

What Is PVA - and Why It Matters

By Mark Murphy, Executive Director NEPVA

From time to time, I am reminded that while many people are familiar with large national veterans service organizations, fewer people truly know about the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) and the unique work we do as a local PVA Chapter. That realization often comes during outreach events, community conversations, or visits to VA facilities across New England. People are eager to support veterans, but they are sometimes surprised to learn about the specific mission of PVA and the community we are privileged to serve.

That is why I wanted to take a moment in this CordWord issue to share a bit more about who we are, what we do, and why our mission

matters so deeply. Across the United States, thousands of veterans live with spinal cord injuries and diseases that fundamentally change their lives. These injuries can result from combat, training accidents, or illness, and they often require lifelong care, specialized resources, and strong community support. For nearly 80 years, PVA has stood beside these veterans, advocating for their health, independence, and quality of life.

The work of the Chapter takes many forms. One important focus is advocacy, ensuring that veterans have access to quality healthcare through the VA system and that their voices are heard in policy decisions affecting their lives.

Founded in 1946 by veterans who returned home from World War II with spinal cord injuries, PVA is a congressionally chartered nonprofit veterans service organization dedicated to helping veterans with spinal cord injuries and diseases - including conditions such as multiple sclerosis (MS) and ALS - live fuller and more independent lives. Through advocacy, medical expertise, research, and community programs, PVA works to ensure that veterans receive the care and benefits they have earned through their service to our country. Here in our local region, the New England Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America carries that mission forward. Serving veterans throughout Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont, our Chapter works every day to provide support, services, and camaraderie for veterans living with spinal cord injury or disease.

The work of the Chapter takes many forms. One important focus is advocacy, ensuring that veterans have access to quality healthcare through the VA system and that their voices are heard in policy decisions affecting their lives. Each year, members of our Chapter travel to Washington, D.C., to meet with members of Congress and their staff to advocate for policies that improve the lives of veterans living with spinal cord injuries and diseases. Equally important is the sense

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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,

As we move further into the month of March, our Chapter continues to build momentum across New England through outreach, advocacy, and comprehensive planning for the busy months ahead.

One of our next stops for our Project 72,000 Square Miles outreach program will take us to New Hampshire and the Manchester VA. This program continues to be an incredibly meaningful way for us to meet our members where they are, connect directly with VA staff, and ensure that veterans across our region remain informed about the resources, benefits, and community that our Chapter provides. Every visit strengthens the relationships that help us serve our members more effectively and reinforces our commitment to reaching veterans throughout all 6 New England states.

None of this work happens alone. It is made possible by the dedication of our Board of Directors, volunteers, partners, and supporters who believe deeply in the mission of our New England Chapter.

We are also looking ahead to the PVA Advocacy and Legislation Seminar in Washington, DC this June. This important annual event gives our Chapter the opportunity to meet directly with members of Congress and their staff to advocate for policies that support paralyzed veterans and individuals living with spinal cord injuries and diseases. Much of the work right now involves scheduling meetings and coordinating our advocacy efforts, and I am deeply grateful to our dedicated and talented team who are working diligently behind the scenes to prepare for these important conversations.

At the same time, the spring months are a critical time for grant writing and fundraising efforts. I am currently pursuing several grant opportunities that are essential to sustaining and growing our Chapter’s work. As a veteran service nonprofit organization, we rely entirely on individual donations, grants, and corporate partnerships to fund our programs and services. These resources are a vital lifeline that allows us to expand outreach, support adaptive sports opportunities, advocate for accessibility, and provide meaningful programs for our members. None of this work happens alone. It is made possible by the dedication of our Board of Directors, volunteers, partners, and supporters who believe deeply in the mission of our New England Chapter.

As always, thank you for your continued engagement and support. We look forward to seeing many of you at upcoming Chapter events and sharing more updates as we continue our work across all 72,000 square miles of New England.

Sincerely,
 Mark Murphy
 Executive Director



Washington Update

VA Backtracks On Disability Benefits IFR

On February 27, VA officially withdrew an interim final rule (IFR) that would have changed the way they calculate disability evaluations for compensation purposes. Under the IFR, which was issued on February 17, examiners conducting medical evaluations were to look at a veteran's level of impairment and evaluate the disability and include the effects of medication or treatment. Since the change was issued as an IFR, it was to have applied to veterans filing disability claims or appeals on or after February 17 and those seeking any changes to their disability ratings after that date.

This is a great example of veterans' voices making a difference.

Significant backlash from veterans and multiple veterans organizations, including PVA, followed the release of the IFR. As a result, VA issued a statement on February 19 announcing that the rule would "not be enforced at any time in the future." Now that VA has officially rescinded the IFR, the issue is moot. However, the court decision that originally led VA to issue the IFR is still on appeal. PVA will continue to work to ensure that veterans' benefits are not harmed.

VA OIG Releases Special Disabilities Capacity Report

On February 23, the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) issued a report titled, "Independent Review of VA's Special Disabilities Capacity Report for Fiscal Year 2023." The OIG found that while VA's reporting on its ability to provide specialized care to veterans with catastrophic disabilities, including spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D), was generally accurate, persistent omissions and structural limitations limit Congress's ability to determine whether VA is maintaining the capacity required by law.

Critically for PVA members, the report does not capture services veterans receive through community care or the extent to which VA SCI/D bed capacity is utilized within VA facilities. The absence

PVA Submits a Joint Comment Emphasizing the Importance of Enforcement of the ACAA

On January 6, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) issued a notice of proposed guidance. The notice included a proposal to revise and update the investigatory and enforcement policies of DOT, including monetary fines, for non-compliance with aviation consumer protection requirements. This includes requirements under the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA), which prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in commercial air travel. Rather than issuing monetary penalties against air carriers, the proposed guidance outlined first steps DOT would take. This included sending warning letters to help the air carrier comply with legal requirements before engaging in enforcement actions. The proposed guidance reiterated that DOT would focus on ensuring compliance rather than assessing penalties.

Recently, PVA and other veterans and disability rights organizations submitted a joint comment emphasizing the importance of monetary penalties and enforcement actions for violations of the ACAA. The comments explained that air carriers are currently not taking adequate affirmative steps to ensure passengers with disabilities are treated with dignity and respect nor providing assistance in a safe and dignified manner. Despite the passage of the ACAA in 1986, thousands of violations are reported each year. The joint comments underscored that warning letters were insufficient to ensure compliance with the ACAA and monetary penalties and enforcement actions are sometimes necessary.

of utilization and community care data prevents policymakers from determining whether in-house care is being gradually replaced by outsourced services. OIG also cautioned that ongoing implementation of VA's new electronic health record system has resulted in missing or inconsistent workload data at some facilities, which may complicate comparisons of SCI/D staffing and patient volume across Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) as deployment expands through fiscal year 2026.

From the President's Desk

by Brad Carlson
NEPVA President

Dear Friends,

At the beginning of the year I began my article by saying that winter was in full swing—but that was written in January. Little did I know what February had in store for us! What a brutal month it turned out to be. I hope everyone made it through safely and without too much inconvenience.

As I sit here writing this now, it's nearly 70 degrees outside. Go figure—only in New England!

Last month I also discussed the upcoming National Veterans Wheelchair Games, and I want to remind everyone what a special event this is. For those who have never attended, I highly recommend it. I went to my first Games 38 years ago not really knowing what to expect. At the time, I was still fairly new to my injury and didn't know many people from our Chapter. We had a large contingent of athletes and staff attending, and over the course of those five days I quickly learned about the incredible camaraderie, sportsmanship, and fun that make this event so meaningful.

To this day, the National Veterans Wheelchair Games remain the largest event of the year for our community, and it is open to all eligible participants. If you have not yet registered, I encourage you to do so soon. Registration forms can be found at: wheelchairgames.org/registration



Registration closes April 3, 2026. Please remember to schedule an appointment with your physician early to have your required medical forms completed. Medical clearance is required to participate, and it is always best to get that taken care of sooner rather than later before doctors' offices become overwhelmed with last-minute requests. As a reminder, the Chapter will help support participants by covering:

- Hotel and lodging
- Transportation of equipment to and from the Games via rented truck
- Airfare reimbursement of up to \$350 per ticket (with receipt)

I'm very much looking forward to seeing many of you in Detroit this summer.

I would also like to thank Mike Guilault for his fantastic article in last month's *CordWord* about the great experience many of our members had at the NESHA Winter Sports Clinic held in January and hosted in part by the New England Chapter.

I want to remind everyone that *CordWord* is open to contributions from our members. If you've attended a clinic, taken part in a Chapter trip, or have something on your mind you'd like to share with the Chapter community, we encourage you to send it in. We would also love to include photos from events and activities.

There are many events currently in the planning stages, and we'll have more information to share with you next month. Until then, stay safe—and get out there and have some fun.

Sincerely,

Brad Carlson
Chapter President & National Director





Each year our Chapter sends a delegation of Athletes and Volunteers to the National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

Register by April 3rd to Join our Team



wheelchairgames.org/registration



45th

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EVENT SCHEDULE

FY26

March 2026		
PVA Bowling Tournament Series: Tri-State Tournament	March 13-15, 2026	Beaverton, OR
PVA Billiards Tournament Series: Mid-Atlantic	March 14-15, 2026	Midlothian, VA
PVA Bass Tournament Series: Southeastern Challenge	March 27-29, 2026	Appling, GA
April 2026		
PVA Bass Tournament Series: Bluegrass Bass Bash	April 10-12, 2026	Kuttawa, KY
PVA Off-Road Paracycling Camp: Pocahontas State Park	April 16-18, 2026	Chesterfield, VA
PVA Bass Tournament Series: Citrus Slam	April 17-19, 2026	Kissimmee, FL
PVA Bowling Tournament Series: Texas	April 22-24, 2026	San Antonio, TX
PVA Billiards Tournament Series: Mid-America	April 23-25, 2026	Oklahoma City, OK
PVA Wheelchair Pickleball Invitational	April 25-26, 2026	Franklin, WI
May 2026		
PVA Bass Tournament Series: Land of Lincoln	May 1-3, 2026	Sesser, IL
PVA Boccia Tournament Series: Puerto Rico (Year-End)	May 2-3, 2026	San Juan, PR
Intro to Paracycling Series: Salt Lake City	May 4-5, 2026	Salt Lake City, UT
Intro to Paracycling Series: Milwaukee	May 20-21, 2026	Milwaukee, WI
PVA Trapshooting Tournament Series: Vaughan	May 22-24, 2026	Whittington, IL
PVA Bass Tournament Series: Buckeye Bash	May 29-31, 2026	Cortland, OH
PVA Airgun Tournament Series: Texas	May 30-31, 2026	San Antonio, TX
June 2026		
PVA Bass Tournament Series: Capital Clash	June 5-7, 2026	Marbury, MD
PVA Wheelchair Basketball Camp	June 8-14, 2026	Arlington, TX
PVA Trapshooting Tournament Series: Wisconsin	June 12-14, 2026	Green Bay, WI
PVA Outdoor Experience: Teton	June 22-26, 2026	Jackson Hole, WY
PVA Bowling Tournament Series: National Championship	June 25-28, 2026	Omaha, NE
PVA Trapshooting Tournament Series: Iowa (Year-End)	June 26-28, 2026	Cedar Rapids, IA
July 2026		
National Veterans Wheelchair Games	July 9-14, 2026	Detroit, MI

Veterans Fishing Tournaments.....

The Veterans Fishing Tournaments are open water bass tournaments for veterans or service members with a permanent physical disability, visual impairment or PTSD. Tournaments are held in May on Candlewood Lake in Danbury, CT or in September on Lake Congamond in Southwick, MA. Each veteran will be paired with an experienced angler and boat captain for a day on the water. The tournament includes all fishing equipment, a weigh-in and an awards luncheon. Prizes are awarded for the top 3 weights.

This event is organized in collaboration with the Major Steven “Roy” Andrews Fishing Outreach Program and CT Bass Nation.

This program is funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of Veteran Affairs in partnership with Move United Warfighter Sports Program and is offered at NO COST for veterans.

Join PVA Online Fitness Classes

PVA Members: Become Warrior Strong!

PVA is proud to launch PVA Online Fitness + Wellness, a free program powered by Warrior Strong and designed exclusively for Veterans facing mobility challenges. This dynamic new program, which is inclusive of all levels and abilities, offers expert-led fitness and wellness classes that are accessible from the comfort of your home. Whether you’re looking to build strength, improve flexibility, reduce stress, or simply increase your activity level, this program has something for you.

Beyond physical fitness, our classes support whole-body wellness through mindfulness practices, including meditation and breathwork. Benefits include improved cardiovascular health, cognitive improvements (including better reflexes, memory, and hand-eye coordination), increased strength and endurance, improved stress management, and mental health relief.



Check out our class schedule using the QR and join us on your fitness journey.

Candlewood Lake

Date: Tuesday, May 12, 2026

Location: Candlewood Lake, Danbury, CT

Time: 7:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m

Check-in: 7:00 a.m. – 7:15 a.m.

Fish: 8:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Weigh-In: 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Awards and Lunch: 3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Register with Gaylord Sports by April 3rd.



CONGAMOND LAKE

Date: Tuesday, September 22, 2026

Location: Congamond Lake, Southwick, MA

Time: 7:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Check-in: 7:00 a.m. – 7:15 a.m.

Fish: 8:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Weigh-In: 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Awards and Lunch: 3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Registration Information for Congamond available in July 2026

Service Officers Report

VA Health and Benefits App

Hello NEPVA. I hope everyone stayed safe during the recent weather events that we had. Hopefully, warmer days are near. For this article, I wanted to steer away a little bit from discussing specific benefits in order to discuss the VA: Health and Benefits app which may be useful for many of our veterans. Although you will be able to access more features on the traditional desktop version of VA.gov, I wanted to focus this article to highlight some of the features that are available via the app.

The Department of Veteran's Affairs (VA) has an official app for IOS and Android download. The app, which can be downloaded on the app store, can allow veterans to view their benefits, VA health care, and VA payments from phones and tablets. To utilize the app, you must first have a VA.gov account. Once you have the app downloaded, and you have access to your account, you will be able to access the app on your phone or tablet.

When signed into the app, you will have five different sections that may be of use. When you first sign in, you will be see the home screen. From the home screen, you will see recent activity which includes upcoming appointments, a spot to show your current disability rating, and a spot that shows your latest payments. If you are eligible for travel reimbursement, the home screen will also show you recent past appointments that are eligible for reimbursement.

On the top right corner of the screen, there will be a profile section. This section will allow you to view your veteran status card (shows proof of veteran status), view the personal information that the VA has on file for you, update your contact information, and update your address with the VA. This section can make the process of updating your address of record with the VA much faster and easier.

Next to the Home tab, you will see a section labeled health. This section has a few features that may be of use to many

by Zachary T. Nuetzel
National Service Officer



of our veterans. In the health section you can view upcoming appointments, past appointments, send and receive secure messages with your healthcare team, track and refill prescriptions, and see limited medical records such as your vaccination record. If you need to view your full VA medical records, you would need to use the desktop version.

Next to the health section is a benefits section. This section allows you to see claims information. You can view past VA notification letters, claim status, decision letters, and travel claims. This section is also where you can curate and download specific letters that may be needed for benefits outside of the VA. For example, you can create a tax abatement letter that will be ready for instant download rather than waiting for it to arrive in the mail. Additionally, you can download your VA Home Loan Certificate of Eligibility (COE) from the benefits tab in the VA app. The benefits section of the app also shows a list of all the conditions that are service connected or have been denied in the past by the VA.

Lastly, the app has a payment tab. This section allows you to see your payment history from the VA, as well as your

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direct deposit information. From this section you can also update your direct deposit if you need to make changes to where your payments get deposited.

This article is just a brief overview of the different features found within the VA: Health and Benefits app and it is my hope that it provides our veterans with useful information. Although it is not mandatory to download and utilize the app, it has many features which may prove useful. Even though the application allows you to access many features, some items may only be available on the desktop version of the VA.gov website. Hopefully, the VA Health and Benefits app can be of use to our veterans, however you can always feel free to contact your local PVA service officer for assistance with any questions that you have.

Sincerely,
Zachary T. Nuetzel
National Service Officer

...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.

New PVAction Force Campaigns

Recently, a few key bills of importance to PVA members were introduced in Congress. Those bills are H.R. 6001, the Veterans with ALS Reporting Act, which would require the VA to report on ALS incidence among veterans and develop risk-reduction strategies; H.R. 6835, the Veterans STAND Act, which would direct the VA to provide annual preventative health evaluations for veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders and expand access to assistive technologies; and S. 3647, the Disabled Veterans Dignity Act, which would codify VA's Bowel and Bladder program. Congress needs to hear from you about the importance of this legislation. Head over to [PVAction Force](#) and message your legislators asking them to sign on in support of these bills and more.



Scan this QR to see PVAction Force Campaigns

PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA – REGIONAL NATIONAL SERVICE OFFICERS

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SYRACUSE VAMC

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800 Irving Ave., Room C419
Syracuse, NY 13210
phone: (315) 425-4400 ext. 53317
fax: (315) 425-2940
Serving New York & Western MA

Survey for Project Focused on Improving the Airport Journey of Wheelchair Users

InterVISTAS is currently collaborating with Indiana University – Bloomington (IUB) to collect information on the air travel experiences of people with disabilities. Funded by the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, this project strives to identify ways to enhance the air travel experiences of individuals using wheelchairs. PVA is a member of the panel overseeing this project.

How to Participate:

1. Register: Please first complete the screening survey. This will only take 5 minutes.
2. Survey: Once registered, eligible participants (those aged 18 or older, living with a disability that requires the use of a wheelchair, and currently residing in the U.S.) will receive a link to the full online survey.

Your Privacy Matters:

Participation in the survey is entirely voluntary. All information you provide will be kept strictly confidential.

Have Questions? Please contact the research team at:

Email: travelX@iu.edu

Phone: 812-855-9037

The survey will close once researchers have reached the target number of completed responses.



Scan the QR to access the survey.

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of community our Chapter provides. Through adaptive sports programs, educational events, outreach visits, and social gatherings, members are able to connect with other veterans who share similar experiences and challenges. These opportunities strengthen both physical health and emotional well-being, reminding veterans that they are never alone in their journey.

Our Chapter also connects veterans and their families to critical resources - including benefits assistance, caregiver support, research updates, and information about spinal cord injury care. These services are offered at no cost to veterans and their families, ensuring that every member has access to the support they deserve. Perhaps most importantly, PVA and its over 30 Chapters throughout the US and Puerto Rico are organizations built by veterans, for veterans. Many of the leaders, volunteers, and advocates within PVA have lived experience with spinal cord injuries themselves. That perspective brings a powerful sense of understanding and determination to the organization's work. At its core, the mission of PVA is simple but profound: to empower veterans with spinal cord injuries and diseases to live lives of dignity, independence, and opportunity.

As we continue our outreach across New England - through programs like Project 72,000 Square Miles, visits to VA facilities, and partnerships throughout our communities - we also recognize the importance of telling our story more clearly and more often. The more people understand the work of PVA, the more veterans we can reach, the more partnerships we can build, and the stronger our Chapter will become.

If you would like to learn more about the work of the New England Chapter, support our mission, or connect with our community, I encourage you to visit www.pvanewengland.org.

Together, we can continue the important work of ensuring that every veteran has the opportunity to live a strong, independent, and meaningful life.



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**VA Officials Warn of
New Scam Targeting Veterans**

VA recently sounded the alarm about a new scam targeting veterans, surviving spouses, and family members who receive VA benefits. The scammers pretend to be VA representatives collecting an overpayment of VA benefits. They are using official looking letters, emails, and texts that often include fake VA logos and letterhead, making it extremely difficult to distinguish from genuine VA communications. If you receive a letter or any communication about a VA benefits overpayment, log into your official VA.gov account immediately to verify if you truly owe money.

If you find you do owe money, VA's Debt Management Center offers many repayment options. Also, be aware that VA will not call you about potential overpayments unless you initiated the inquiry first. You can learn more about the scam and ways to protect yourself [here](#).



PVA Policy Priorities

As we embark on the second session of the 119th Congress, PVA's priorities for 2026 are once again focused on ensuring access to the care and benefits PVA members have earned and the civil rights protections they deserve.

PVA priorities for 2026:

- Strengthen the Foundations of VA's Specialized Health Care Services
- Maximize VA Long-Term Services and Supports for Veterans with SCI/D
- Fortify the Financial Security of Veterans with SCI/D, their Families, and Survivors
- Increase SCI/D Veterans' Access to Health Care Services
- Ensure Equal Opportunity and Full Participation for Catastrophically Disabled Veterans

GAO Publishes New Report on WIOA

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) published a report on February 20 focused on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The report highlighted that actions are needed to ensure people with disabilities can access jobs through the Department of Labor's (DOL) programs.

Between 2021 and 2024, more than 500,000 people with disabilities were unemployed but actively looking for work each year. People with disabilities often need workplace accommodations, like assistive technology, to access DOL-funded employment programs at various employment centers, such as the American Job Centers.

GAO found that while DOL monitors its programs and provides accessibility guidance to employment centers, it doesn't routinely analyze or monitor results or evaluate the use of the guidance it provides. Nearly seven percent

of the participants during the time analyzed by GAO were people with disabilities and they had worse employment outcomes than their non-disabled counterparts. GAO found that the data collected by states is lacking and the data varied widely between states.

GAO made several recommendations. First, DOL should take additional steps to collect more comprehensive data on workforce program participants' disability types. Next, they should develop written procedures for routinely analyzing DOL's state monitoring reports to identify widespread issues with accessibility and a plan to address them. Finally, DOL should evaluate state and local workforce agencies' awareness and use of guidance and technical assistance to ensure accessibility of workforce programs.

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Office Hours: Monday-Friday 9:00am-4:30pm



New England Chapter

Join the Team

wheelchairgames.org/registration

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2. CRUSH GOALS
3. BUILD CONFIDENCE

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Paralyzed Veterans of America

