



**Paralyzed Veterans
of America**

New England Chapter

CORDWORD

The Monthly News Magazine of the New England Chapter, Paralyzed Veterans of America



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CHALLENGING DAYS



From the Director's Desk - Chapter operations and activities in response to COVID-19.

As we continue to navigate through these challenging days during this global pandemic, we have been working hard at New England PVA to support our organization and members in a variety of ways. Since March I have been researching and applying for local grants that could provide some financial support and relief to our organization, as most if not all Veteran Service Organizations ...*continued on page 2.*

COVID MOBILE APP



VA Releases COVID Coach Mobile Application.

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced the launch of the COVID Coach app, a new mobile app designed to help both Veterans and civilians cope with feelings of stress and anxiety they may be experiencing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The app includes practical tools, information and resources that can all be used from the safety of one's home to*continued on page 6.*



Out Front

Michael G. Negrete, Chapter President

As another month goes by, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to present tremendous challenges for the Chapter and its membership with long-term consequences we cannot fully predict or comprehend. As the Nation's deaths rise over 90,000, I sadly must report we've had 5 Chapter members die in the past 2 months, 2 known directly to be COVID related. I know there are others affected in the PVA family, but these 5 are New Englanders. We should all take a moment to think of these members and their families during this most difficult time and circumstances.

I want each of you to know, that as we all continue on this journey of uncertainty, your health, safety, and well-being is my #1 priority, as is the Chapter Board of Directors' and Staff's. We continue to closely monitor the fluid environments throughout New England to provide relevant and timely information, as well as, advocate on your behalf when your rights and access to equitable care are infringed upon or in jeopardy. If you every encounter a circumstance where you feel discriminated against or treated unfair because of your disability, please let me or our Govt Relation Dir. Kristen McCone Gordon know. We're here to ensure you're able to receive the benefits and care you've earned.

As part of our response to this pandemic, we continue to take advantage of every opportunity we can to assist you during these tempestuous times. To this, we are developing a Chapter "COVID-19 Relief Grant" that members in financial need may apply for assistance through. Details of applying for assistance through this grant will be distributed shortly, so please keep an eye on your Inbox for this information. We also continue to leverage our status as a non-profit Veterans Service Organization to apply for grants ourselves so as to shore-up the Chapter's operational infrastructure not knowing how this pandemic will affect future donations and fundraising efforts.

Finally, as I've often said, each of us has the individual capacity to make a positive impact in someone's life. It doesn't have to be something huge or time consuming. It could be a simple "Hello, how are you doing" as you pass by someone, a small \$10 donation or sharing a few minutes of your time with someone. Especially now, we need to lookout for one another so we all make it safe through to the other side of this pandemic. Theodore Roosevelt said it best, "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are."

Michael G. Negrete, *President and Paralyzed Veteran*

From the Director's Desk

Mark Murphy, Chapter Executive Director



As we continue to navigate through these challenging days during this global pandemic, we have been working hard at New England PVA to support our organization and members in a variety of ways. Since March I have been researching and applying for local grants that could provide some financial support and relief to our organization, as most if not all Veteran Service Organizations and non-profits are feeling the recent pinch and strain on the economy. I am very happy to report that to date we have been awarded 3 unrestricted grants through the Boston Resiliency Fund, the Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts, and the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation. These grants will be indispensable in providing some needed financial support for NEPVA while also continuing to sustain our COVID-19 response initiatives.

In addition to our focus on new revenue streams that could be helpful to our organization, we are continuing to assess how we can support and communicate effectively with you, our members, throughout the pandemic. Emails and direct mailings have been distributed articulating what New England PVA has been doing in response to COVID-19. This has included issues related to government relations and advocacy, member support and webinars facilitated through PVA National, and general Chapter operations. Our Facebook page @NEPVA1947 has new posts almost daily with some of this same information. Continued updates on our COVID-19 response, including some new support initiatives, will be forthcoming in the weeks ahead, so stay tuned!

On May 6th I participated in a PVA member webinar with the Executive Director of the VA SCI/D System of Care regarding their response to the pandemic. I found this webinar to be extremely informative and interesting, especially when they addressed how technology is being used to help veterans stay safely connected to their health care team through virtual care options. This includes VA Video Connect and 24-hour online access through My HealthVet. In addition to covering the VA's COVID-19 response, they also answered several live questions from PVA members. We will let you know when there are more PVA member webinars such as these.

As always, please feel free to reach out to our Board of Directors or staff if we can assist you in any way possible. I am deeply grateful for all the active engagement we have had over the past several weeks as we strive to support one another and our Chapter in these difficult days.

Mark Murphy, *Executive Director*

New England PVA Contact Information

1208 VFW Parkway, Suite 301
West Roxbury, MA 02132
Phone: (800) 660-1181
Fax: (857) 203-9685

www.newenglandpva.org
info@newenglandpva.org
Office Hours: Mon-Fri, 8:30am-4:30pm

CHAPTER ADMINISTRATION

NEW ENGLAND PVA OFFICERS

President	Michael G. Negrete
Vice President	Mike Guilbault
Treasurer	Peter Moore
Secretary	Mike Moran

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Wayne Ross	

NATIONAL DIRECTOR TO PVA

Neal Williams

STAFF

Executive Director Mark Murphy
Govt. Relations Dir. Kristen McCone Gordon
Admin/Bookkeeper Jerry Cole
Office Volunteer Denise Pease

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PROGRAM DIRECTORS

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Bass Trail Liaison	Jim Wallack
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Assistant Sports Director	Michael Moran
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Women Veterans' Liaison	Vacant

CHAPTER HOSPITAL LIAISONS

VAMC

Brockton SCIU Bldg 8
Providence
Manchester
Togus
West Haven
West Roxbury
White River Junction
Northampton

CHL

Dan Shaul
Vacant
Mike Moran
Neal Williams
Peter Falcione
Mike Guilbault
Mike Moran
Tim Kelly

NEW ENGLAND PVA NATIONAL SERVICE OFFICERS

BOSTON VA REGIONAL OFFICE

Joseph E. Badzmierowski
Director of Field Services
J.F.K. Federal Bldg. - Room - 1575 C
Boston, MA 02203
Phone: (617) 303-1395 or (800) 795-3607
Fax: (617) 303-1396

WEST ROXBURY/BROCKTON VAMC

Pete Demarkis, National Service Officer II
1400 VFW Parkway, Room AG 60
West Roxbury, MA 02132
West Roxbury Phone: (857) 203-6091
Brockton Phone: (774) 826-2219
Serving Massachusetts, Rhode Island

TOGUS, VARO, 1 VA CENTER

Michael Snapes, National Service Officer II
Bldg. 248, Room 112
Augusta, ME 04330
Phone: (207) 621-7394 or (866) 795-1911
Fax: (207) 621-4829
Serving Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont

SYRACUSE VAMC

Charlie Tocci, East-North Area Manager
800 Irving Ave, Room C419
Syracuse, NY 13210
Phone: (315) 425-4400 Ext. 53317
Fax: (315) 425-2940
Serving New York and Western Massachusetts

MANHATTAN

Bruce Weston, National Service Officer
245 W. Houston Street, Room 212A
New York, NY 10014
Phone: (212) 807-3114
Fax: (212) 807-4047
Serving Connecticut and New York

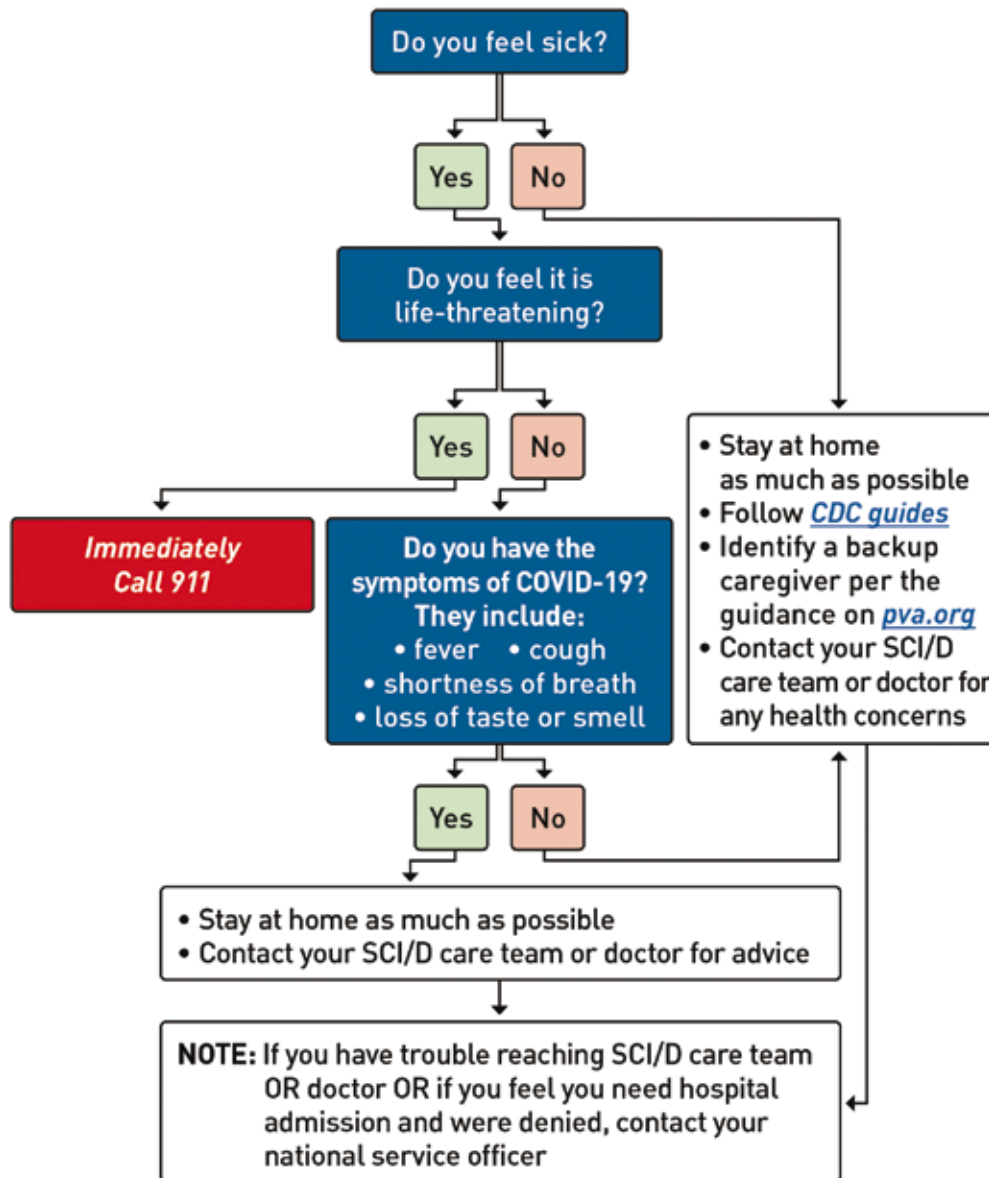
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FEELING SICK?

GUIDANCE ON COVID-19



PVA National Service Officers Serving New England

West Roxbury/Brockton VAMC
Pete Demarkis, National Service Officer II
West Roxbury, MA Phone: (857) 203-6091
Brockton, MA Phone: (774) 826-2219
Serving Massachusetts, Rhode Island

Togus VAMC, Augusta, ME
Michael Snapes, National Service Officer II
Phone: (207) 621-7394 or (866) 795-1911
Serving Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont

Syracuse VAMC, Syracuse, NY
Charlie Tocci, East-North Area Manager
Phone: (315) 425-4400 Ext. 53317
Serving New York and Western Massachusetts

Manhattan, New York, NY
Bruce Weston, National Service Officer
Phone: (212) 807-3114
Serving Connecticut and New York

VA Coronavirus FAQs: What Veterans Need to Know

via www.va.gov



What should I do if I have an upcoming VA health appointment?

For routine appointments, we recommend using telehealth (phone or video) for your scheduled appointment. You can also cancel and reschedule your appointment for a later date. But if you need care, please don't delay. We're here and can provide safe care to meet your needs.

If you have a non-urgent elective procedure scheduled, we may contact you to cancel or reschedule for a later date. **Note:** Urgent and emergent procedures will continue as scheduled.

To change your in-person appointment to a telehealth visit:

- Use [Secure Messaging](#) through My HealtheVet to send a message to your provider.
- Use the [VA appointments tool](#) to request a telehealth appointment online. (Available only for some types of health services.)

Once your provider schedules a telehealth appointment, you'll receive a VA Video Connect link (or another approved video meeting tool). [Learn more about VA Video Connect.](#)

[Learn about our requirements for cloth face coverings.](#)

What should I do if I have a community care appointment, or need a referral?

If you have a scheduled community care appointment:

Please contact your community care (non-VA) provider directly before going to your appointment. Some providers' hours or services may be affected by current CDC and local health department guidelines.

If your community care provider cancels your appointment:

Work with the provider to reschedule. We're extending VA authorizations for community care referrals during this time.

If you have concerns about rescheduling your appointment, [send a secure message](#) to your VA provider.

If you need a referral:

We'll work with you to assess your needs. We're continuing to make community care referrals. But we're prioritizing referrals for urgent or other medically necessary care.

Please remember: You need VA approval for all community care appointments, except for emergency and urgent care needs. Getting a referral depends on eligibility, type of care, and other factors. At this time, community care eligibility requirements haven't changed.

[Learn about eligibility for community care.](#)

Can I use emergency care?

If you're experiencing a life-threatening medical emergency, call 911 or go to your nearest ER.

If you have an urgent care need, please don't delay seeking care. We're

open and can provide safe care to meet your needs.

To help us protect you, other patients, and our staff, we do ask that you contact us first. You can [use secure messaging](#) or call your facility's advice nurse before going to a clinic or walk-in urgent care facility. By not using the ER for non-medical emergencies, you can help us protect you and others as well as help us address critical medical needs first during this period of COVID-19 outbreak.

Symptoms that may need emergency medical (immediate) attention include:

- Chest pain
- Numbness or tingling in your arms or on one side of your body
- Severe fever or violent vomiting
- Bleeding that doesn't stop

Symptoms that may need urgent care attention (within 24 to 48 hours) include:

- Sore throat, earache
- Sprains or strained muscles from sports or exercise
- Minor cuts and injuries

Note: For emergencies, you don't need a referral or approval from VA to go to an ER in your community (an ER that's not a VA facility).

What should I do if I need to refill my prescription?

Please request refills as soon as possible, but no later than 10 days before you run out of your current prescription. And please check that we have your current mailing address on file in [your VA.gov profile](#) so we send your prescriptions to the right address. If you need to, you can sign in to [change your address online](#).

Note: If you currently get your prescription sent to you by mail, you'll continue to receive your refill requests as normal.

You'll need to actively request your refill in one of these ways:

- **Online** with the [My HealtheVet prescription refill and tracking tool](#).
- **Through your mobile device** with our new [Rx Refill mobile app](#).
- **By phone.** Call the number on your [prescription label](#) for your VA pharmacy's automated refill line or to speak to a pharmacy representative. Be sure to have your Rx number from the prescription label and Social Security number ready.
- **By mail.** Complete the prescription refill form that came with your medication. Mail the form to the VA pharmacy address listed on your medication paperwork.

For questions about your prescriptions, [send a secure message to your health care team](#) through My HealtheVet or call your local VA medical center.

Do You Have a Mask?

via My HealtheVet



Face coverings or masks now required at all VA facilities.

All VA facilities require the use of face coverings or masks for all patients, families, staff, and volunteers. The health and safety of Veterans and the staff who care for them is and always

has been VA's top priority.

During the coronavirus pandemic, we're all trying to do our part and help stop the spread of COVID-19. Whether it's social distancing, washing our hands, or cleaning surfaces, we're trying to protect ourselves and stay

healthy.

We recommend you bring your own face covering, such as a cloth mask or scarf. This is required for all patients and families in public and administrative areas of facilities. If you don't have a face covering, ask a staff member, and they will provide you with one. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers [helpful guides](#) on making suitable masks at home for personal use.

If you have non-urgent medical concerns, schedule an appointment with your health care team through [VA Video Connect](#). This tool allows Veterans at home to meet with VA health care providers through live video on any computer, tablet, or mobile device with an Internet connection.

Four Ways to Support Your Immunity

via My HealtheVet



A weakened immune system puts your health at risk.

Germs are always trying to invade our bodies. You may think you're unprepared to fight, but your immune system keeps its troops ready. It's the body's armor against infections. But your immune system can always use reinforcing. Follow these tips to give yourself some extra support against outside forces.

Eat healthier

Food is one of our best allies when it comes to strengthening our immune systems. Food's vitamins and nutrients keep us healthy. To strengthen your army, try foods that have vitamin A, vitamin D, vitamin C, and zinc such as:

- salmon, or tuna
- dark green leafy vegetables
- citrus fruits, like oranges and grapefruits
- red meat, poultry, and nuts

If you have food restrictions or chronic conditions such as diabetes or high blood pressure, know your diet. Understanding good food choices and eating mindfully gives your body a well-balanced diet that'll help keep you protected and healthy.

Stay fit

Getting regular exercise has many benefits. It helps manage body weight, improves mental health, and builds self-esteem. Staying fit also helps our immune systems remain strong. Get your daily dose of exercise, while social distancing by:

- using water bottles or canned foods if you don't have hand weights

for strength training

- doing activities with your partner, like tennis or walking around your neighborhood
- following along to a fitness video

For more help, try the MOVE! Coach app. The mobile app has a self-management guide that teaches you about different weight-management strategies using videos, worksheets, games, and other tools.

Watch your stress

Managing stress during the COVID-19 outbreak can give your immune system the extra support it needs to keep you healthy. If you need help coping while social distancing, try these mobile tools:

Annie: these coronavirus precautions protocol text messages can help you monitor symptoms and advise you when to contact your VA health care team.

COVID Coach app: this mobile app can help you cope with stress, track your mood, and find resources.

Get your rest

One simple thing that enhances our immune systems is getting enough sleep. When we practice good sleep hygiene, our bodies release hormones that help our immune system fight against infections. Without enough sleep, we increase our risks of having high blood pressure, heart disease, and even stroke. To improve your sleep habits:

- avoid caffeine and alcohol before bed
- exercise regularly
- get rid of distractions such as noises, bright lights, and a TV or computer in the bedroom

Remember: You should always check with your health care team about making changes in your lifestyle. Sign in to My HealtheVet and send a secure message and ask about what's right for you.

Increasing support for your immune system doesn't make you immune to illnesses. Washing your hands and cleaning surfaces and then wiping them down with a disinfectant is still a simple yet effective way to stop the spread of germs.

From the Hill

Kristen McCone Gordon, Chapter Government Relations Director

It's been a busy month for government relations efforts at New England PVA. We continue to work collaboratively with both our National PVA office as well as State disability advocacy organizations throughout New England to ensure the rights of our members are protected. If you are facing any issues during this pandemic, particularly related to accessing testing, PPE, or increased Aid & Attendance rates, please let me know. You can contact me directly at kristen@newenglandpva.org or 800-660-1181 #3. By sharing your experiences and concerns, you will greatly help both our advocacy efforts and the larger New England PVA community.

We are fortunate to have a very strong congressional delegation representing New England, and I want to share a few highlights of their efforts over the past month with you:

- **Representative Chris Pappas (D-NH) introduced Legislation to Support Veterans Seeking Emergency Care During the Pandemic.** Representative Chris Pappas (D-NH) recently introduced legislation to ensure that veterans do not have to worry about seeking emergency COVID-19 care during the current public health emergency. Under current law, both veterans and community providers face bureaucratic obstacles to collecting VA payments for emergency medical care. Even if the VA agrees to reimburse the treating facility for the veteran's care, veterans may be held liable if the department does not pay the provider in a timely manner. H.R. 6591 cuts through the existing red tape by repealing requirements like the need for the veteran to have received care from the VA within the past two years. It also makes VA the primary payer, even in cases where veterans may have other health insurance like TRICARE; covers emergency ambulance transportation; and allows VA to pay for emergency care beyond the point of stabilization.
- **Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Senator Ed Markey (D-MA), Senator Jack Reed (D-RI), Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH),**

Senator Angus King (D-ME) Formally Requested that the VA Create a Nationwide Testing Program For COVID-19. In a letter to Secretary Wilkie, Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Senator Ed Markey (D-MA), Senator Jack Reed (D-RI), Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Senator Angus King (D-ME) formally requested that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) play a proactive role in supporting an expansive nationwide testing program for the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). In the letter, the Senators and their colleagues stated that "the VA should establish a national plan to facilitate testing for the veteran community and VA health care providers, as one element of the national strategic testing plan required by the Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act. As part of a larger national strategy, a VA effort focused on expansive testing is critical to achieving widespread testing across the nation."

- **Congresswoman Lori Trahan (D-MA) hosted a virtual Veteran Town Hall.** Joined by VA Boston Healthcare System Director Vincent Ng and Executive Director of Massachusetts General Home Base Program Gen. Jack Hammond (Ret.), Congresswoman Trahan hosted an informative virtual town hall focusing on relief and resources available to Massachusetts veterans. New England PVA was pleased to join and appreciates the Congresswoman's efforts in spreading awareness to the veteran community during this time.

New England PVA has thanked the above members of our delegation for their efforts, but please consider thanking them yourselves! It's important that our delegation knows we are engaged and politically active. You can find contact information for elected officials here: <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials>. Be sure to tell them you are a member of the New England Chapter, Paralyzed Veterans of America!



Arlington National Cemetery's Memorial Amphitheater celebrates 100th Anniversary

via VAntage Point



Today, Arlington National Cemetery's Memorial Amphitheater celebrates its 100th anniversary. In 1920, for the first time, the nation's Memorial Day ceremony (then known as Decoration Day) was held at the brand new Memorial Amphitheater. For a century it has served as the setting for the National Memorial Day Observance, at which the president of the United States traditionally gives a public address after laying a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

ANC will commemorate Memorial Amphitheater's centennial anniversary with its first online exhibit, available to the public on the ANC website (www.ArlingtonCemetery.mil/Memorial-Amphitheater-100) beginning on May 13, 2020.

"As Arlington National Cemetery remains closed to visitors, the online exhibit will allow the public to explore these hallowed grounds," said Karen Durham-Aguilera, Executive Director, Office of Army National Cemeteries and Arlington National Cemetery. "Virtual visitation is the centerpiece of the 100th anniversary commemoration, showcasing the resilience of the historical structure and our nation."

Featuring original photographs depicting Memorial Amphitheater's construction and evolution during the past century, along with interpretive text and a video, the exhibit will narrate the story of the building's origins, design and ongoing preservation. Through the story of the Amphitheater, the exhibit explains how Americans have honored and remembered military service and sacrifice, from 1920 through today.

Historian Dr. Benjamin Brands provides an audio lecture, and his report for the Historic American Buildings Survey, "Arlington National Cemetery: Memorial Amphitheater and Tomb of the Unknowns," is available free-of-charge as a downloadable PDF.

"The exhibit will appeal to anyone interested in American history, architecture or the military's changing role in society, from international tourists to those within the national capital region who are currently unable to explore Arlington National Cemetery in person," stated Ray Alexander, Superintendent, Arlington National Cemetery.

When construction on Memorial Amphitheater began in 1915, a memorabilia box was placed in its cornerstone. Untouched for over a century, this "time capsule" was recently removed and carefully opened by ANC experts, including a historian, a conservator, and a facilities maintenance staff. The copper box contained designs and plans for the Amphitheater; one of each U.S. coin and postage stamp in use in 1915; an autographed photo of President Woodrow Wilson; a map of Pierre Charles L'Enfant's design for Washington, D.C.; a U.S. flag; copies of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and a Bible; and other documents pertaining to the history of the Amphitheater and the nation's capital. In 2020, ANC plans to install a new time capsule to be opened in 100 years, continuing the tradition of commemoration and preservation for generations to come.

The ANC historian who unveiled the time capsule discovered that his great-grandfather's name was listed in The Boyd's City Directory, included in the contents. Connecting the past and the present, the historian wrote an accompanying blog post, "Memorial Amphitheater's 100 Years of History: A Firsthand Look," to share the personal and professional impacts of this coincidence.

Arlington National Cemetery's virtual visitation initiative extends its mission to honor, remember and explore. The online exhibit uncovers the origins of Memorial Amphitheater, its design and construction, the ceremonies and events held there, and the work that ANC has undertaken, and will continue to execute, in order to preserve this hallowed building for the next 100 years.

Combating Feelings of Isolation and Loneliness During COVID-19

via pva.org

Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) wants our veterans and their caregivers to overcome loneliness during this time of social distancing.

While sheltering in place helps us stop the spread of COVID-19, the decreased social engagement and lessening of medical visits can lead to feelings of helplessness, isolation, and loneliness. For those living with mental health issues and chronic diseases, we may see a worsening of symptoms. There are things we can do to take care of ourselves and help #BeThere for others. If you are able, try to spend a little time outdoors each day, even if just for a few minutes on your front porch, as there are many benefits to being outside. Keep your mind occupied and take a break from the news by working on free coursework, listening to audiobooks, watching virtual concerts, plays, & tours of museums, or calling

or writing friends and loved ones. Don't have Internet access? For the next two months, Comcast is providing free Internet service for disabled veterans.

If you do find yourself struggling with increased anxiety, depression or other psychological symptoms, you can call or text mental health professionals at Psychological Health Center of Excellence Psychological Recourse Center, call or chat with peers at Veterans 4 Warriors, or use some of the self-help strategies at Make the Connection. If you need help right away, we encourage you to call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255, and press "1" if you are a veteran, texting 838255, or chatting via their <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/hotline>.

Spaulding Adaptive Sports is Going VIRTUAL!

via Mary K. Patstone, Executive Director, Spaulding Adaptive Sports Centers



SPAULDING™
ADAPTIVE SPORTS CENTERS

Spaulding Adaptive Sports is going VIRTUAL!

Dear Adaptive Sports Community Members,

During this time of great uncertainty and social distancing, it is more important than ever to stay connected and be mindful of our wellness while we navigate rough waters. We need to stay close to one another – we need our community.

With this in mind, Spaulding Adaptive Sport Centers will be moving to an all virtual platform for our programming through the end of May. Starting next week, we will be offering individual, group and social program opportunities. We will begin small and grow the opportunities as we develop additional curriculum choices.

These programs will be offered to our community free of charge and our clinicians and adaptive sports professionals will be utilizing the Zoom virtual platform from the safety of their own homes keeping us connected while respecting the bounds of social distancing.

Please consider joining us in our virtual community. The Zoom platform

can be utilized from your smart phone, a tablet, laptop or standard home workstation. If you need assistance setting up Zoom, our staff will happily help you go through the steps for installation.

Connie Blake will continue to manage appointments through our website <https://sasc.spauldingrehab.org/> and she will be available on our standard registration line at 877-976-7272.

If you are not a current member of the SASC community, but want to participate, please go to our website and create an account for yourself. Once completed, you will be able to sign up through the calendar portal.

We are a strong, vibrant community and the whole SASC team is very excited to see you all online very soon!

Wishing you all health and wellness today and in the weeks to come.

Registration for virtual programming will open on Monday, March 23rd.

Programs will be free of charge through May.

Sincerely,

Mary K. Patstone

Executive Director, Spaulding Adaptive Sports Centers

Getting Paralyzed Veterans Walking Again with Indego®

New VA Program offers eligible veterans an Indego® Exoskeleton at no cost.



What is Indego?

A robotic device that enables veterans to walk again.

Indego is an FDA-approved exoskeleton worn around the waist and legs that enables individuals paralyzed from spinal cord injuries to stand and walk, offering a new level of independence.

Indego can currently be used with spinal cord injury levels of T3 to L5 in community or home settings. The device offers:

- Lightweight, modular design
- Slim profile compatible with most wheelchairs
- Rapid setup and breakdown for easy transportation
- Can be used with forearm crutches or walker



Contact us today to find out if you are eligible to receive an Indego exoskeleton

Email: support.indego@parker.com

Phone: 844-846-3346



PVA WASHINGTON UPDATE

PVA Washington Update Volume 26, Number 9

PVA Provisions on Aid and Attendance Included in Latest COVID Response Package

On May 12, House Democrats released an 1800-page, \$3 trillion package to further address the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The “Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions Act” or “HEROES Act” (H.R. 6800) includes several provisions that address the needs of veterans and people with disabilities. Although the House is set to vote on the bill on May 15, the bill is primarily a messaging bill from the House majority of items that they would like included in the next pandemic response bill.

Included in the legislation was a PVA proposal to temporarily raise rates of VA Special Monthly Compensation (SMC)/Aid and Attendance (A&A) benefits to offset higher home care costs being reported by some members due to the pandemic. Increased costs are being reported due to providers’ expenses related to the provision of personal protective equipment such as gloves and masks or having to replace an aide on short notice. If Congress includes this provision in a final package, rates for A&A could be temporarily increased by as much as 25 percent to help veterans alleviate these costs.

Other provisions in the bill include VA debt collection relief, extension of deadlines for VA claims and appeals, and streamlined VA payments to community providers for emergency care claims during the pandemic. The legislation would also provide additional stimulus checks and make dependents 17 and older eligible.

Certain VA employees would become eligible for hazard pay due to caring for COVID-19 patients. VA health care providers would also be assured access to paid sick leave if they are exposed to or are diagnosed with the virus.

The legislation also includes several provisions of interest to the broader disability community:

- Section 811 “Housing for Persons with Disabilities”—\$200 million would be provided to maintain operations for such housing, for providing supportive services, and for taking other necessary actions to prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus,

including actions to self-isolate, quarantine, or to provide other coronavirus infection control services as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

- Home and Community Based Services—Medicaid would receive increased federal support and the Secretary for Health and Human Services (HHS) would be directed to evaluate the implementation and outcomes of these services.
- Testing Strategies—HHS would have to update the COVID-19 strategic testing strategy identifying ways in which social distancing efforts, when determined appropriate by public health officials, can be undertaken in a manner that optimizes the health and safety of people and reduces disparities (including disparities related to race, ethnicity, sex, age, disability status, socioeconomic status, and geographic location) in the prevalence of, incidence of, and health outcomes with respect to, COVID-19. Such strategy must include specific plans to ensure accessibility of testing to people with disabilities, older individuals, and individuals with underlying health conditions or weakened immune systems.
- Data Collection—CDC would award grants to state, local, and territorial health departments to support the modernization of data collection methods to increase data related to health inequities, such as racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, sex, gender, and disability disparities.
- Emergency Leave—leave provisions contained in the previously passage COVID-19 package would be extended to caregivers of seniors or adults with disabilities.
- Voting Accessibility—states would be directed to ensure that all absentee ballots and related voting materials in elections for federal office are accessible to individuals with disabilities in a manner that provides the same opportunity for access and participation (including with privacy and independence) as for other voters.

Second Bill Passed to Protect Users of GI Bill Benefits During the COVID-19 Pandemic

At the end of April, H.R. 6322, the “Student Veteran Coronavirus Response Act of 2020,” was signed into law. It strengthens legislation passed in March to ensure student veterans will not see a reduction in their monthly housing allowance because of their schools moving to online instruction due to COVID-19. H.R. 6322 protects work-study allowances, vocational rehabilitation, and GI Bill housing allowance payments in the event of sudden school closures for student veterans and preserves

eligibility for students who cannot transition to an online curriculum for the next semester. It also stops the eligibility clock for student veterans and eligible dependents impacted by school closures during emergency situations by allowing VA to extend – by the same amount of time that a student was prevented from attending school due to an emergency – the “use or lose” date for VA education benefits.

COVID-19 Financial Resilience Center Launched

The National Disability Institute has set up a Financial Resilience Center to assist people with disabilities and their families in finding information about programs and resources to help people navigate the economic upheaval brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. Materials include

information on stimulus payments, unemployment information, tips for money management, and warnings against scams. <https://www.nationaldisabilityinstitute.org/financial-resilience-center/resources/>

PVA Responds to Proposed Rule on VA Caregiver Program

In early March, VA published a proposed rule that would amend and improve VA's comprehensive family caregiver program. In our May 5 response to the proposed rule, PVA applauded VA's proposal to expand the definition of "serious injury" to include serious illnesses but disagreed with VA's plan to redefine "serious injury" to mean any single or combined VA service-connected disability rated at 70 percent or more. This change alone would bounce nearly a third of the current participants out of the program. Other concerns PVA raised are as follows:

- Requiring personal care services to be provided daily, and every time an eligible veteran completes one or more of seven commonly identified activities of daily living. We have concerns about requiring such dependence on a caregiver.
- Requiring in-person personal care services from another person, and without such personal care services, other in-person caregiving arrangements (including respite care or the assistance of a different caregiver) would be required to support the eligible veteran's safety. Such a requirement is a major change from how the current program has functioned.
- Revoking caregivers from the program because VA made an error in determining the caregiver's eligibility. Neither the veteran nor the caregiver should bear the burden for VA's own errors.
- Requiring reassessment for veterans and family caregivers annually to determine their continued eligibility for participation in the program. For most of our members, their conditions will never

improve making the annual assessment unnecessary and certainly not a wise use of tax dollars. We recommended VA add a list of serious injuries that do not warrant continued reassessment for purposes of eligibility.

We were also concerned about the absence of language stating that being employed does not exclude either the veteran or the family caregiver from this program. VA routinely states that employment is not used as an exclusionary criterion, but PVA has documented several cases where our members were discharged from the program—by VA error—simply because they were employed.

The lack of a defined appeals process in the current caregiver program has led to inconsistencies in eligibility. We were disappointed that rather than addressing the appeals process in the proposed regulations, VA has chosen to address it through policy. This denies veterans, their caregivers, and other stakeholders an opportunity to provide comment on it.

Many of these same concerns were noted by the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee and other military and veterans service organizations. VA must now consider all comments and recommendations submitted before presenting its final proposal to the Office of Management and Budget. If all goes well, VA will look upon our comments favorably when drafting the final rule. We understand that VA is still planning to launch the expanded program in late summer/early fall.

AAE Proposed Rule Comments Filed

On May 8, PVA filed comments in response to VA's proposed rule about the allowance for automobile adaptive equipment. While we are hopeful that the proposed regulations will provide clarity to veterans, as well as to dealers and modifiers, we also have some areas of concern that we addressed in our comments. For individual veterans, we want to ensure that the policy changes have clear and accessible instructions and rules, so veterans understand what is available to them and how to be reimbursed; that full reimbursement occurs for all Schedule equipment (including power steering) on the vehicle whether itemized on a window

sticker or invoice or not; that the VA set clear rules for eligibility for repairs and emergency services; and choice of vendor. Our broader concerns include how the Schedule for reimbursement will be managed and updated; how VA will handle veterans who prefer to work with a provider that is not on the list of registered providers for reasons such as having a long relationship with a vendor or geographic convenience; and how VA is effectively reducing the value to a veteran through depreciation, since the proposed five-year standard is a stark departure from current practice.

Update on Legislation to Improve SAH

As previously reported, H.R. 3504, the Ryan Kules and Paul Benne Specially Adaptive Housing Improvement Act of 2019, cleared the Senate in late March and is awaiting final consideration by the House. Unfortunately, the House is not currently moving legislation that is not directly related

to the pandemic or ongoing relief efforts. Thus, the bill is on hold for now, but it has been placed on a list for possible consideration under the chamber's unanimous consent rule. We hope the House will expedite its passage once they begin to address non-COVID-19 legislation.

Update on PVA COVID-19 Response

On May 6, PVA National hosted a webinar for PVA members about the response of VA's SCI/D System of Care to the coronavirus pandemic. Dr. I. Manosha Wickremasinghe, MD, Executive Director, VA SCI/D System of Care, provided updates on health care issues important to veterans with

spinal cord injury or disease and answered questions from PVA members. The webinar recording is available on PVA's COVID-19 response page. Please visit the page regularly for updates focused on the needs of PVA members during the pandemic: <https://pva.org/covid-19/>.

Connect With What Matters



Being there makes a difference

Recently the Ride-Away team joined forces with MobilityWorks so that we could provide our veterans with the largest selection of mobility solutions that best fit their physical capabilities and lifestyle. Veterans have unique needs so we treat each of them as individuals. First of all, we listen. Then, we work together find the best solution. Collectively, Ride-Away and MobilityWorks will continue to build on our mission to help veterans connect with who and what matters most.

MobilityWorks has more than 50 locations across the country with the largest selection of accessible vehicles and adaptive solutions:

- Minivans, full-size vans and trucks
- The latest in adaptive technology
- Complete maintenance and service
- Rental vans — veterans receive a 10% discount

MobilityWorks is committed to serving you. Contact us today so we can evaluate your needs and find a solution that best fits your lifestyle.



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781-222-3622

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WANT TO HELP IMPROVE HEALTH SERVICES FOR VETERANS WITH SPINAL CORD INJURY OR DISABILITIES?



Researchers at the University of Washington are conducting a study to evaluate how health services and supports contribute to *improved quality of life* for Service Members and Veterans with spinal cord injury (SCI/D). We are focusing on services provided by the Military Health System (MHS) and Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and hope to identify barriers and areas of health service improvement for SCI/D patients from the point of injury through reintegration within the community.

Can you participate?

YES, if you are a:

- **Service Member or Veteran** who suffered a spinal cord injury (SCI/D) on active duty after 9/11, with no known traumatic brain injury or cognitive impairment
- **Caregiver** of a Service Member or Veteran with SCI/D, as outlined above
- **Health Care Provider, Health Care Staff, or Community Partner** who treats or supports Service Members and Veterans with SCI/D
- **Patient Administrator or Staff** who provides care coordination between the MHS and VHA or civilian health care organizations

Participation

involves:

- One 60-minute phone interview about your experiences within the MHS and/or VHA
- Interviews are scheduled at a time that is convenient to you
- **Veterans and caregivers** can be compensated for their time

Questions?

Contact Dr. Suzanne Wood at:

scieval@uw.edu

or

(206) 616-2947

NEPVA Bass Trail Upcoming Tournaments

...



The Massachusetts Bass Federation met and decided to cancel the June 6th Charles River Bass Tournament.

The following NEPVA Bass Trail tournaments are **still currently scheduled**:

Sept. 11-13 Lake Winnepesaukee at Camp Robindel, Moultonborough, NH

Oct 2-4 North Pond at Pine Tree Camp Rome, Maine

For more information about the Bass Trail or any other sports activities and events, call Mike Guilbault at 800-660-1181 #5 or email at rollingilbo@newenglandpva.org.

PVA Sports - Virtual Spin Sessions via Zoom



VIRTUAL SPIN SESSIONS

Join us!
zoom.us/join

Mon & Fri, 5-7 PM EST:

Meeting ID: 860-6279-7962

Tues & Thurs, 9-11 AM EST:

Meeting ID: 852-9800-1714

Weds & Sat, 12-2 PM EST:

Meeting ID: 840-3436-4148

To sign up, email:
handcycling@pva.org



Paralyzed Veterans of America
New England Chapter
1208 VFW Parkway, Suite 301
West Roxbury, MA 02132

T 800-660-1181
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info@newenglandpva.org
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