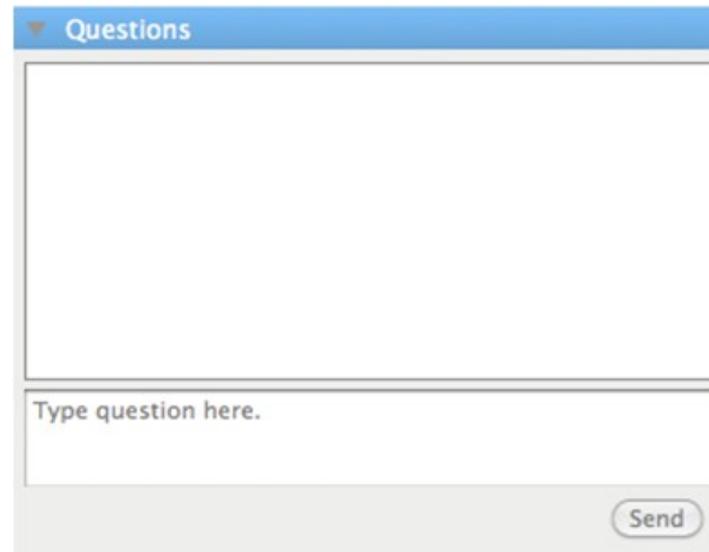
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Questions

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VetsFirst's History

- Represents over 65 years of service to veterans and their families.
- Provides the tools veterans, their dependents and survivors need to be successful in their pursuit of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits and health care.
- Fights to ensure all veterans with disabilities have the ability to live and work in their communities and achieve greater independence.

Increased Awareness of Caregiving Needs

- Advances in battlefield medicine have allowed wounds sustained by military personnel to be treated more quickly, which has resulted in increased survival rates.
- Due to medical advances, people with significant disabilities are living longer lives in their communities.

Veterans Living with Disabilities

- 5.5 million veterans are living with disabilities.
- 3.84 million veterans receive VA disability compensation.
- 310,000 veterans receive VA pensions.

Aging Veterans

- Vietnam Era Veterans—7.3 million.
- Korean Conflict—2.1 million.
- World War II—1.2 million.

Who are Caregivers?

- Caregivers may be spouses, parents, children, or other relatives of an individual who requires assistance.
- Other caregivers may be friends, neighbors, or community volunteers.

How Do Caregivers Assist Veterans?

- Help in performing activities of daily living such as bathing or dressing.
- Help in performing instrumental activities of daily living such as managing financial matters and taking medications.



HIDDEN HEROES: AMERICA'S MILITARY CAREGIVERS



RAND Corporation Study
www.rand.org/military-caregivers

Hidden Heroes: Caregiving By The Numbers

- 5.5 million individuals provide caregiver services for veterans and servicemembers living with disabilities.
- 1.1 million of these caregivers assist post-9/11 veterans and servicemembers.
- Children caring for aging parents make up the biggest share of caregivers for pre-9/11 veterans.
- Spouses represent the biggest share of post-9/11 caregivers.

Hidden Heroes: Caregiver Burdens

- Negative health outcomes.
- Increased relationship strain with family members.
- Difficulty balancing work and caregiver responsibilities.

Hidden Heroes: Unique Characteristics of Post-9/11 Caregivers

- Less likely to have a support network.
- More likely to be employed.
- Less likely to help with activities of daily living or instrumental activities of daily living than pre-9/11 caregivers.
- More likely to help in coping with anxiety and stressful situations.

Hidden Heroes: Caregivers Need Support Too

- Caregivers must have access to training that can help them meet caregiving challenges.
- Caregivers need respite.
- Caregivers need resources that help them stay healthy.



Hidden Heroes: Proposed Solutions

- Empower caregivers.
- Create caregiver-friendly environments.
- Fill gaps in current programs.
- Plan for the future.

New Caregiver Resource

- The Military Officers Association of America spearheaded the creation of a guide that focuses on helping caregivers navigate the legal and financial needs of caregiving.
- This guide shares best practices from other caregivers whose contributions are directly-related to the burdens caregivers encounter.
- Available at: www.moaa.org/caregiver.

VA ASSISTANCE FOR CAREGIVERS



Caregivers and Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-163)

- Landmark law creating the VA Caregiver Program.
- Provides assistance to disabled veterans and their caregivers.
- Includes general services for caregivers of veterans of all eras.
- Provides enhanced benefits for caregivers of veterans who were injured in the line of duty after Sept. 11, 2001 (post-9/11 veterans).

General VA Caregiving Services for Veterans of All Eras

- Access to VA's toll-free Caregiver Support Line: 1-855-260-3274.
- Expanded education and training on caring for veterans at home.
- Other support services such as counseling and support groups and referral services.



Eligibility for General VA Caregiving Services

- Veteran shows an inability to perform one or more activities of daily living.
- VA regulations give guidance on how this is determined.

Enhanced VA Caregiving Services for Post-9/11 Veterans

- Monthly stipend.
- Health care coverage.
- Travel expenses, including lodging and per diem.
- Respite care.
- Mental health services and counseling.

Eligibility for Enhanced Services

- Veteran or servicemember undergoing discharge who has a serious injury (including traumatic brain injury, psychological trauma, or other mental disorder) that was incurred or aggravated in the line of duty in the active military, naval or air services on or after Sept. 11, 2001.
- Demonstrates a need for personal care services because of an inability to perform one or more activities of daily living and/or shows need for supervision or protection based on symptoms or residuals of neurological or other impairment or injury.

Monthly Stipend

- A monthly stipend may be paid for personal care provided up to 40 hours per week.
- VA makes the determination about how much care to authorize based on the amount and degree of personal care needed.
- VA is required to make sure that to the maximum extent possible the stipend is commensurate with what would commonly be provided to a local personal caregiver in the area where the veteran lives.

Health Care Benefits

- Health care coverage is provided through the Civilian Health and Medical Program of VA (CHAMPVA) for qualifying caregivers of severely injured veterans.
- Caregivers must have no other source of health insurance to qualify.

VA Feasibility Report on Expanding Enhanced Benefit Eligibility

- The Caregiver Law required VA to submit a report to the House and Senate VA Committees two years after implementation of the program.
- The purpose of the report was to identify the feasibility of expanding the enhanced caregiver benefits to injured veterans of all eras.

Results of VA Report on Expanding Caregiver Benefits

- The VA reported that expansion of the program was operationally feasible.
- VA expressed concern, however, with how the expansion would be funded.
- For example, VA believes they would need an additional 2,000 full-time staff positions to administer the expansion.

CAREGIVER LEGISLATION



Need to Expand Eligibility

- Enhanced services are limited to caregivers of injured veterans who served post-9/11.
- Veterans who become ill, including those diagnosed with ALS and other diseases that are related to their military service, regardless of when they served, are also unable to access enhanced caregiver services.

Legislation Expanding Generations Served

- **Caregiver Expansion and Improvement Act of 2013 (H.R. 3383/S. 851)**
 - Introduced in the House by Congresswoman Elizabeth Esty (D-CT) and in the Senate by Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Bernie Sanders (I-VT).
 - Builds on Public Law 111-163 by extending enhanced caregiver benefits to the family caregivers of veterans who meet the level of need regardless of era served.

House Legislation Expanding Disabilities Covered

- **S.O.S. Veterans Caregivers Act (H.R. 3672)**
 - Introduced in the House by Congressman Raul Ruiz (D-CA).
 - This legislation will expand eligibility to include veterans who have illnesses related to their military service.
 - Also requires VA to measure the burdens on caregivers and provide a satisfaction assessment.

Comprehensive Senate Caregiver Legislation

- **Military and Veteran Caregiver Services Improvement Act of 2014 (S. 2243)**

- Introduced in the Senate by Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) in response to the findings of the Hidden Heroes caregivers study.
- Extends VA Caregiver Program eligibility to injured veterans of all eras and to those who have illnesses.
- Removes barriers to transferring GI Bill education benefits to dependents.

Committee and Congressional Dynamics

- The Veterans' Affairs Committees in Congress have a bi-partisan culture of agreeing on the principle of assisting veterans regardless of partisan differences.
- Most issues or disagreements focus on VA oversight and the fiscal challenges of national debt vs. the provision of services for veterans.

Caregiver Benefits Legislative Outlook

- Financial Constraints in Congress.
- Election Year Politics.
- Lack of 2013/2014 VA legislation.

How You Can Help

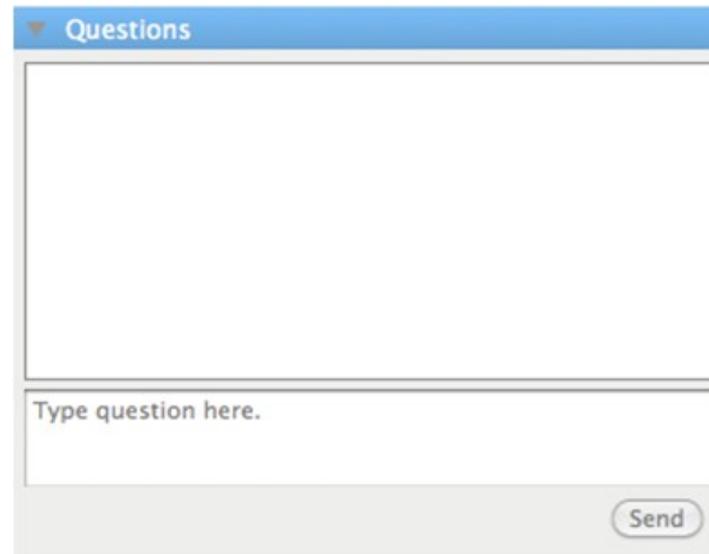
- Contact your Members of Congress and make your voice heard on caregiver issues.
 - To find your U.S. Representative, visit: www.house.gov.
 - To find your U.S. Senators, visit: www.senate.gov .
- Follow veterans caregiving issues on VetsFirst's website: www.vetsfirst.org.

VA Caregiver Resources

- VA's Caregiver Assistance Center provides information on the services available to caregivers (www.caregiver.va.gov).
- VA Caregiver Support Line: 1 (855) 260-3274.
- Caregiver Support Coordinators are also available to provide assistance.

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Presentation Resources

- RAND Military Caregivers Study:
www.rand.org/military-caregivers.
- VA Caregiver Program: www.caregiver.va.gov.
- Tips for Lifelong Caregiving:
www.moaa.org/caregiver.