

## The Second Phase of Service: What Comes After Survival

### A Reflection Article from our Executive Director

By Mark Murphy, Executive Director NEPVA

In the immediate aftermath of a life-changing injury, there is often one word used more than any other: *Stable*. In medical terms, it's a success. It means the crisis has passed. The body has survived. It means that, against the odds—or because of the extraordinary skill of those providing care—a life has been preserved. But stability does not answer the next set of questions.

What comes next? How will life actually be lived? What support will be needed—and how long will it take to receive it?

For many veterans living with spinal cord injuries and related conditions, survival is not the end of the story. It is the beginning of a different phase—one that unfolds more slowly, often more quietly, and far less visibly than the moment of injury itself. It is a phase shaped not by emergency intervention, but by systems. A need is identified. A benefit is approved. A modification is authorized. And then, in many cases, there is a pause. A home may be approved for accessibility updates—a ramp, a widened doorway, a modified bathroom—but weeks or months pass before construction begins. A piece of adaptive equipment is deemed necessary, but moves through multiple stages of review, procurement, and delivery. A service is technically available, but functionally out of reach due to scheduling, coordination, or capacity. Each step in the process is reasonable on its own. Assessments must be completed. Plans must be reviewed. Funding must be allocated responsibly. Contractors must be identified. Systems must ensure accountability. But for the veteran living through it, the experience is not a series of individual steps. It is a single reality: The need is immediate. The solution is

delayed. And during that time, daily life does not pause. The front steps remain. The bathroom remains inaccessible. The routines of the day require additional effort, additional time, and often additional help.

*...ensuring that veterans have the support, access, and resources needed to live full, independent, and connected lives in the communities they call home.*

What has been approved on paper has not yet changed the lived experience. This gap—between what is recognized and what is delivered—is where many veterans and their families find themselves navigating a second, less visible challenge. It is not defined by a single moment, but by accumulation. Follow-up calls. Unanswered emails. Requests that must be resubmitted. Processes that depend not only on eligibility, but on persistence. The system is not indifferent. In many cases, it is working exactly as it was designed to work—carefully, deliberately, and with layers of oversight intended to ensure that resources are used appropriately. But what the system is not designed for is urgency. And urgency, in this context, is not a matter of convenience. It is the difference between dependence and independence. Between being able to move freely in one's own home and needing assistance for basic daily activities.

This is where the role of the Paralyzed Veterans of America New England Chapter becomes essential. Our work exists in that gap. We help veterans and their families under-

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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,*

**A**s we move into the spring and summer months, our Chapter is actively engaged across several key areas - national leadership, advocacy, outreach, and fundraising - all of which are central to strengthening our impact throughout New England.

In May, I will be attending the Paralyzed Veterans of America Annual Convention in Las Vegas alongside our Chapter President and National Director, Brad Carlson, and Kathy Carlson. The Convention is always an important opportunity to connect with national leadership, collaborate with fellow chapters from across the country, and ensure that our work here in New England remains aligned with PVA’s broader mission and strategic priorities. I am also pleased to share that our Chapter has placed a full-page advertisement in the official Convention Journal, helping to elevate our visibility and highlight the work we are doing across the region. An example of that ad is placed in this newsletter.

Looking ahead to June, we are preparing for the PVA Advocacy and Legislation Seminar in Washington, DC. This annual event is a cornerstone of our advocacy efforts, bringing together PVA members and leaders from across the country for policy briefings and direct engagement with Members of Congress. Our team will be meeting with legislators from across New England to advocate on issues impacting veterans living with spinal cord injuries and diseases. Kathy Carlson has been instrumental in helping to coordinate and schedule these meetings, and I am especially pleased that Ericka Haddad will be joining us this year, further strengthening our presence on Capitol Hill.

Our work on the ground continues through Project 72,000 Square Miles, our outreach initiative designed to connect with veterans across all six New England states. One of our next visits will take us to New Hampshire and the Manchester VA. This program remains one of the most

meaningful ways we engage directly with our members - meeting them where they are, connecting with VA staff, and ensuring veterans are aware of the full range of resources, benefits, and community our Chapter provides. Each visit strengthens relationships and reinforces our commitment to serving veterans throughout the region.



Finally, planning is well underway for our Annual Golf Tournament, which will be held on August 17 at South Shore Country Club in Hingham. Registration is now live on our website, and our Golf Committee will be meeting soon to continue advancing sponsorship outreach, player recruitment, and event logistics. This event remains one of our most important fundraising efforts of the year, while also serving as a great opportunity to bring our community together in support of our mission.

*Thank you, as always, for your continued support and engagement with the New England Chapter. I look forward to sharing more updates in the months ahead.*

Sincerely,

Mark Murphy  
 Executive Director

## Washington Update

### HVAC Examines More Than Two Dozen Bills

On March 18, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs (HVAC) held a legislative hearing to discuss 27 pending bills, including several pieces of legislation that would reauthorize specific policies and programs at the VA. Many of them have not been reauthorized by Congress in more than three decades. VA officials were the only witnesses requested for this single panel hearing which lasted slightly more than two hours. PVA submitted a statement for the record on bills of interest, like the Dental Care for Veterans Act (H.R. 210). Even though dental benefits are the bridge to health and wellness, VA closely rations these services. Currently, VA dental care is limited to those veterans who are 100 percent service connected or have a service-connected dental condition, former prisoners of war, and homeless veterans. Dental care may also be available if a dental condition is aggravating a service-connected condition or complicates its treatment. PVA believes VA should furnish dental care in the same manner as any other medical service.

Meanwhile, unaccredited claims consultants often skirt long-standing mandates of Congress and VA that require all who assist veterans with the preparation, presentation, or prosecution of VA claims and appeals to be accredited by the VA, subject to ongoing VA oversight, and compliant with laws regarding fees. Often, their technique of choice is to operate in the shadows by assisting a veteran with claims preparation and then leaving the veteran to file his or her claim alone, thereby avoiding the appearance of "representing" the claimant. Furthermore, they routinely obtain medical opinions from affiliated medical providers, raising ethical concerns regarding the veracity of such opinions. In recent years, the unaccredited "claims consulting" industry has exploded and new guardrails are needed to protect veterans from individuals and entities seeking to surreptitiously take their hard-earned benefits. In our statement, we reiterated our strong support of the GUARD VA Benefits Act (H.R. 1732), which would reinstate criminal penalties for non-VA accredited persons charging veterans unauthorized fees relating to claims for benefits under the laws administered by VA.

Another PVA-supported bill reviewed by the committee was the Establishing the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration Act (H.R. 6843). This legislation seeks to create a new administration within VA to oversee the agency's education, training, employment, and other programs focused on helping veterans as they transition to civilian life. The new Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration would be

***In recent years, the unaccredited "claims consulting" industry has exploded and new guardrails are needed to protect veterans from individuals and entities seeking to surreptitiously take their hard-earned benefits.***

headed by an Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition. Two of the programs that would transition to the new administration include VA's Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program and the Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) program. Although relatively small in terms of budget and numbers of veterans served, they are vitally important to veterans who have catastrophic disabilities because of their military service. Without them, these veterans would not be able to access independent living services or adapt their homes to meet their disability-related access needs.

PVA had mixed feelings about several of the reauthorization bills. For example, the VA Research Reform Act (H.R. 6583) is intended to strengthen VA research efforts by managing all the department's studies through a centralized research management system. The bill directs the VA to establish a tiered review process for research proposals. Lower-risk research projects could move through the approval process more quickly, while higher-risk projects would undergo a more comprehensive review. Additionally, the legislation would establish department-wide timelines for approving research proposals and creating

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[www.pvanewengland.org](http://www.pvanewengland.org)

## From the President's Desk

*by Brad Carlson  
NEPVA President*

Dear Friends,

No wasting time—just like that, we've gone from winter to spring. That's New England for you. The flowers and trees are starting to bloom, and of course, allergy season is right there with them. But after the winter we had, it's hard to complain.

Things are about to get very busy on the executive side of the Chapter, with several important trips coming up in the months ahead.

First, Executive Director Mark Murphy and I will be heading to Las Vegas for this year's PVA National Convention from May 11th through the 15th. The Convention is a key event for the organization, where national officers are elected and important policies, guidelines, and bylaws are discussed and set for the year ahead.

Following that, we will be traveling to Washington, DC for the Advocacy and Legislation Seminar (ADLEG). Each year, we bring a different Chapter Board member to participate

### VA Announces New Efforts to Combat Fraud

The VA recently announced that they are developing a new tool to scan submitted Disability Benefits Questionnaires (DBQs) for "telltale signs" of fraud. According to the VA, this new system, which is not active yet and may be rolled out sometime in 2026, will help VA field staff detect suspicious patterns that may help identify when organized fraud rings are posing as legitimate medical providers to prey on veterans. They stress that this new system is not AI but relies on manual data entry and analysis. However, this announcement was not without its controversies.

A "Stars and Stripes" article initially reported that the VA had plans to "analyze one million old disability benefits questionnaires dating back to 2010 to identify possible signs of fraud using this tool. However, after backlash from the veterans community, the VA clarified that this new system is "forward-looking only... No Veteran's claim or benefit will be reduced or denied because of this effort."

in this important effort. It's an opportunity to learn about the legislative process and to meet directly with Senators and Members of Congress from across New England to advocate for the needs of veterans with disabilities and the broader disabled community.



We will also be attending the Golden Age Games to evaluate whether this is something we should consider including in our budget to support Chapter member participation in the future. While we extended the invitation this year, many members have understandably chosen to focus on the upcoming National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Detroit. At this time, I do not yet have a final list of participants for Detroit, but I will share that information in the June issue of *Cord Word*.

It is with great sadness that I also share the passing of Bob Hall at the age of 74. Bob was a true pioneer and widely regarded as the father of wheelchair racing. He was instrumental in introducing wheelchair athletes to the Boston Marathon during a time when it faced significant resistance, and he helped build the division into what it is today—one of the most respected in the world. Through his company, Hall's Wheels, he also played a major role in advancing racing and basketball wheelchairs throughout the 1980s and 1990s. More than that, Bob was incredibly supportive of VA athletes and served as a mentor to many, myself included. He taught us not just about competition, but about the meaning and value of sport. He will be deeply missed, especially within the Boston Marathon and Falmouth Road Race communities.

In closing, stay safe—and get out there and have some fun.

Sincerely,

Brad Carlson  
Chapter President & National Director

[www.pvanewengland.org](http://www.pvanewengland.org)

## Enjoy Massachusetts State Parks with the Universal Access Program

The Department of Conservation and Recreation's Universal Access Program provides outdoor recreation opportunities in Massachusetts state parks for visitors of all abilities.

### From the DCR Website

**DCR's** Universal Access Program (UAP) is dedicated to providing outdoor recreation opportunities in Massachusetts state parks for visitors of all abilities. Accessibility is achieved through site improvements, specialized adaptive recreation equipment, and accessible recreation programs.

The Universal Access Program (UAP) offers adaptive, accessible programming seasonally at state parks, pools, and ice skating rinks. We partner throughout the year with All Out Adventures, Easterseals Massachusetts, Holyoke Rows, and Waypoint Adventure to provide programs statewide.

Our structured programs feature adaptive equipment, professional staff, and instruction and support. Friends, family members, and companions are encouraged to take part in our programs alongside participants with disabilities.

**UAP's Program Seasons:** Our Spring Program season runs from April through May, our Summer Program season runs from June through August, our Fall Program season runs from September through October, and our Winter Program season runs from November through March.

**Release Forms and Pre-Registration:** A current release form is required for all our programs, and you must pre-register with the organization running the program. To pre-register, cancel, or check-in about inclement weather, please contact the providing organization listed for each program.

**Essential Eligibility Criteria and Program Attendance Guidelines:** You must also meet the essential eligibility criteria (ECC) and follow our program attendance guidelines (PAG) for the activity. The ECC helps you understand the skills you need to participate in our programs. For risk management considerations, everyone who attends our programs must complete a release form and meet these ECC, including caregivers and group staff. You can meet the ECC independently, or with the help of a caregiver (family member, friend, or PCA).

If you have concerns about your ability to meet the ECC or PAG, please speak with the organization leading the activity. If you have general questions or concerns, please contact us by email [DCR.UniversalAccess@mass.gov](mailto:DCR.UniversalAccess@mass.gov) or phone at (413) 461-7126.

Visit their website at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/adaptive-program-schedule>

**Supported Programs:** Several organizations also offer adaptive programming at DCR locations on their own, sometimes with the use of DCR equipment. These are called supported programs. These supported programs may have their own requirements and release forms. Please contact the providing organization for more information about a supported program.

**Accommodation Requests:** If you need an accommodation at a program, like an ASL interpreter or a sighted guide, please let the program provider know when you're registering. Please allow at least two weeks (14 days) advance notice for accommodation requests. Program providers may not be able to fulfill last-minute requests.

*Check out the complete schedule at their website*



**45<sup>th</sup>**

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WHEELCHAIR  
GAMES**

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# EVENT SCHEDULE

## FY26

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 Bocchia 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. Benefits include improved cardiovascular health, cognitive improvements, increased strength and endurance, improved stress management, and mental health relief.

**FITNESS+ WELLNESS PROGRAM**  
POWERED BY WARRIOR STRONG

**REGISTER TODAY!**

PVA.org/Sports ParalyzedVeterans PVA1946

### 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



### 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

by Michael Snape  
Senior National Service Officer

Greetings to New England chapter members. Spring is finally here, the flowers are blooming, and temperatures will start to rise soon. Ensure that you have appropriate clothing for the increased temperatures, as well as a place where you can stay cool in the event of significantly increasing heat temperatures.

Some chapter members may be in receipt of or paying apportionment from a veteran's benefits. An apportionment is when the VA disburses a part of a veteran's monthly stipend/payment directly to their dependent instead of the veteran or primary payee. The VA previously made apportionments based on financial need for dependents not living with the veteran; typically in cases of separation or divorce, but also in cases where the veteran or surviving spouse was incarcerated, or a veteran who was considered incompetent for the purpose of managing their VA finances who did not have a fiduciary (person who manages their money) and was institutionalized at government expense.

As of February 9, 2026, the VA changed regulations to limit instances in which apportionment will be addressed.

Going forward, VA will no longer take into consideration financial need in the apportionment process for compensation, pension, and dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) awards, and will leave that aspect of apportionment to be determined by state courts. **It is important to note that this will not affect existing apportionments.** But please also note that adjustments to existing financial need-based apportionments will no longer be made. Before this change, VA took into consideration overall income and expenses when determining if apportionment could be granted, but that process will no longer continue. The VA will still process apportionments based on cases where the veteran/surviving spouse is incarcerated, or a veteran who is considered incompetent for the purpose of managing their VA finances who does not have a fiduciary (person who manages their money) and is institutionalized at government expense.

As the apportionment process can be very complicated, if any chapter member has questions regarding this process they should reach out to their local national service officer.

## House Judiciary Committee Considers ADA Notification Legislation

On March 26, the House Judiciary Committee held a full committee legislative markup on seven pieces of legislation. One of the bills considered was the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) 30 Days to Comply Act (H.R. 6453). This legislation, introduced by Rep. Mike Lawler (R-NY) and Rep. Luis Correa (D-CA), would require a person with a disability to give detailed notice to a public accommodation of an architectural barrier under the ADA prior to being able to enforce his or her civil rights through the legal system. PVA has long opposed ADA notification requirements as we believe it would result in delayed ADA compliance and decreased access for disabled veterans and people with disabilities. The last time an ADA notification bill moved in the House was the 115th Congress's passage of H.R. 620, the ADA Education and Reform Act.

Under H.R. 6453, a person with a disability would have to provide a detailed notice of a barrier prior to filing a lawsuit and give the business 30 days to remove it or potentially up to 60 days to

make "substantial progress" in doing so. "Substantial progress" is not clearly defined, and it would effectively eliminate the current requirement for providing access and replace it with something inferior.

During the markup, proponents of the legislation expressed concerns about the effect of lawsuits on small businesses. Opponents expressed concerns about the impact of notification requirements on people with disabilities and noted the role of state laws providing damages in increasing the number of lawsuits in those states. Title III (public accommodations) of the ADA only allows for injunctive relief (barrier removal) and attorney's fees in some situations.

The legislation was voted out of committee 16-8. Except for Rep. Correa, who voted in favor of the bill, the final tally was along party lines. Next steps for the bill are currently unclear.

...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.

### 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

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Washington Update continued

clinical research hubs. The VA would also be required to report on the implementation and performance of the new research framework.

A centralized research data system could reduce information silos across the VA research enterprise and provide improved transparency into the status and performance of projects. Standardized review timelines could improve predictability for researchers and institutions seeking to partner with VA. Also, the bill's requirement for mandatory planning for how research outcomes translate into benefits for veterans, could strengthen accountability and ensure taxpayer resources are directed toward meaningful improvements in care.

However, the bill also provides an override authority that could allow senior VA leadership to undermine the integrity of existing review processes. Additionally, its emphasis on direct veteran impact may unintentionally discourage foundational research. Basic research, even when it lacks immediate clinical application, is often the precursor to breakthroughs that ultimately transform care for veterans. For veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D), this concern is particularly significant. SCI/D research represents a relatively small subset of the VA's overall research portfolio. Under a system focused heavily on broad or immediately measurable impact, research focused on smaller populations could be deprioritized. PVA believes the bill represents a positive first step toward improving the VA research pipeline, but careful oversight of the implementation process will be necessary. We look forward to further commenting on this bill and others when stakeholders take their turn at the table later this spring. A video of the hearing and all associated documents, including PVA's statement, can be viewed here.

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stand what is available to them—but just as importantly, we help ensure that what is available becomes accessible. We navigate systems alongside our members, helping to interpret processes that are often complex and difficult to follow. We identify where delays occur and work to move things forward. Sometimes that means making the call that gets returned. Sometimes it means following a request across multiple offices. Sometimes it means advocating more directly to ensure that a veteran's needs are not lost in the process. In every case, it means ensuring that no one is navigating this alone. Because support should not exist only as an approval or a line item in a system. It should exist in real, tangible ways: In a home that can be entered independently. In a bathroom that can be used safely. In equipment that arrives when it is needed—not months after.

Ultimately, the measure of any system of care is not whether it can respond in a moment of crisis—though that matters deeply. It is whether it can sustain a life afterward.

Our nation has made a commitment to those who have served. Part of that commitment is survival. But an equally important part is what follows: ensuring that veterans have the support, access, and resources needed to live full, independent, and connected lives in the communities they call home. That work does not happen all at once. It happens step by step, decision by decision, and often with the support of organizations and advocates who help ensure that the system works as it should. Survival is the first step. What comes after—and how we support it—is just as important.

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\* For full indications for use, visit: [www.eksobionics.com/indications-for-use/](http://www.eksobionics.com/indications-for-use/)



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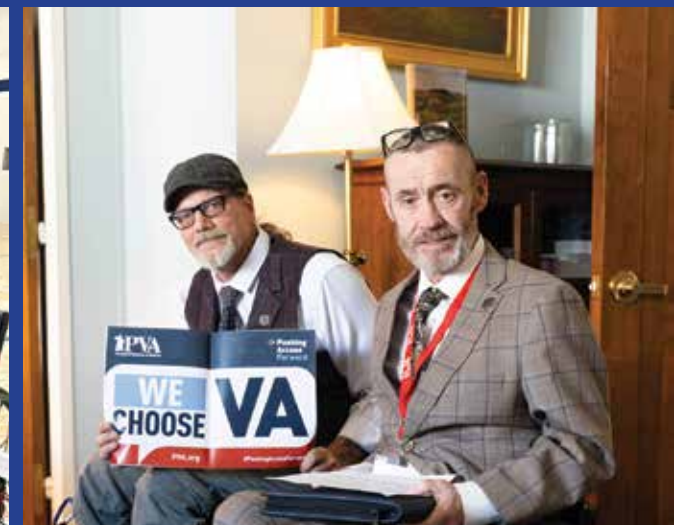
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