



Paralyzed Veterans
of America

WASHINGTON UPDATE

Recent news regarding legislation and regulatory actions affecting veterans and people with disabilities.

Written and produced by Paralyzed Veterans of America - Government Relations Department

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VETERANS BENEFITS/SOCIAL SECURITY COLA ANNOUNCED

The Social Security Administration (SSA) announced on October 13 that Social Security benefits will receive a 1.3 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) increase starting in 2021. SSA's COLA serves as a baseline for other federal benefit increases such as military and federal employee retirement pay which will also rise by that amount. As previously noted, Congress has passed legislation that would allow certain veterans' disability compensation programs to receive a similar boost. The bill was presented to the President on October 9 and now awaits his signature.

PVA AWARDED TSA'S DISABILITY COALITION PARTNER OF THE YEAR AWARD

On September 28, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) held its [18th Annual Disability and Multicultural Coalition Conference](#). During the event, which was held virtually, TSA Administrator David P. Pekoske, presented PVA with the award for Disability Coalition Partner of the Year. The award was in recognition of our efforts to educate transportation screeners about the unique needs of people with spinal cord injuries and disorders and screening considerations for people with disabilities during a pandemic. The latter effort resulted in a document produced by PVA and supported by nine other disability organizations that was transmitted to TSA earlier this year.

VA CAREGIVER EXPANSION AND FINAL RULE NOW IN EFFECT

On October 1, VA announced that Secretary Wilkie had certified the IT system for VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC). Thus, veterans with a service-connected disability rating of 70 percent or above who were seriously injured (including a serious illness) on or before May 7, 1975, or on or after September 11, 2001, may now apply for caregiver benefits. Also, on October 1, VA implemented significant changes to the existing caregiver program. All current participants will be reassessed to see if they are still eligible to participate in the program. We will be closely watching the implementation of the program and are working closely with PVA's Veterans Benefits Department to ensure that any systemic

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problems are quickly identified. More information about the program, including fact sheets on the [application](#), [eligibility](#), and [current participants](#), is available [here](#).

PVA TESTIFIES AT HVAC HEARING ON ACCESS TO COMMUNITY CARE

On September 30, the co-authors of The Independent Budget (IB)—DAV (Disabled American Veterans), PVA, and Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) [testified](#) before the House Veterans' Affairs Health Subcommittee on the timeliness of veterans' access to community care since VA implemented the MISSION Act. Roscoe Butler, PVA's Associate Legislative Director, gave the oral testimony on behalf of the IB.

Mr. Butler testified that the IBVSOs' members had reported ongoing issues exacerbated by COVID-19. Issues identified included veterans receiving bills for care provided through VA community care, the provider no longer participating in the program, wait times, and VA's cancelation of appointments earlier this year. Because of the specific problems PVA members have experienced with erroneous billing from community network providers, the IB's testimony further highlighted this specific concern.

NEWS ITEMS OF NOTE

- Department of Labor Marks National Disability Employment Awareness Month
The U.S. Department of Labor issued a [news release](#) announcing the 75th anniversary of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) in October 2020. This year also marks the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. "Americans with disabilities bring tremendous value to the workforce, and National Disability Employment Awareness Month is an opportunity for the nation to recognize and honor the contributions they make," said U.S. Secretary of Labor Eugene Scalia. "This year we also celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, an important milestone in our effort to increase access and opportunity for all Americans."
- Update on COVID-19 Relief Legislation
On October 1, the House passed a revised version of the HEROES Act, which it originally passed back in May. It has a lower cost estimate than the original HEROES Act, but the list of included priorities for the disability community largely remains the same. Additional information from the Center for Public Representation is available [here](#).
- Expansion of Respite Relief for Military and Veteran Caregivers
The [Elizabeth Dole Foundation](#) and VA joined together to create a new program, *Respite Relief for Military and Veteran Caregivers*, which offers family caregivers of veterans access to no-cost, short-term relief with the help of in-home care professionals. The

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program started out with CareLinx providing \$1 million to launch the first phase of the campaign that is providing non-medical respite home care for more than 1,600 caregivers and their wounded warriors in metro regions of California, Florida, and Texas. With additional funds from Wounded Warrior Project, the program will continue to expand to reach 3,000 caregivers in a phased nationwide roll-out of services to additional areas across the country. More information, including how to apply, is available [here](#).

Courtesy of the ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center

- New Report on Impact of Caregiving

BlueCross BlueShield (BCBS) recently released a report entitled, “The Impact of Caregiving on Mental and Physical Health.” Close to seven million BCBS members are caregivers for their spouse or child(ren). Caregivers in the BCBS sample felt a 26 percent greater impact of health conditions that could lower their overall health, as measured by the BCBS Health Index, compared to a benchmark population. The survey also found that the health differences associated with caregiving are greater for millennials than for Gen X and baby boomers. Also, the differences are larger for those caregivers in communities with a majority Black or Hispanic population compared to caregivers in majority white population communities. Not surprisingly, COVID has increased the demand for and intensity of caregiving and has increased self-reported stress, isolation, and loneliness among caregivers. To read the report, please click [here](#).

Courtesy of the ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center

- National Inventory of Self-Directed Programs

The fourth [National Inventory of Self-Directed Long-Term Services and Supports Programs](#) prepared by Applied Self-Direction for the 2020 AARP Long-Term Services and Supports (LTSS) State Scorecard provides a snapshot of self-direction programs immediately prior to the spread of COVID-19. The Inventory also examines the extent to which self-directed LTSS programs support family caregivers by allowing them to be paid workers and by offering respite services available to family caregivers. Included are the 2019 Inventory project methods, key findings, and emerging trends. For Respite Services, the data revealed that in 2019 the majority of programs reported that respite was a waiver service or, in the case of Veterans Health Administration’s Veteran-Directed Care (VDC) programs, that funds could be used to pay for respite services. While respite is not explicitly part of the VDC program plan of care, program rules do not prohibit participants from using allotted staff time to provide respite services.

Courtesy of the ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center

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- HVAC Subcommittee on Technology Modernization Hearing on the Electronic Health Record Modernization Program

On September 30, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Technology Modernization conducted an [oversight hearing](#) entitled: "Examining VA's Ongoing Efforts in the Electronic Health Record Modernization Program." During the hearing, subcommittee members expressed concern over VA's ability to meet its timeline for launching the modernized electronic health record (EHR) at hospitals around the country and how well it will work with the military's new system, as its deployment lags behind that of the Department of Defense's (DOD) Military Health System—GENESIS. The programs are being developed under the same Cerner EHR platform with the ultimate plan to create interoperability between them so service members' health records can seamlessly transition from DOD to VA.

VA plans to launch the EHR in late October at the Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center in Spokane, Washington. This go-live date has already been pushed back twice due to a lack of training and impacts of the ongoing pandemic. After the first major launch in Washington state, VA plans to update the IT systems of dozens of centers over the next several years. Eventually, more than 100 centers will transition to the Cerner-based cloud platform.

- AAPD Report on Voting during the Pandemic

The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) has published a nonpartisan policy report, [COVID-19 and the Disability Vote](#), urging federal, state, and local governments to take immediate action and ensure that voters can cast a ballot safely, accessibly, and securely in the 2020 general election. This report explores how COVID-19 has both created and worsened a variety of accessibility barriers that disenfranchise voters with disabilities. For many people with disabilities who face a higher health risk from COVID-19, in-person voting is too risky. However, vote-by-mail and absentee voting present other accessibility barriers to voters with disabilities.

WEBINARS

- PVA Webinar on Voting Now Available

On October 6, PVA hosted a webinar with the National Disability Rights Network entitled, "Understanding Voting Access for Veterans with Disabilities During a Pandemic." The webinar is now available on PVA's dedicated [voting webpage](#). The direct link is available [here](#).

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- DOL Presents Building a Future That Works

The U.S. Department of Labor will host a virtual celebration of the 75th annual National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) and the 30th anniversary of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. "Building a Future that Works" will be held on October 20 from 2:00-3:00 p.m. ET. The event will explore the crucial role of accessible technology in relation to this year's NDEAM theme of "Increasing Access and Opportunity" for people with disabilities, and the Labor Department's work to ensure that emerging technologies are accessible to all in the workplace. One of the panelists is Rory Cooper, Ph.D. – Distinguished Professor at University of Pittsburgh and PVA member. Features will include insightful dialogues with thought leaders and a video showcase of the latest innovations in communications, artificial intelligence, autonomous vehicles, and more. To register, click [here](#).

- Access Board Webinar on Built-In Elements

The next webinar in the Access Board's free monthly series will take place November 5 from 2:30 – 4:00 (ET) and will review scoping and technical provisions for built-in elements in the Americans with Disabilities Act and Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Standards (Chapter 9). This session will address the requirements for dining and work surfaces, benches, check-out aisles, and sales and service counters. Presenters will clarify common sources of confusion and address frequently asked questions about these provisions. To register, click [here](#).