



**Paralyzed Veterans
of America**

New England Chapter

CORDWORD

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

ADA 30



Americans with Disabilities Act

Celebrate the ADA! July 26, 2020

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WHAT IS THE ADA?



AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

The ADA celebrates 30 Years this Month!

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became law in 1990. The ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public. The purpose of the law is to make sure that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. The ADA gives civil...*continued on page 7.*

MOBILE CHECK-INS



VEText Offers Mobile Check-In for Appointments.

VA Boston Healthcare System is gradually lifting COVID-19 restrictions to include scheduling of select elective procedures and in-person appointments.

For the safety of all, we are conducting mandatory health screenings by phone and upon check-in and require all to wear a nose and mouth face*continued on page 11.*

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PROGRAM DIRECTORS

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CordWord is the New England Chapter, Paralyzed Veterans of America's (New England PVA) monthly magazine that covers news, health, research, lifestyle and issues of interest and concern to Veterans and others with spinal cord injury and disease. Anyone interested in submitting an article to *CordWord* should email media@newenglandpva.org. The assertions and opinions expressed in articles and announcements in *CordWord* reflect the views of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the New England PVA. New England PVA can in no way whatsoever be held responsible for the content of such views nor can it be held liable for any direct or indirect damage that may arise from such views.

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Out Front

Michael G. Negrete, Chapter President

July 26, 2020 marks the 30th Anniversary of President George H.W. Bush signing into law the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA) were created to ensure a more inclusive America by providing civil rights protections to individuals with disabilities similar to those provided to individuals on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age, and religion. The ADA and ADAAA also assure equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities for access to businesses, employment, transportation, state and local government programs and services, and electronic technologies.

This landmark legislation provided a new freedom for people with disabilities. The freedom to work, the freedom to participate in all aspects of our society, and simply the freedom to achieve one's own personal independence! Even though 30 years might seem like a long time to have been in place, there's still so much more work to be done. Even with the support of the ADA, there are daily battles we fight on your behalf to maintain these rights, your freedom and your independence. As I've said before, I can't imagine navigating and living in a society where my access as a person didn't exist. Having to endure the indignant and discriminatory treatment as a second-class citizen had to be nearly unbearable. We should be thankful to those who laid the road to success for us all those years ago. It's because of their sufferings and persistent efforts, that has made our journeys today that much easier.

Closer to home, we are still raising our voice to address the discriminatory language and treatment of those with underlying disabilities in Massachusetts' Critical Standards of Care policies. Earlier this month, I wrote a letter on behalf of the Chapter membership directly to Marylou Sudders, Massachusetts' Secretary Health and Human Services, which included several testimonial statements written by Chapter members. It is vitally important to remind policymakers that the decisions they make affect real people, and so it's important that they hear directly from those people - YOU. Nothing is more powerful and humanizing than hearing directly from those that will be directly affected. The good news is, through these efforts, we've been able to make a positive impact by having some of the policies revised in favor of our positions on them. If you're interested in a copy of the letter and the testimonials, as well as learning about our government relations efforts, please get in touch with our Government Relations Director Kristen McCone Gordon. Kristen would be more than glad to hear from you, both to share what she has working on AND listen to what you have to say.

At the end of June we held our Annual Membership meeting via teleconference. Although we mailed out over 800 postcards directly to members throughout New England, there unfortunately was only a very small turn out. A key decision made at this meeting was to postpone the Chapter elections until June 2021. This was primarily because of State and local COVID restrictions preventing the Election Committee from meeting, and also in an effort to maintain the current balance and forward momentum of the Chapter as we navigate through these unprecedented times. The hope is by next June the conditions will exist which will allow us to properly execute the election policies set forth by PVA. For updates on this and our overall Office Re-opening plans, please keep your eye here on the newsletter, as well as, the Chapter website.

We have had several members respond to the Chapter's COVID Member Relief Grant. The Board and I are extremely proud of the fact that the Chapter is in the financial position to be able to help our members in their time of need. If you, or another member you know, is in need of financial assistance to meet your essential living needs with food insecurity, medical supplies, utilities, or transportation needs, for example, please contact Executive Director Mark Murphy. There is also detailed grant information on the Chapter website at www.newenglandpva.org. We are here to help our brothers and sisters in arms however we can.

Finally, let me leave you with a quote from author and speaker Leo Buscaglia - "Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around." As you journey through your day, week, life, know that the smallest of gestures may have an unknown impact on someone along the way.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael G. Negrete". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Michael G. Negrete
Chapter President/PVA National Director
and Paralyzed Veteran

From the Director's Desk

Mark Murphy, Chapter Executive Director

Even though we have moved into Phase 3 of the Massachusetts re-open plan, COVID-19 still looms large over many of the day to day efforts and work of the Chapter. Serving our members and ensuring your health care needs are provided for is always on the forefront of the thoughts and conversations of our Board and staff. In that vein, Chapter President Michael Negrete and I have been continually updating our Chapter office re-opening plan as more data and information becomes available, so that when we are able to re-open the office we can do it safely and responsibly. Additionally, our COVID-19 Relief Member Grant Program is still open, and we are reviewing applications as they come in and approving them when appropriate. A postcard has been sent to members with information on this program and how to apply. Also, I recently ordered hundreds of cotton reusable face masks and neck gaiters/bandanas branded with the New England PVA logo. My plan is to distribute some of the masks to the West Roxbury VA and building 8 in Brockton. If members are interested in receiving a mask, we will let you know the process to request one and will ship it out to you.



On June 30th I was happy to virtually attend the New England PVA Annual Membership Meeting. Because this was my first membership meeting since coming on staff as Executive Director, I introduced myself and shared a little bit about my military and civilian work background. I also highlighted several developments that have occurred in my work on the staff over the past several months, including the following:

1. We have received \$55,000 in grants over the last 3 months from foundations in 4 out of the 6 New England States
2. On #GivingTuesday in early May we happily raised over \$1,000
3. With the temporary closing of our Chapter office in March due to COVID-19, we have developed a detailed Chapter office re-open plan
4. Back in February we hired a new, experienced, and gifted Government Relations Director, Kristen McCone Gordon
5. Development of our COVID-19 Member Relief Grant Program and process
6. I participated in the PVA Annual Convention at the end of May, in addition to multiple PVA related webinars over the past several months

In writing my report for the Annual Membership Meeting I was afforded the opportunity to reflect on the many positive things that have occurred over the past several months, while also recognizing the challenges we have faced as an organization because of the pandemic and the circumstances surrounding it. While this has certainly been a difficult year, I believe we have many reasons to hope, because even in the face of all these challenges the state of our Chapter is still very strong.

Finally, in these “dog days of summer” I hope you will be able to find some time for rest, relaxation, and reflection, as it will be Labor Day before we know it!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Murphy".

Mark Murphy
Executive Director



From the Hill

Kristen McCone Gordon, Chapter Government Relations Director

As our country continues to move through this increasingly difficult time, I've been making a point to look at the world through a more positive lens and emphasize the good around me. In that vein, the past month has been full of productivity, growth, and learning. Our Chapter's government relations efforts are expanding and increasingly making an impact.

We continue to join our colleagues in the disability advocacy community across New England to ensure that your rights, which you have sacrificed so much for, are protected and valued. As you are aware, our Chapter has been very vocal in advocating for clear anti-discriminatory language in the Crisis Standards of Care guidance documents being developed, and in some places activated, throughout the country. This month, we've continued our advocacy with a formal letter written by Chapter President Michael Negrete to Massachusetts Secretary of Health and Human Services Marylou Sudders. This letter not only articulated our concerns, but also included incredibly powerful testimonials from Chapter members Dr. Samuel Jay Keyser, Mike Guilbault, Peter Falcione, and Executive Director Mark Murphy. I also represented the Chapter on a call with the Secretary, and remain hopeful that she will be receptive to the concerns that were raised by our coalition as the state considers revisions to the current guidance.

Our relationships within the New England Congressional Delegation also continue to grow. Staff members are interested in hearing from us and receptive to the concerns that I'm raising on your behalf. I will continue to schedule briefings with Congressional district offices, to ensure that our Representatives in Washington are aware of the challenges you are facing, your concerns during this pandemic and beyond, and the strength of our organization as a whole.

Perhaps the most encouraging sign of progress, however, is the significant increase in membership engagement. Over the course of the past month, I'm been extremely fortunate to have many conversations with NEPVA members. Through these conversations, I've learned more about your

service and the history of our military. I've learned more about your injuries, and how you have persevered despite chilling prognoses and physical and mental challenges. I've learned more about your concerns with COVID-19 and also your faith in the VA system of care.

I've also learned more about your perspectives on our legislative priorities. I thank all of you who have already contacted your Representative through the [VoterVoice](#) email system regarding H.R. 3504, the Ryan Kules and Paul Benne Specially Adaptive Housing Improvement Act. I am so pleased to report that nine members of the New England Delegation have since signed onto the bill. Your advocacy is working! For those of you who haven't yet had a chance to try out the [VoterVoice](#) system, there is still time and we need your support. Please visit: <https://www.votervoicenet/PVA/campaigns/75359/respond> and make your voice heard.

I am also grateful to those of you who have reached out to me to share concerns that the housing legislation doesn't go far enough. As a direct result of your advocacy, National PVA is looking at policy changes to assist veterans with non-service-connected injuries with access to housing adaptation assistance. To help build a case, our colleagues at National are looking for more stories of how this issue has impacted members. If you would be willing to speak with national about your experiences, please let me know.

Last but not least, in large part due to the direct advocacy of former National Director Neal Williams, Senator Susan Collins has introduced Senate companion legislation to one of PVA's legislative priorities, H.R. 5761, the Advancing Uniform Transportation Opportunities for Veterans Act. Our colleagues at National are currently working with Congressional offices on moving this legislation and will be letting Chapters know the best way we can support their efforts in the coming days. Please be on the lookout for that information!

As we continue through the strangest summer I've ever lived through, I will keep trying to look for the good around me. I hope all of you do as well.

**For a copy of the President's letter and member testimonials please email me at kristen@newenglandpva.org.*



What is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?

via the ADA National Network

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became law in 1990. The ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public. The purpose of the law is to make sure that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. The ADA gives civil rights protections to individuals with disabilities similar to those provided to individuals on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age, and religion. It guarantees equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in public accommodations, employment, transportation, state and local government services, and telecommunications. The ADA is divided into five titles (or sections) that relate to different areas of public life.

In 2008, the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) was signed into law and became effective on January 1, 2009. The ADAAA made a number of significant changes to the definition of “disability.” The changes in the definition of disability in the ADAAA apply to all titles of the ADA, including Title I (employment practices of private employers with 15 or more employees, state and local governments, employment agencies, labor unions, agents of the employer and joint management labor committees); Title II (programs and activities of state and local government entities); and Title III (private entities that are considered places of public accommodation).

Title I (Employment)

Equal Employment Opportunity for Individuals with Disabilities

This title is designed to help people with disabilities access the same employment opportunities and benefits available to people without disabilities. Employers must provide reasonable accommodations to qualified applicants or employees. A reasonable accommodation is any modification or adjustment to a job or the work environment that will enable an applicant or employee with a disability to participate in the application process or to perform essential job functions.

This portion of the law is regulated and enforced by the [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#). Employers with 15 or more employees must comply with this law. The regulations for Title I define disability, establish guidelines for the reasonable accommodation process, address medical examinations and inquiries, and define “direct threat” when there is significant risk of substantial harm to the health or safety of the individual employee with a disability or others.

[More information and events related to ADA Title I \(Employment\).](#)

Title II (State and Local Government)

Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability in State and Local Government Services

Title II of the ADA prohibits discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities in all programs, activities, and services of public entities. It applies to all state and local governments, their departments and agencies, and any other instrumentalities or special purpose districts of state or local governments. It clarifies the requirements of section 504

of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, for public transportation systems that receive federal financial assistance, and extends coverage to all public entities that provide public transportation, whether or not they receive federal financial assistance. It establishes detailed standards for the operation of public transit systems, including commuter and intercity rail (e.g., AMTRAK).

This title outlines the administrative processes to be followed, including requirements for self-evaluation and planning; requirements for making reasonable modifications to policies, practices, and procedures where necessary to avoid discrimination; architectural barriers to be identified; and the need for effective communication with people with hearing, vision and speech disabilities. This title is regulated and enforced by the U.S. Department of Justice.

[More information and events related to ADA Title II \(State and Local Government\).](#)

Title III (Public Accommodations)

Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability by Public Accommodations and in Commercial Facilities

This title prohibits private places of public accommodation from discriminating against individuals with disabilities. Examples of public accommodations include privately-owned, leased or operated facilities like hotels, restaurants, retail merchants, doctor’s offices, golf courses, private schools, day care centers, health clubs, sports stadiums, movie theaters, and so on. This title sets the minimum standards for accessibility for alterations and new construction of facilities. It also requires public accommodations to remove barriers in existing buildings where it is easy to do so without much difficulty or expense. This title directs businesses to make “reasonable modifications” to their usual ways of doing things when serving people with disabilities. It also requires that they take steps necessary to communicate effectively with customers with vision, hearing, and speech disabilities. This title is regulated and enforced by the U.S. Department of Justice.

[More information and events related to ADA Title III \(Public Accommodations\).](#)

Title IV (Telecommunications)

This title requires telephone and Internet companies to provide a nationwide system of interstate and intrastate telecommunications relay services that allows individuals with hearing and speech disabilities to communicate over the telephone. This title also requires closed captioning of federally funded public service announcements. This title is regulated by the Federal Communication Commission.

[More information and events related to ADA Title IV \(Telecommunications\).](#)

Title V (Miscellaneous Provisions)

The final title contains a variety of provisions relating to the ADA as a whole, including its relationship to other laws, state immunity, its impact on insurance providers and benefits, prohibition against retaliation and coercion, illegal use of drugs, and attorney’s fees. This title also provides a list of certain conditions that are not to be considered as disabilities.

COVID-19: VA Offers Debt Relief to Veterans Through Year's End

VA Media Relations via VAntage Point



VA this month announced its commitment to extend debt relief to Veterans adversely impacted by COVID-19 to the end of 2020 by suspending certain debt collection actions.

The department recognizes Veterans and beneficiaries are still being greatly impacted by the coronavirus prompting the extension of financial relief.

“Veterans and their families should be focused on their health and safety during the pandemic,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “VA is taking action to give those with pending debts greater flexibility during these challenging times.”

VA is suspending all actions on Veteran debts under the jurisdiction of

the U.S. Treasury Department. This includes the suspension of collection action or extending repayment terms on preexisting VA debts, whichever the Veteran prefers.

For benefit debts, Veterans should contact the [VA Debt Management Center](#) at 1-800-827-0648.

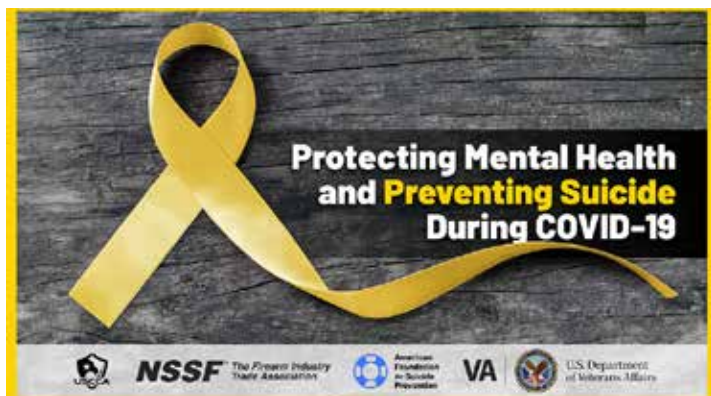
For health care debts, Veterans should contact the Health Resource Center at 1-866-400-1238 or <https://www.pay.gov> for payments.

More information

Ordinarily, Veterans, members of the Armed Forces and family members who incur debts as a result of their participation in most VA compensation, pension and education programs as well as home loans closed before January 1, 1990, would receive letters from the Debt Management Center notifying them of their rights as well as their obligation to reimburse VA.

Mental Health and Suicide Prevention during COVID-19

By Aimee Johnson via VAntage Point



[Watch](#) leaders at the United States Concealed Carry Association (USCCA), National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), and VA's suicide prevention program discuss strategies to protect your family and prevent suicide during the novel coronavirus outbreak.

This important webcast provides expert answers on topics such as:

- How VA, USCCA and NSSF are working together to help Veterans and non-Veterans with mental health challenges and prevent suicide
- How to take care of your mental health during stressful times
- Warning signs that someone may be at risk
- Ways that the firearm industry, gun owners and their families can

help

Safe storage can reduce the risk

VA respects the important role firearms play in many Veterans' lives. As a result, it is dedicated to educating Veterans, their families and communities about safe storage.

In 2017, individuals used firearms in nearly half of all U.S. suicide deaths and nearly 70% of suicides among U.S. Veterans. Safe storage can put time and space between an individual and a firearm and help keep Veterans and their loved ones safe during a suicidal crisis.

By practicing safe storage before challenging times arise, you can reduce the risk for everyone in your home.

Veterans Crisis Line

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, contact the Veterans Crisis Line to receive free, confidential support and crisis intervention available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, text to 838255, or chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat.

Reporters covering this issue can download [VA's Safe Messaging Best Practices](#) fact sheet or visit www.ReportingOnSuicide.org for important communication guidance.

Aimee Johnson is a licensed clinical social worker and program analyst in VA's Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention.

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Retired Army Sergeant Terry Vereline crosses the finish line of the 2019 New York City Marathon after walking 26.2 miles in her ReWalk Exoskeleton. She received this device in 2014 and has used it to take nearly 1,000,000 steps in the past five years.

Did You Know That Paralyzed US Veterans May be Eligible For a ReWalk Exoskeleton?

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or 508.251.1154 Option 2**

What is *Your* Mission?

Whether your goals include experiencing the proven health-related benefits of exoskeleton assisted walking, standing to hug a loved one or completing an entire marathon, ReWalk can you help you achieve them.

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COVID-19 Info Goes Mobile

via www.myhealth.va.gov



Use COVID Coach app to feel more connected

Do you want tools that can help you cope with stress, track your mood, and find resources? Maybe even help navigate staying home while social distancing, quarantined, or sheltered in place? We created COVID Coach, a mobile app that can do just that.

COVID Coach supports self-care and overall mental health during the coronavirus pandemic. We have a few tips to help you use COVID Coach.

How to use COVID Coach

COVID Coach can be used as a stand-alone education and self-care tool, or as a supplement to professional mental health care. Try out different tools to see what helps you manage stress in the moment. You can mark

your favorite coping tools to easily access them later and track your mental health as you go. Set a personal goal and track your progress toward it over time. Set reminders to visit the app each day to read an inspiring quote, practice a tool, or check your mood.

How can it help?

From your mobile device, you can use these four features of COVID Coach:

Education: Learn more about how to stay well, stay balanced, stay together, stay safe, and stay healthy. These short readings are organized by topic and include direct links to helpful activities and resources.

Tools: Manage stress by choosing from tools to help you find calm, feel grounded, or connect with others. Find activities to do by yourself, with a roommate or partner, or with children.

Trackers: Use Mood Check to set a goal for yourself or to track your well-being, anxiety, mood, or PTSD symptoms. View your progress over time with detailed graphs for each assessment.

Resources: Access additional resources for support during this challenging time. The app includes quick links to crisis resources, mental health treatment locators, public benefits, and more.

Remember that COVID Coach is not intended to replace professional care related to COVID-19 or mental health conditions, such as PTSD.

Note: This app is available on the App Store for [iPhone and iPad](#) and at [Google Play for Android devices](#).

Do You Have a Mask?

via www.myhealth.va.gov



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.



VEText Offers Mobile Check-In for Appointments

By Pallas Wahl, Public Affairs Officer Boston VA Health Care System



VA Boston Healthcare System is gradually lifting COVID-19 restrictions to include scheduling of select elective procedures and in-person appointments.

For the safety of all, we are conducting mandatory health screenings by phone and upon check-in and require all to wear a nose and mouth face covering. If you have a health condition that does not allow you to wear a face covering, please notify your care team ahead of your appointment so alternative arrangements can be made for you.

Beginning July 13, 2020, we are introducing a new check-in feature called **VEText, mobile check-in**. This new feature allows you to notify your care

team when you arrive at the facility from the safety of your vehicle. You will need to have a scheduled appointment to use **VEText**.

To use this feature, you must have a text-capable cell phone number on file with us. If you are unsure if we have a number on file, please contact your care team or you can verify that information when you are contacted to schedule an appointment. The number you text from must be the same number in your file. If you do not have a text-capable cell phone, you can proceed to the entrance and our screeners will assist you.

The process is simple!

Once you arrive on campus, send a text message stating “**HERE**” to **53079**. This will alert your care team you are at the facility waiting to be called to your appointment.

You will receive a text acknowledging your check-in status.

When your care team is prepared for you, you will receive a text instructing you to proceed to your appointment.

Safety is our primary concern, for you and for our dedicated staff. Using this mobile check-in feature minimizes the amount of people in the building and the waiting areas and reduces risk associated with COVID.

National Veterans Wheelchair Games at Home

via James J. Peters VA Medical Center



National Veterans Wheelchair Games at Home with Air Force Veteran Kenneth Hernandez

This past week, the first-ever National Veterans Wheelchair Games at Home (NVWGatHOME), was held. In partnership with Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), the national team worked with adaptive sports professionals, VA clinicians and staff to bring an exciting week of competitive sports for wheelchair athletes to complete at home.

The mission of the National Veterans Wheelchair Games is to empower Veterans to be active, independent and engaged in sports, fitness and recreation throughout the year, not just one week of the summer. Each of the NVWG at HOME events represent sports Veterans can do within the stay at home and social distancing guidelines. Most importantly, the events chosen represent the NVWG element and new and emerging sports for disabled Veterans.

Air Force Veteran, Kenneth Hernandez, represented the James J. Peters VA Medical Center in the competition. Here's an [Instagram clip of Kenneth training with ball slam burpees](#) as he prepares for the Cascade Cup, an adaptive fitness challenge. More than 125 Veterans from across the country competed in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games at HOME. From adaptive gaming, adaptive fitness, cycling, disc golf and more, the virtual competition is supporting the fitness, sport and healthy engagement of our Veterans and inspiring the rest of the community to get engaged.

Congratulations to Kenneth and all the athletes for their dedication and determination to conquer this year's events. Well done!

PVA WASHINGTON UPDATE

PVA Washington Update Volume 26, Number 13

Update on Specially Adaptive Housing Legislation (H.R. 3504)

The Senate amended and approved in late March H.R. 3504, which increases the amount of the Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) grant to better match current construction costs, establishes a supplementary grant for veterans who need it, and allows veterans more opportunities to draw from the grant funds to accommodate moving and life changes. PVA has been working aggressively to get the House to advance this bill

to the President. Our sources tell us the constant pressure is showing results. Through our new grassroots system, VoterVoice, you can send a pre-drafted letter on this subject directly to your U.S Representative. If you have not contacted your representative, please click [HERE](#).

PVA Participates in Hearing on Reproductive Care

On July 1, PVA [testified](#) at a House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health hearing titled, "Veterans' Access to Reproductive Health Care.: The oral testimony included permanent authorization of in vitro fertilization services; inclusion of surrogacy and gamete donation to assistive reproductive technologies provided by VA; and the importance of asking about sexual health, incontinence, and other topics to veterans with

spinal cord injuries or disorders (SCI/D). Our written comments included the need for more research on reproductive health among veterans with SCI/D. Of note, during the hearing, Rep. Michael Levin (D-CA) mentioned a recently introduced infrastructure bill and asked witnesses if issues of physical accessibility of services were widespread.

VA Funding Bill Clears Key Committee

The House Appropriations Committee recently approved its version of the [fiscal year \(FY\) 2021 Military Construction, Department of Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies \(MILCON/VA\) spending bill](#) by a vote of 30-20 on July 9. The draft measure provides \$250.9 billion in both discretionary and mandatory funding that includes an extra \$12.5 billion in emergency spending to cover increasing costs of health care through VA's Community Care Network.

Roughly \$90 billion of the bill goes directly toward veterans' medical care: \$10.3 billion of that amount would be provided for mental health care, including \$313 million for suicide prevention outreach; \$661 million would go toward the specific health care needs of women veterans; and \$840 million would go toward Medical and Prosthetic Research. The latter figure would be an increase of \$40 million above the 2020 enacted levels

but is \$20 million less than what the Independent Budget recommended. The bill also provides \$2.6 billion for VA to continue developing its new Electronic Health Record System as well as continued oversight of the project by the Government Accountability Office.

The Committee allocated roughly \$1.4 billion for VA's major construction projects and \$400 million for minor ones. Another \$3.2 billion was set aside to cover the operating expenses of the Veterans Benefit Administration to ensure the prompt processing of disability claims. Finally, the bill provides advance appropriations for FY 2022 of \$145.3 billion for VA's benefit programs and \$94.2 billion for veterans' medical programs.

Action on this legislation could take place in the House prior to the August recess.

Prosthetic Benefit Applications

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, VA is recommending that all prosthetic benefit applications (Clothing Allowance, Home Improvement and Structural Alterations, and Automobile Adaptive Equipment) be submitted to the local facility by email, fax, or regular mail. At this time, in-person submission or dropping off applications is not recommended.

For clothing allowance applications, the submission deadline is August 1; however, if veterans have extenuating circumstances (such as lack of resources; lack of access to email, fax, or mail; hospitalization) applications should still be submitted by fax, email, or regular mail to their local Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service and will be accepted for an entitlement decision after August 1. However, we cannot stress

enough the importance of timely submission of applications as clothing allowance applications are currently being accepted and processed. VA tells us payments for applications processed on or before August 1 will be released by the Veterans Benefits Administration between September 1-October 31. If you have any questions about your eligibility and/or applying for prosthetic benefits, or any other VA benefit, contact your PVA national service officer for assistance.

PVA'S ADA 30 Webinar

In honor of the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), PVA will host a webinar exploring PVA's role in the passage of the ADA, ongoing advocacy efforts to remove barriers, and new accessibility frontiers. We will also have a panel of PVA members who will share their ADA experiences. This webinar will be recorded.

When: July 23, 2020 02:00 PM ET

Topic: ADA 30: Celebrating Access, Highlighting Remaining Barriers

Register in advance for this webinar: https://pva.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_KpV4UdkkQ-yyKUI55VASlg

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

Senate Version of Auto Act Introduced

On July 2, Senators Susan Collins (R-ME) and Joe Manchin (D-WV) introduced S. 4155, which would allow qualified service-connected disabled veterans to receive a grant every ten years towards the purchase of a new vehicle. This legislation is a companion bill to H.R. 5761, which was introduced in the House by Representatives Dan Meuser (R-PA) and

Anthony Brindisi (D-NY) in February. Senator Collins' [press release](#) on the bill can be found here; and the video of her floor speech, mentioning PVA member Neal Williams, as she introduced the measure [here](#).

Hearing on Recruitment, Retention and Building a Resilient Veterans Health Care Workforce

On July 1, the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a hearing on Recruitment, Retention and Building a Resilient Veterans Health Care Workforce. Dr. Steven L. Lieberman, M.D., Acting Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health, Veterans Health Administration (VHA) was the key witness.

According to Dr. Lieberman, during the COVID-19 pandemic, VHA has hired new staff and redistributed current staff across the system to areas of greatest need. Between March 29 and mid-June 2020, VHA hired more than 20,000 employees including over 3,800 RNs, 250 Nurse Practitioners, and more than 1,000 Nursing Assistants. Approximately 85 percent of the

new hires have been hired on as permanent appointments. VA also has the option to convert some of the remaining 15 percent of new hires to permanent positions.

The hiring surge resulted in a net onboard increase of 2.2 percent since the start of fiscal year (FY) 2020 (8,020 net gain), more than half of which occurred since the COVID-19 hiring surge began (4,900 net gain). Nurses have grown at even higher rate of 2.7 percent since the start of FY 2020 (2,820 net gain).

Access Board Virtual Celebration July 29th

The Access Board will conduct a virtual meeting on July 29 from 1:30 – 3:00 pm ET to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the signing of the ADA into law. The event, which will be open to the public, will focus on how the ADA has reshaped the American landscape and the design of facilities and sites, transportation systems, and information and communication technologies. Guest speakers and Board representatives will recall what

our world was like before the ADA, review achievements under the ADA in advancing accessible design, and look ahead to new accessibility frontiers, challenges, and solutions over the next 30 years. The Board will provide further details on this event and how to attend on its [website](#) and by email.

Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Celebration

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities [invites](#) you to a briefing celebrating the 30th anniversary of the ADA on July 23 from 11:00 am -- 12:00 pm ET. Panelists will discuss key issues that remain of significant concern for the disability community 30 years after the ADA's passage, and offer thoughts on what the future holds for ADA implementation in these areas. The briefing focuses on the intersection of disability and racial equity, and the aim of ensuring that the ADA's goals of full

participation, equal opportunity, independent living and economic self-sufficiency can become a reality for all people with disabilities including Black, Indigenous and People of Color.



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VA Supports Whole Health for Women Veterans

Story and photo by the VA Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation.



What matters most to you? On the pathway to Whole Health, this is the defining question. Whole Health is about treating you, the person. We want to consider the big picture of your life, not just one symptom or challenge.

That's why we're encouraging women Veterans to ask themselves this question and take the first step in making health a priority. VA helps women take control of their health and build positive habits for life. By identifying what's important, you can choose care that fits with your health and well-being priorities.

You don't have to wait until something is wrong to focus on your well-being. Just ask Patty. After 28 years in the Air National Guard, Patty describes transitioning to civilian life and starting a new job at a VA medical center as "a little scary" and "anxiety provoking."

"This is really an awesome benefit"

Then she learned about Whole Health. Even though she wasn't experiencing any big health issues, she attended a Whole Health peer-led group. During a follow-up call, a Whole Health coach strongly encouraged her to meet with a provider.

"I thought, well, I'm going to get someone who isn't familiar with what I was going to want in the civilian sector." But to her surprise, "They were fantastic. This is really an awesome benefit for all Veterans." Having experienced the impact of Whole Health as a Veteran and VA employee, she sees the positive impact it is having on both groups.

Each of us has the power to impact our well-being. Whole Health offers the skills and support you need to make the changes you want. It may include self-care strategies and complementary therapies such as meditation, massage, and yoga, along with your conventional medical care.

Self-care is not something you have to figure out on your own

In the Whole Health approach, you can look at all areas of your life, including areas of strength and aspects where support could be helpful to you. These areas of self-care include:

- Mindful Awareness – Being aware of thoughts and feelings to focus on the present.
- Moving the Body – Exercising and moving for energy, flexibility, and strength.
- Surroundings – Having comfortable, healthy spaces that support your body and emotions.
- Personal Development – Moving toward what matters most to you.
- Food and Drink – Nourishing your body to not only live, but to live well.
- Recharge – Getting enough sleep, rest, relaxation.
- Family, friends, and coworkers – Developing close, loving, supportive relationships with others.
- Spirit and Soul – Cultivating a sense of connection, purpose, and meaning.
- Power of the Mind – Tapping into your ability to heal and cope through mind-body approaches.

Start your Whole Health journey by exploring the Circle of Health to find self-care resources that match your needs: <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/circle-of-health/index.asp>

To learn more about Whole Health self care, [watch VA's #LiveWholeHealth guided meditation videos.](#)



Safe Healthcare for Veterans and Frontline Staff

By Kristin Pressly, Public Affairs Officer, VA Manchester via va.gov



Dean Kamen, Inventor and Civilian VA Strategic Partner, Daniel Cutsinger, Project Manager, VHA Procurement & Logistics, Fritz Morgan, DEKA Research, Kevin Forrest, Director, VA Manchester, Capt. Jeremy Saunders, Operations Officer, Taskforce Distribution, NH National Guard welcome FedEx delivery of scarce PPE at Manchester/Boston Regional Airport

VA secures scarce PPE through Strategic Partnerships and Patriotism

In March, the Secretary's Center for Strategic Partnerships began efforts to realize a first-of-its-kind strategic partnership to secure scarce personal protective equipment (PPE) with entrepreneur and inventor Dean Kamen, the state of New Hampshire and its National Guard. The mission promised massive shipments of PPE.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) work is ensuring the safety of the Veterans we serve and our workforce. Before any clinical care is delivered, safe infrastructure and support must be in place. A key element in that infrastructure is PPE.

Securing PPE and safeguarding its accessibility across the organization is among the department's highest priorities and will continue to be throughout the COVID 19-pandemic. Supply of this now scarce resource allows the department to properly equip and protect our frontline healthcare associates and veteran care to continue. The global demand for PPE continues to place unprecedented stress on the supply chain. VA's success in having an ample supply of PPE can largely be attributed to this unique partnership and our ability to execute, courtesy of our brightest and most skilled workforce.

"As trusted and effective stewards of government resources, VA had to think strategically and work efficiently," said Deborah Scher, Executive Advisor to the Secretary, who leads the Secretary's Center for Strategic Partnerships. "This is exactly the kind of big, bold and impactful work the department is uniquely suited to carry out and it is aligned with our shared passion to save lives."

Success! VA and the state of New Hampshire National Guard have received PPE via 8 FedEx flights with another half dozen planned. (Watch the courtesy PPE receiving video from the New Hampshire National Guard.) These PPE flights delivered 4.5M masks, 3M gowns and 20M gloves. Separately, a like partnership with the state of New Hampshire garnered 7M test swabs for national dissemination.

"What we are doing in New Hampshire is unusual and we needed to work creatively to make sure we have PPE for clinicians, housekeepers and the entire workforce. There are a lot of contracts in place to supply

the department. Unfortunately, many are not able to perform as they are operating under just in-time conditions relying on national and international supply chains never designed to handle this volume of demand," said Deb Kramer, Acting Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Support Services. "I am in awe of the department as a whole and how we are stepping up, but I am also especially proud of our Procurement & Logistics, Engineering, Facility and Occupation Health and Safety folks who are all involved. Everyone is out of their comfort zone and there isn't anyone who hasn't raised their hand to do more."

This goliath effort required on-ground inspectors, payment coordinators, project management, legal reviews, expertise in communication, a host of many other professionals and a united approach directed at the highest levels of the organization.

"When VA Secretary Robert Wilkie first reached out to me, I knew this was a mission New Hampshire could take on," said Governor Chris Sununu. "We owe those on the frontlines taking care of our Veterans the protection they deserve. I give a lot of credit to Secretary Wilkie for leaving no stone unturned in his search for equipment, and I am honored that the State of New Hampshire can continue to help VA hospitals across the country with securing lifesaving PPE."



Image: Daniel Cutsinger of VHA Procurement & Logistics who flew into New Hampshire to inspect a recent PPE delivery.

The PPE strategic partnership required an internal process to ensure occupational safety and health standards as well as product specification compliance prior to VHA placing an order. When acceptable PPE is identified, it is airlifted to Manchester/Boston Regional Airport via FedEx where an on-ground interim inspection takes

place upon its arrival. The interim inspection is performed by seasoned VHA Procurement & Logistics staff and includes a random box sampling complete with photos of all exterior sides of the box and its contents including any literature. The box is then sealed, integrated with other boxes from the shipment and hand-loaded onto the trailers by the FedEx and NH National Guard. On-ground transportation of the shipment is coordinated through the Transportation and Relocations Division, LSS Office of Procurement Acquisitions and Logistics (OPAL) for delivery to the Health and Human Service (HHS) warehouse in Maryland. When the trucks arrive at the warehouse the boxes are off-loaded and counted, placed on pallets and the contents are verified through a standardized Quality Assurance (QA) review to ensure applicable FDA and/or NIOSH standards are met. Once shipment is entered into the inventory system it is ready for the payment authorization process which empowers VHA to reimburse the State of New Hampshire. The process is efficient, compliant and supports zero risk to the government, as no government funds are used until after the QA review. National VA PPE distribution is prioritized based on mission-need and location. VHA's response to COVID-19 demonstrated the strength and agility of an integrated healthcare system



Image: VA 4th Mission Deployment Team safely equipped with PPE to deliver care. Left to right: Edith Munoz, LNA, (VA Manchester) Arnoldo Cruz-Ayala, RN (kneeling) (VA Manchester), Morgan Wilkinson, RN (VA Travel Nurse), Suzanne Mowery, RN, Diane McGehee, LPN (VA Bedford), Luke Rock, RN (VA Providence) and Elizabeth Smith, RN (VA Manchester)

geographically distributed across the United States and operating as a single enterprise.

As COVID-19 incidence varied by location, VHA was able to sustain operations in locations experiencing high demand due to COVID-19 (e.g., New York City, New Orleans) by cross-leveling staff, PPE and ventilators from areas with low levels of disease.

“The exercise in necessity showcased the department’s ability to work as a single team, much like a military operation. Support Service doesn’t directly touch Veterans,” said Kramer. “I am an Army Veteran and I feel like I have deployed again. Deployed forward and making it happen –along with everyone from the field to the level of the Secretary. The experience has been very meaningful for me.”

Outside these extraordinary efforts spearheaded by the Secretary’s

Center for Strategic Partnerships and led by VHA Procurement & Logistics to secure PPE, they also continue to be the grit behind all we accomplish during this pandemic and beyond. They ensure facilities have medical equipment, cleaning supplies, essential and non-essential items. While unseen, they are the unsung heroes, working to ensure the wellness of our nation’s Veterans.

Contributed by the Office of the Secretary, Secretary’s Center for Strategic Partnerships and written by Kristin Pressly, Public Affairs Officer, Manchester VA Medical Center.

Special note of recognition:

VA’s collaboration with Dean Kamen, Governor Sununu, NH National Guard and FedEx supported a deft PPE supply ensuring safe health care delivery for the Veterans who entrust VA with their care. The team are collective heroes for their contribution to the overall safety of our nation.

The department extends its gratitude for the service of our VA workforce many of whom are Veterans themselves.

Paralyzed Veterans of America

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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.

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July 03

Daniel J. Phelan
Edward J. Walsh

July 09

Thomas Hall, III

July 14

Paul J. Budrow
Anthony G. Andricopoulos

July 19

Sarah Hickland
Percy P. Annis, Jr.
Ronald F. Stevens

July 26

John D. Indelicato
Douglas J. Carrier
Chism C. Elmore

July 04

Kevin B. Strel
Deanne P. Connors

July 10

William J. Sweeney
James S. Barrett
Gordon W. Mellis

July 15

Frank A. Vogeli
John R. Melvin
Ellen M. Corindia

July 20

Louis Corvese, III

July 27

Dennis M. O'Brien

July 05

Donald J. Plunkett
Austin A. Wilcox
Theodore D. Lynch
Brendan R. Higgins

July 11

Roger R. Patch

July 16

Floyd T. Smith
Clement R. Vayda

July 21

Charles Yessian
Gary J. Paulette

July 28

Normand L. Dumais, Jr.

July 06

Robert P. Zimmer
Richard F. Prouty

July 12

David Lee Keniston
Lloyd P. Coughlin

July 17

Francis X. Prucha
Prince E. Blue
James A. Palm

July 22

Raymond Lindeman, Jr.

July 29

Albert A. Brusseau
Russell M. Gallant

July 07

Samuel J. Keyser

July 13

Luigi A. Rasetta
John F. Pillsbury
Charles P. Abbott
Gregory J. Lane
Kevin R. Gelineau
Michael G. Negrete

July 18

William A. Anthony
John H. Miner

July 24

Michael E. Cummings
Ronald A. Rogers
John P. Vibert

July 30

Sheldon L. Pascar

July 08

Ibelia Diaz

July 25

David P. Carnegie, III

July 31

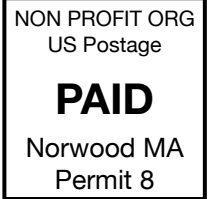
David P. Cambio
Brian E. Archer
Colleen M. Bholo-Dey

Paralyzed Veterans of America
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West Roxbury, MA 02132

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F 857-203-9685

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