

A Swinging Success: 2025 Annual Chapter Golf Tournament Recap

By Mark Murphy, Executive Director NEPVA

On August 18th, the New England Paralyzed Veterans of America hosted our Annual Golf Tournament at the beautiful South Shore Country Club in Hingham, MA. From the first tee shot to the last auction item won, the day was filled with energy, generosity, and friendship - all in support of our mission to empower paralyzed veterans and their families.

One of the highlights on the course was the incredible long drive champion from Charity Golf International, who wowed golfers with 300+ yard drives that had teams buzzing all day. The friendly competition and shared laughs reminded us once again that this tournament is about more than golf – it is about community and purpose coming together.

After the final putts dropped, golfers and guests gathered for a lively dinner and auction. Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, the auction featured some truly exciting items, including a Ted Williams

print, Julian Edelman autographed game shirt, Jayson Tatum autographed NBA All-star game basketball, an incredible Florida golf package in Naples, golf certificates to Brookside, Harmon, Braintree Municipal, South Shore Country Club, and Scituate Country Club, a custom Patriotic cornhole set (which I won!), a New York Mets game shirt, a Boston Red Sox 2013 World Series shirt, and more! The spirited bidding and donations reflected the dedication of our community to ensuring that the New England PVA can continue providing vital programs, advocacy, and resources for those who have served our nation.

Of course, none of this would have been possible without the tireless commitment of our Golf Tournament Planning Committee. A special thank you goes to Jim Clark, Mitch Fishman, Holly Warshaw, and Brad Carlson for their outstanding leadership, hard work, and passion for our mission. Their efforts behind the scenes made this year's tournament one of our most successful yet.

We are deeply grateful to all the golfers, sponsors, volunteers, and supporters who joined us for this unforgettable day. Their generosity not only made this event a success but also fuels the important work we do year-round.

We look forward to seeing everyone back on the course next year!



The New England Chapter, Paralyzed Veterans of America (New England PVA) is a congressionally chartered veterans service organization founded in 1947 that has developed a unique expertise on a wide variety of issues involving the special needs of our members – veterans of the armed forces who have experienced spinal cord injury or dysfunction.



The New England PVA uses that expertise to be the leading advocate for:

- Quality health care for our members
- Research and education addressing spinal cord injury and dysfunction
- Benefits available because of our members' military service
- Civil rights and opportunities that maximize the independence of our members

To enable paralyzed veterans to continue to honor this commitment, we recruit and retain members who have the experience, energy, dedication, and passion necessary to manage the organization and ensure adequate resources to sustain the programs essential for the Chapter to achieve its mission.

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Executive Director's Report

By Mark Murphy

Executive Director NEPVA

Dear Friends,

This past month has been a remarkable one for our New England Chapter, and I am pleased to share a few highlights with you.

On August 18th, we gathered at the South Shore Country Club in Hingham, Massachusetts for our Annual Chapter Golf Tournament - and what a day it was! Thanks to the support of so many, we enjoyed not only beautiful weather on the course, but also the deep sense of community and purpose that makes this event so special each year. Friends, corporate partners, and community members came together in support of our mission to empower paralyzed veterans and their families. The Annual Golf Tournament is

one of our biggest single annual fundraisers of the entire year for the Chapter, and it helps ensure we can continue providing the critical programs, advocacy, and resources that our veterans deserve. I want to extend a heartfelt thank you to our Golf Tournament Committee Members Jim Clark, Mitch Fishman, Holly Warshaw, and Brad Carlson for their tireless work in making this year's tournament such a fun and successful event. It was an absolute pleasure to work alongside them and to see their passion and dedication to the New England PVA mission. For more information and pictures from the Golf Tournament, please see my dedicated cover article in this newsletter.

August closed on another high note with our Annual Chapter Clambake. I especially want to thank Brad Carlson for his leadership in planning this great tradition. At the Clambake our Annual Pierik Awards were announced and awarded to Danielle Taber, LPN, Na-

dia Nouaman, NA, Raquel Phillips RN, and Victoria Henshaw NA. Please see additional information about each of these exceptional awardees in this newsletter edition.

Looking ahead, our new member outreach program Project 72,000 Square Miles is moving forward with

exciting momentum. Later this month we will be visiting the Providence VA as part of our efforts to connect with paralyzed veterans from across New England. I am grateful to Board Member Keelan Zenion for his instrumental role in helping facilitate this important visit.

As always, thank you for your continued support and engagement. Together, we are making a real difference in the lives of veterans and their families across New England.

Sincerely,

Mark Murphy
Executive Director





From the President's Desk

Dear Friends,

Summer has come and gone, and what a season it has been for our Chapter! August was an exceptionally busy and rewarding month. On August 18th, we hosted our Annual Golf Tournament, and it turned out to be one of our best yet. Everyone had a ball out on the course, and thanks to the months of planning and hard work by our Golf Tournament Committee, the day was a great success. The food was excellent, the company even better, and the event helped raise significant funds to support our Chapter's mission. A heartfelt thank-you goes to the entire Committee for making it possible.

Just 2 days later, on August 20th, we held our monthly Board of Directors meeting. I'm proud to say it was productive and positive, as always. We are fortunate to have 10 dedicated individuals serving selflessly on our Board, guiding our Chapter forward with commitment and care.

Then, on Sunday, August 24th, we capped off the month with our Annual Chapter Clambake - a true highlight of the entire year! Special thanks go to the Italian American War Veterans for generously allowing us to use their facility for the day. Clambakes Etc. once again provided a fantastic spread, and we were glad to be able to send

leftover food to Building 8 at the VA in Brockton for those who couldn't join us. We welcomed about 80 guests, including 3 vanloads of inpatients from the Brockton VA, who enjoyed a well-deserved day of fun and relaxation. With music from our DJ, delicious food, and great friendship, it was a memorable event for all. As always, the Clambake was free for Chapter members as well as VA volunteers and staff, underscoring our commitment to community and fellowship.

Looking ahead, we are excited about upcoming events on the sports side. Plans are underway for a Bocchia tournament (date to be announced soon). Even more exciting, we are preparing for a special 2-day pistol and trapshooting event in partnership with PVA National, to be held next year in Scarborough, Maine. Planning has already begun for that, and we are eager to bring this unique experience to our members.

As we reflect on this busy summer and prepare for the months ahead, I want to thank each and every one of you for your ongoing support of our Chapter. We continue to make a discernible difference in the lives of veterans and their families.

Sincerely,

Brad Carlson,
Chapter President & National
Director



Northeast Passage Adaptive Sports & Recreation Fall Schedule Cycling, Court Sports, Outdoor Archery

PORTSMOUTH CYCLING Portsmouth, NH

Join Northeast Passage and enjoy some beautiful Fall trail cycling on the Seacoast of NH. Our staff will get cyclists fitted onto a NEP cycle or you can bring your own! The section of the rail trail we are using is hard-packed gravel and is a great trail for ALL riders.

TANDEM OPTIONS--If you are requesting a tandem cycle, please call the Northeast Passage office (603) 862-0070, to register. Due to limited tandem options, this is the best way to ensure the cycle you need is available. It is highly recommended that participants have a companion to ride tandem with them, as NEP cannot guarantee staff availability to be a tandem rider.

****Due to limited capacity and high demand for cycling opportunities, we are asking participants to register for two fall cycling rides and Wait List for the remaining options.**

DATES: Fridays, September 19, October 3, October 17 from 1:00-3:00PM.
Fee: \$30 w/ NEP Cycle, \$5 w/own cycle, Fees for Veterans are covered by a grant from the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs

OUTDOOR ARCHERY Allenstown, NH

We will be on the archery range at Bear Brook State Park this fall. Come enjoy the fall foliage while we make some arrows fly! The range is wheelchair accessible. Equipment and instruction provided by Northeast Passage staff and volunteers.

If you anticipate using one of our Draw-Loc bows, please state that in your registration as we are limited to two Draw-Loc archers per event.

****Due to limited capacity and high demand for archery opportunities, we are asking participants to register for two fall archery dates and Wait List for the remaining options.**

DATES: Wednesdays, September 24, October 1, October 15, October 22 from 12:00-2:00PM. **Fee:** \$20, Fees for Veterans are covered by a grant from the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs.

TO REGISTER:
PRE-REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED. Please contact
Northeast Passage at 603-862-0070 or northeast.passage@unh.edu or register online on our calendar.

*Fees for Veterans
are covered by a
grant from the U.S.
Department of
Veteran's Affairs!*

COURT SPORTS Durham, NH

Come join Northeast Passage at UNH's Hamel Recreation Center for a night of Court Sports. We will provide court wheelchairs, people to fill out teams, and all the equipment needed for the specific games. We usually play games such as wheelchair handball, Korf Ball and ultimate frisbee. This program is appropriate for participants of all abilities, ages, and levels of experience.

DATES: Wednesdays, September 17, September 24, October 1, October 8, October 15, October 22**, October 29, November 5 from 5:30-7:30PM
There is no cost for these events
****10/22 is 5:00PM-6:30PM**

SVAC Approves 25 Veteran-Related Bills

On July 30, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) marked up and approved 25 veterans-related bills, including an amended version of the Veterans' ACCESS Act (S. 275). This legislation aims to improve the provision of care and services through VA's Community Care Program. The bill contains several provisions to enhance access to community care for veterans. They include:

- Codification of eligibility standards for access to community care from VA.
- Standardized screening processes for veterans to participate in mental health treatment programs.
- A pilot program allowing veterans to access mental health and/or substance abuse programs in the community without a referral.
- Tracking of wait times and care availability for mental health programs.
- Increased transparency in the decision-making process regarding care options for veterans, including the appeals process for denied community care.

The House Veterans' Affairs Committee approved its version of the bill (H.R. 740) on July 23. The amended version of the bill removed language helping veterans seeking care through the VA's Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Programs (RRTP). Not only did the Senate bill retain these provisions, but it also added language requiring the VA to create a plan and establish a pilot to provide access to VA mental health RRTP for veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders (Sec. 202). Additionally, the amended Senate bill includes a provision (Sec. 305) that we believe will help improve disability-related access for our members not just at VA facilities, but also with the department's community care partners.

A second bill approved by the committee was the Veteran Caregiver Reeducation, Reemployment, and Retirement (3R) Act (S. 879), which would provide greater support for the family caregivers of veterans. It would ensure family caregivers enrolled in CHAMPVA remain enrolled for up to 180 days following their dismissal from the Program of

Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, unless they have been dismissed for fraud, abuse, or mistreatment. Other provisions in the bill would offer bereavement counseling, job training assistance, and help with professional relicensing costs to help caregivers ease into the workforce or into retirement once their time as a caregiver has concluded. Caregivers are often the most important component of rehabilitation and maintenance for veterans with catastrophic disabilities, and their welfare directly affects the quality-of-care veterans receive.

SVAC also approved the Service Dogs Assisting Veterans Act (S. 1441), which requires the VA to establish a competitive grant program to fund nonprofit organizations that provide service dogs to veterans with a variety of disabilities, such as mobility or vision impairments or PTSD. This bill would require nonprofit organizations seeking a grant to submit an application to the VA Secretary that includes a description of the training that will be provided by the organization to eligible veterans; the training of dogs that will serve as service dogs; the aftercare services that the organization will provide for the service dog and eligible veteran; the plan for publicizing the availability of service dogs through a marketing campaign; and the commitment of the organization to have humane standards for animals.

Finally, the committee approved the Veterans Accessibility Advisory Committee Act (S. 1383), which aims to enhance VA's accessibility for individuals with disabilities. It mandates the VA to establish a new veterans advisory committee that would focus on improving access for disabled veterans to electronic information, benefits, services, health care facilities, and community care providers. The committee would issue reports identifying barriers and provide recommendations to improve accessibility. This is a companion measure to a House bill that was passed back in May.

Much of the discussion during the relatively short hearing centered on the ACCESS Act, while the remainder of the legislation was agreed to en bloc without discussion.

Honoring Excellence: 2025 Pierik Award Recipients

Each year at our Annual Chapter Clambake, the New England PVA proudly presents the Pierik Awards to outstanding nurses and nursing assistants who go above and beyond in their care for veterans with spinal cord injuries. These awards celebrate not only clinical excellence but also the compassion, dedication, and advocacy that define the very best in patient care. We were proud to recognize this year's remarkable honorees:

From the West Roxbury VA

Danielle Taber, LPN

Danielle Taber is a highly skilled and energetic nurse whose dedication to veterans on the acute spinal cord injury unit sets her apart. Known for her compassion, advocacy, and ability to inspire those around her, Danielle is frequently requested by veterans and their families because of the trust and comfort she brings to their care. Beyond her clinical excellence, Danielle demonstrates extraordinary commitment to her patients and colleagues alike - always willing to step in and lend a hand. She balances her demanding role on A2 with being a devoted mother of three, all while pursuing her LPN-to-RN degree at Massasoit Community College. Her empathy, tireless work ethic, and drive for professional growth make Danielle a shining example of what the Pierik Award represents.



Nadia Nouaman, NA

As a nursing assistant on A2, Nadia Nouaman brings both skill and heart to everything she does. She manages the needs of multiple patients with calm efficiency while creating an environment of dignity and respect for each veteran she serves. Her ability to connect with patients and families - listening deeply and providing comfort during challenging moments - embodies the very spirit of patient-centered care. Colleagues admire Nadia for her reliability, teamwork, and steady presence under pressure. Whether she is assisting with daily care, responding swiftly to patient needs, or offering quiet reassurance, Nadia consistently goes above and beyond. Her professionalism and compassion make her an invaluable part of the SCI team and a deserving recipient of this year's Pierik Award.



Please join us in congratulating Danielle, Nadia, Raquel, and Vicky - the 2025 Pierik Award recipients. Their dedication, compassion, and professionalism embody the highest standards of nursing care and reflect the heart of our mission to serve veterans with dignity and respect.



From the Brockton VA

Raquel Phillips, RN

An experienced and deeply respected member of the SCI team in Brockton, Raquel Phillips stands out for her ability to handle even the most complex situations with skill and confidence. Raquel's compassion, dedication, and ability to build strong rapport with veterans form the foundation of the high-quality care she provides every day. Her commitment to excellence makes her an indispensable member of the team and a worthy Pierik Award recipient.



Victoria "Vicky" Henshaw, NA

As a key member of the overnight shift, Vicky Henshaw brings both expertise and positivity to her role. She is highly proficient in SCI care and always willing to go above and beyond to support veterans and her colleagues. Known for her strong work ethic and warm smile, Vicky provides not just excellent clinical care but also the encouragement and kindness that make a true difference in the lives of patients.



Service Officers Report

by Zachary T. Nuetzel
National Service Officer

Hello NEPVA. I hope everyone is enjoying the change in weather now that summer has come to an end. I wanted to provide some information on one of the housing grants that some veterans and active duty military members may be eligible for. The VA has a few different housing grants for veterans (and in some cases members still on active duty) that have qualifying disabilities. The most common grants that you may see will be Specially Adapted Housing (SAH), Home Improvement Structural Alterations (HISA), and Special Home Adaptation (SHA). This article will focus on Special Home Adaptation (SHA) which is a grant authorized under 38 U.S.C. 2102(b)

SHA is a housing grant that is used in a similar manner to SAH. However, the amount of the grant and its eligibility requirements will differ. SHA can be used to assist in buying a home that is already adapted, to build a home, or to make changes (adaptations) to a permanent home. Eligibility requires that a veteran meet a few criterion outlined below:

- 1) The veteran or their family member own or will own the home the grant will be used for and;
- 2) They meet the criteria for having a service-connected disability that qualifies for SHA and;
- 3) The veteran is not eligible to use Specially Adapted Housing and has not used specially adapted housing in the past.

The VA considers certain disabilities to qualify for SHA. These disabilities differ from that of SAH. To qualify for SHA, the veteran or active duty military member must have a service-connected disability that the VA rates permanently and totally disabling and it includes the following:

- 1) Anatomical loss or loss of use of both hands (if the loss of use of the upper extremities is above the elbow, they are eligible for SAH, which is the greater of the two benefits).
- 2) The disability is due to full thickness or subdermal burns that have resulted in contractures with limitation

- of motion of one or more extremities
- 3) The disability is due to deep partial thickness burns that have resulted in contractures with limitation of motion of two or more extremities, or of at least one extremity and the trunk.
- 4) The disability is due to residuals of an inhalation injury (including, but not limited to, pulmonary fibrosis, asthma, and COPD)

If the veteran or active-duty military member is eligible based on the above criteria, they should receive a certificate of eligibility. After obtaining the entitlement, they can apply for SHA by using VA Form 26-4555. As of FY 2025, the grant amount is \$24,405.00. Like the SAH grant, this can be used up to 6 times as long as the full amount was not exhausted. Of note, the SHA grant and SAH grant do receive COLA Increases annually. Therefore, if there is money left over, an increased amount will be added to the remaining funds left over.

I hope this article has provided some information on one of the few different VA disability housing grants that the VA offers. If you believe that you are eligible for SHA, are unsure if you meet the criteria, or are interested in learning more, please contact your local service officer for assistance.

Best,

Zachary T. Nuetzel
National Service Officer
Paralyzed Veterans of America

...get to know
your PVA service
officer, they can
help you navigate
through the
questions you may
have on disability
ratings and
navigating
the VA system.

Senate Passes FY 2026 VA Funding Bill

The Senate passed its version of the fiscal year (FY) 2026 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies (MILCON/VA) Appropriations Act prior to leaving for the August recess. The bill was coupled with the Agriculture Department's funding bill, so it was approved as an omnibus measure. The VA portion of the bill totaled \$433.7 billion with \$114.9 billion of that figure going toward the delivery of veterans' healthcare and \$300.4 billion for veterans benefit programs. The chamber also allocated an additional \$384.3 billion in advance funding for FY 2027.

The House passed its version of the MILCON/VA bill back on June 25. While there are many similarities between the two measures, there are also some key differences. Both bills provided \$52.7 billion for the Toxic Exposures Fund for FY 2026, which funds the Administration's full request and is more than \$22 billion above what was made available in FY 2025. \$50 billion would go toward the delivery of healthcare stemming from hazardous exposures during the military, with the remaining going toward the Veterans Benefits Administration's expenses emanating from claims-related work that led to the veterans' eligibility to receive that care.

Both bills provided about \$940 million for medical and prosthetics research and roughly \$2 billion for major and minor construction. However, the House measure provides nearly \$19 billion more for the department (\$452 billion total) than the Senate. Also, while the Senate bill garnered broad, bipartisan support for its bill (81 to 15), the House vote occurred largely along party lines (218 to 206).

The differences between the bills are not insurmountable, and the two chambers are already working together to resolve them. It is possible that Congress will hash out their differences in time to pass the bill prior to the start of FY 2026 on October 1.

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New VA OIG Report Released on MST Claims

In 2018, a VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) report recommended the consolidation of Veterans Benefits Administration claims raters that worked on claims related to military sexual trauma (MST). In that report, the OIG found that almost half of the denied claims were processed incorrectly. By streamlining the decision process and increasing training related to MST claims, the OIG thought claims decisions would improve.

In a report released this July, however, the OIG determined that the efforts did not yield the intended improvements. OIG identified challenges in planning and implementation of the MST Operations Center which impacted staffing and quality. The Operations Center has struggled to retain quality staff and has encountered challenges finding raters with MST claims expertise. The turnover rate for the Operations Center was 22.6 percent compared to other claims raters who have a turnover rate of just 7.5 percent. The OIG also found that despite the efforts to improve the accuracy of MST claims decisions, in fiscal year 2024, claims accuracy was only 75.3 percent, far below the internal goal of 96 percent.

The OIG made three recommendations for VA: develop and implement a method to identify and report quality statistics for the operations center; improve and update the internal review process; and develop and implement a process to assess reviewers' competency in processing denied MST claims to monitor and improve effectiveness.

DOT Launches New Complaint System

On August 1, the Department of Transportation's (DOT) Office of Aviation Consumer Protection (OACP) launched a new, modernized web-based system for filing, submitting, and handling air travel service complaints. The launch of the Aviation Complaint, Enforcement and Reporting System (ACERS) will focus solely on submission and handling of new air travel service complaints. DOT announced that ACERS makes it more efficient for airlines and ticket agents to process and respond to consumer complaints, and enhances security and privacy protection of consumer data. Consumers will be able to file air travel service complaints, comments, and compliments by accessing the Consumer Portal. OACP hosted a virtual information session with disability rights advocates after the launch of ACERS to field general questions and obtain feedback on it.

REMINDER: Seeking Potential Class Members in Lawsuit Against Car Rental Company

Disability Rights Advocates (DRA) filed a class action lawsuit against Hertz for failing to provide hand controls in most of the types of vehicles they offer for rent. DRA is seeking policy changes on behalf of a proposed class of people with mobility disabilities. If you have ever tried to rent a vehicle with hand controls from Hertz but could not get the type of vehicle you wanted, DRA wants to hear from you! DRA has put together a simple survey to collect potential class members' contact information. DRA will contact everyone who fills out the form. You can access the survey using the QR.. You can learn more about this lawsuit on [DRA's Ho v. The Hertz Corporation webpage](#).



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SVAC Meets to Consider a Pair of Key Nominations

On July 23, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) met to consider the president's nominations for a pair of key veterans-related leadership positions.

Air Force Reserve Major General John Bartrum is the president's nominee to be VA Under Secretary for Health. Currently, he is serving in the most senior medical officer position in the Air Force Reserve, and the most senior Medical Service Corps hospital executive in the Air Force across all components. If confirmed, he would be responsible for overseeing the Veterans Health Administration, which is the largest integrated health system in the nation. This role involves managing a vast network of health care services for approximately nine million enrolled veterans across various facilities, including medical centers, clinics, and nursing homes.

In his answers to pre-hearing questions, Bartrum apparently said he looks forward to re-examining the balance between direct care and community care. On more than one occasion during the Q&A session he was asked to clarify what he meant by this. He responded by saying that balance should favor the veteran in that they should have greater choice in where they receive care. He talked about the difficulties a veteran had to go through to get a referral to community care, noting these referrals should not require anything more than the initial physician's determination of need with the veteran.

In his opening statement, General Bartrum said he will continue VA's focus on patient safety and quality improvement, while balancing access and improved outcomes. He would also continue to support medical research on veterans' issues and the department's medical education programs, as well as VA's mission to assist the nation during emergencies and disasters.

Also considered was Jeremiah Workman, the president's nominee to be Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans' Employment and Training. Workman served with the US Marine Corps during the Iraq War and received the Navy Cross for gallantry under fire after killing 20 insurgents in Fallujah, Iraq. If confirmed, he would be responsible for formulating and implementing policies and procedures to support veterans' employment and training. When asked what he would do to ensure veterans can get quality, long-term jobs, Workman stressed the importance of separating servicemembers going through the Transition Assistance Program. He said too many people are not going through the program and he would work to change that.

The hearing, which lasted a little more than an hour, along with General Bartrum and Mr. Workman's written statements. Voting on both nominations is expected to occur when Congress returns after Labor Day.

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DOJ Opens Investigation into Flixbus and Greyhound for Disability Discrimination

On August 4, the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division announced that it has launched an investigation into bus companies FlixBus and Greyhound. The notice of investigation comes after complaints that the bus companies violated Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Complaints allege that Flixbus and Greyhound discriminated against passengers with disabilities and denied them reasonable accommodations by failing to properly maintain lifts on buses, refusing to assist passengers with disabilities with using lifts, refusing to allow service animals to accompany passengers with disabilities or improperly asked for documentation, abandoning customers with disabilities between legs of their journey, and failing to allow and assist passengers with disabilities to leave and return to the bus at rest stops, among other allegations. The department is encouraging those who believe they have been a victim of disability discrimination by FlixBus or Greyhound to file a complaint with the Civil Rights Division.

PVA Policy Priorities

With a new Congress and a new Administration in Washington, D.C., PVA's priorities for 2025 are focused on ensuring access to the care and benefits PVA members have earned and the civil rights protections they deserve. We look forward to working with our champions to move these priorities forward throughout the year.

PVA priorities for 2025 are as follows:

- **Protect VA's Specialized Health Care Services**
- **Increase Access to Long-Term Services and Supports for Veterans with SCI/D**
- **Improve Veterans' Financial Security**
- **Enhance Access to Health Care Services for Veterans with SCI/D**
- **Defend the Freedoms of Veterans with Disabilities**

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