



**Paralyzed Veterans
of America**

New England Chapter

CORDWORD

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

New England Winter Sports Clinic



INSIDE THIS EDITION

YEAR OF THE NURSE

WASHINGTON UPDATE



NEW ENGLAND CHAPTER OFFICES

SERVICE OFFICER DIRECTORY	3
ALS SURVIVING SPOUSE BENEFIT	4
FREE FLU SHOT AT WALGREENS	4
NEWSC MOUNTAIN OF MIRACLES	6
FREE EVENT AND CONCERT TIX	8
PVA SPORTS CALENDAR	15



VA YEAR OF THE
NURSE
2020+
TRAIN · MENTOR · LEAD

In honor of Year of the Nurse, VA kicks off a year-long initiative to celebrate its nurses and the reasons why they choose a VA career

Every day, our 100,000-strong VA nursing corps provides exceptional service to Veterans. To honor nurses and nursing careers throughout the year, VA Careers is sharing profiles, stories and employment opportunities that you can also share with your community and networks. *...continued on page 5.*



PVA's Legislative Issues and Status before Congress

UPDATE ON CAREGIVER EXPANSION - Under the VA MISSION Act, veterans who sustained a serious military-related injury before May 7, 1975, were supposed to be able to enroll in VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) starting this fall. But, as we have previously reported, VA was unable to launch its new management system for the program so veterans *....continued on page 10.*



Making a **DIFFERENCE.**

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Paralyzed Veterans of America is the only non-profit Veterans' Service Organization chartered by the U.S. Congress to support and advocate for the benefits and medical care of our country's armed forces Veterans who have experienced a spinal cord injury or dysfunction spanning conflicts from WWII thru Iraq and Afghanistan.

PVA has developed a unique expertise, on a wide variety of issues,

involving the special needs of our catastrophically injured members. PVA uses this expertise to be the leading advocate and supporter for:

- Quality health care for our members.
- Research and education.
- Benefits available, because of our members' military service.
- Civil rights that maximize the independence of our members.

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www.newenglandpva.org



**Paralyzed Veterans
of America**

New England Chapter

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Sens. Coons and Murkowski Introduce Bill to Extend Benefits to Surviving Spouses of Veterans Impacted by ALS

via PVA.org



Paralyzed Veterans of America is pleased to announce the introduction of the “The Justice for ALS Veterans Act of 2019” by U.S. Senators Chris Coons (D-Del.) and Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) to help ensure surviving spouses and families of veterans who die from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) receive all of the benefits available through the Department of Veterans Affairs to survivors. As previously reported, the House companion bill was introduced in mid-October by U.S. Representatives Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr. (D-Calif.) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-Pa.).

Since 2008, ALS has been classified as a presumptive, service-connected disease so surviving spouses would most likely be eligible to receive basic DIC benefits. However, under current law, a higher rate of DIC (DIC kicker) is only payable if the veteran was rated totally disabled for a continuous

period of at least eight years immediately preceding death.

Unfortunately, ALS is a disease that progresses rapidly once it is diagnosed, and most patients die within two to five years. Some veterans may live longer but the overwhelming majority of veterans with the disease do not live long enough to meet the eligibility criteria required for the DIC kicker. The bipartisan and now bicameral Justice for ALS Veterans Act would extend benefits to the surviving spouses and families of veterans who have passed away from ALS, regardless of how long their veterans lived with the disease.

“Survivors should not be deprived of benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs simply because the service-connected disease their veterans obtained made it nearly impossible for them to meet an eight-year life expectancy requirement,” said Heather Ansley, PVA’s associate executive director of government relations. “We thank Senators Coons and Murkowski for introducing the Justice for ALS Veterans Act and urge members of Congress in both chambers to quickly pass this important piece of legislation.”

PVA is committed to supporting veterans with ALS and their families. To learn more visit www.pva.org



Free Flu Shots for Veterans at Your Local Walgreens

By Beth Lamb via Vantage Point

VA and Walgreens are national partners, providing no-cost quadrivalent flu shots to enrolled Veterans of the VA health care system. Now through March 31, 2020, enrolled Veteran patients nationwide have the option of getting their flu shot at any of Walgreens’ 9,600 locations, in addition to their local VA health care facilities. [Long Description](#)

How do I get my flu shot for free at Walgreens?

No appointment is required. Simply go to any Walgreens, tell the pharmacist you receive care at a VA facility, and show your Veterans Health Identification Card and another form of photo ID. (Patients will also be asked to complete a vaccine consent form at the time of service.)

Walgreens has the capability to electronically send vaccination information to the VA and your immunization record will be updated in your VA electronic health record.

The VA-Walgreens national partnership is part of VA’s eHealth Exchange project. This national program ensures that many Veterans get their no-cost flu shot at their local Walgreens, satisfying their wellness reminder

because they either found it more convenient or did not have a scheduled appointment at a local VA health care facility.

Can I get my flu shot at no cost at the VA?

Yes! If you are enrolled with VA you may receive a no-cost flu shot during any scheduled VA appointment or at one of the convenient walk-in flu stations. For more information on locations and hours contact your local VA health care facility.

Need to apply for VA health care? Visit: <https://www.va.gov/health-care/how-to-apply/>.

Beth Lamb has been a member of VA’s Veterans Experience Office since January 2017. She previously held Public Affairs positions for several Veterans Health Administration facilities and currently lives in Missouri with her family.

VA Celebrates Year of the Nurse by Thanking the Nurses Who Serve Veterans

via VAntage Point



In honor of Year of the Nurse, VA kicks off a year-long initiative to celebrate its nurses and the reasons why they choose a VA career.

Every day, our 100,000-strong VA nursing corps provides exceptional service to Veterans. To honor nurses and nursing careers throughout the year, VA Careers is sharing profiles, stories and employment opportunities that you can also share with your community and networks.

Celebrate Nurses

On Jan. 30, 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) designated 2020 the “Year of the Nurse and Midwife” in honor of the 200th birth anniversary of Florence Nightingale.

“We join our partner organizations in commemorating this momentous year by recognizing the exceptional service VA nurses provide to Veterans — at intake, at the bedside, during case management and throughout their lives,” said Darren Sherrard, Associate Director for Recruitment Marketing at VA. (Click the VA Year of the Nurse logo on the VA Careers nursing website in the coming weeks to find #YON2020 promotional social graphics, banners and flyers.)

Ask almost any VA nurse or nurse leader how they feel about their career and they’ll tell you that it’s more than a job, it’s a mission.

“As a nurse, we’re going to have good days and bad days,” says Nurse Manager Sarah Lueger, who serves Veterans at the VA Eastern Kansas Health Care System in a video. “But there’s no better feeling than caring for the Veteran. It’s a way for me to give back to them for what they’ve done for us.”

Make a Difference

Lueger is part of the nation’s largest nursing corps. VA nurses touch Veterans’ lives 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

VA nurses provide support for Veterans at risk of homelessness, Veterans in crisis and Veterans who just need someone to talk to. They learn the history of war to assist a Veteran diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder or conduct research to improve nursing practices. Every day, they impact the more than 9 million Veterans enrolled in VA care.

All of this work adds up to better care for Veterans. “When you look at the quality outcomes for our health system, VA nurses make such a strong contribution to improving the health of our Veterans,” says Beth Taylor, Chief Nursing Officer, Veterans Health Administration.

Find Opportunities to Grow and Lead

We offer our nurses almost limitless opportunities to lead and grow. Nurses at VA are part of a Veteran’s treatment team, serve on leadership boards and contribute to interdisciplinary collaborations to improve patient outcomes.

“Within our healthcare system, there’s different departments and there’s different opportunities that, once you’re here, you can really find that niche and there really is a place, I feel like, for everyone,” adds Topeka VA Inpatient Acute Psychiatry Nurse Manager Karalie Gantz in another video.

At all of our 1,255 sites of care, nurses have a voice at the table. VA nursing staff often weigh in alongside physicians and leadership to improve nursing care at their facility.

But we also empower our nurses by encouraging them to accelerate their healthcare career training and skill set through several scholarship opportunities available to nurses both before and after they embark on a career path at VA.

Enjoy work-life balance and robust benefits

Here at VA, we also offer an unbeatable roster of benefits that encourages work-life balance. If you’re hired under Title 38, you can enjoy 39 days of paid time off each year — and you start enjoying them right away. Our nurses also receive premium-support group health insurance, life insurance and, in some cases, transit support. Nurses have access to the Federal Employees’ Retirement System (FERS), a three-tier retirement plan composed of Social Security, FERS basic benefits and the Thrift Savings Plan.

With one active license, work at a VA by the beach, in a city or in the countryside. Your benefits travel with you. Apply for an open position at VA facilities in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa and the Philippines. And if you transfer to a new location, you won’t lose benefits or accumulated paid leave. Other perks that come with choosing a VA career as a nurse include:

- Flexible work schedules and shifts.
- Diversity and inclusion programs.
- Leadership development and mentoring programs.
- Career training and enhancement opportunities.
- Dining options and a tax-free retail store.
- A smoke/drug-free workplace.

VA nurses take their mission to heart, advocating for Veterans and making sure they get the care they need, when they need it. But that doesn’t mean they can’t have fun along the way.

“They make me laugh every single day,” Lueger says of the Veterans she serves.

Choose VA Today

Join VA Careers this Year of the Nurse as we take special notice of Lueger, Gantz, Taylor and the many thousands of VA nurses around the country pursuing careers with the purpose of caring for those who’ve served our nation.

VA New England's Mountain of Miracles: Disabled Veterans Conquer the Winter at the New England Winter Sports Clinic

By John Paradis via Vantage Point



Fifty years ago, Paul Nyerick served as an artillery forward air observer during an 11-month tour in Vietnam.

Thinking of skiing down a mountain in New Hampshire at that time was the furthest thing from his mind.

Growing up in Connecticut, sports were always an important part of his life. He learned to ski at a young age at nearby Mount Southington. But after being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1991, he knew he'd need assistance to enjoy outdoor recreation again.

This is why Nyerick says the New England Winter Sports Clinic for Veterans with Disabilities is so important. After his combat service in Vietnam and with MS, every day outdoors, he says, is a special one.

Nyerick was one of 55 Veterans from eight states and Puerto Rico who participated in the clinic this week at Mount Sunapee in Newbury, N.H.

It was the 23rd year the New England Healing Sports Association has partnered with the VA New England Healthcare System to host a week of adaptive sports such as skiing and sled hockey.

"It's very cathartic and you can get a lot out of it," said Nyerick, a bit out of breath after completing a run down South Peak at Mount Sunapee. "It bolsters your confidence and once you get out here you can forget everything except for the next turn."

Nyerick made all the turns down the peak while seated in a bucket chair over two skis designed for people with intact lower legs but who have minimal control over them.

"You have to be set up right; if you're not even (balanced) in the bucket, you're all over the place," he said.

He came to a stop with the help of outriggers or shortened poles, his own upper body strength and the assistance of volunteers. Behind Nyerick was Ralph Marche, a seasoned instructor and former VA chief of Voluntary Services at the VA Boston Healthcare System and the co-founder of NEHSA, a charitable 501(c)3 organization, located at Mount Sunapee.

NEHSA was formed in 1972 as injured Vietnam-era Veterans were

returning home, searching for ways to reintroduce skiing back into their lives.

Marche remembers the day when a Vietnam Marine Corps Veteran, Tony Santilli, came into his office at the VA medical center at Jamaica Plain, Mass. Santilli, whose leg was amputated after being wounded in Vietnam, wanted the freedom of being able to ski again.

Santilli, who died in 2016, sought Marche's help to start a program. "He said, 'Hey, I hear you're the guy to talk to,'" Marche remembers. "He said, 'We got snow, we got mountains, we got Veterans. Why do I have to go anywhere but New England to ski with my fellow Veterans?'"

Marche took Santilli's charge and met with a local ski school director in New Hampshire. The small program grew from Tony and a few other Veterans to more than 50 Veterans today.

'THIS HEALS PEOPLE'

A physical or mental disability may seem to be like a big roadblock to participating in outdoor recreation for many Veterans with physical, cognitive and developmental disabilities, but the winter sports clinic makes adventuring outside accessible, and, the Veterans say, fun.

"People don't realize how much this heals people," said Marche.

When John Bacon, a Vietnam Veteran with a spinal cord injury, participated in the clinic in 2018, he said the experience saved his life. He realized he wasn't alone.

Now he encourages other Veterans like him to get started and to meet with their VA recreation therapy program about how to be active and to experience life to the fullest.

"You don't know what you're missing," he said he would tell any Veteran. "You want to come see us and enjoy. Get outside the box because the box is going to be really big."

Now, with more and more Veterans returning from the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Southwest Asia and other post 9/11 Veterans coming home, they are starting to take full advantage of the clinic, which promotes rehabilitation through recreation.

FINDING COMMUNITY

The program also allows Veterans to come together as a community through winter sports, said Dustin Siroka, who was injured in 2004 and completely paralyzed while serving in the Marine Corps. He had to learn how to walk all over again.

He credits Marche, who was then still working at the West Roxbury VA Medical Center with the motivation to start recreational therapy. The support, persistence and determination is what ultimately got him back on his feet, he said.

He hasn't missed a Mount Sunapee winter sports clinic since, and he's also attended the National Winter Sports Clinic in Colorado. He's improved so much that a few years ago he decided he would stop attending as a Veteran participant and attend instead as a volunteer – helping other Veterans face the same challenges he did.

An athlete his entire life, Siroka said the clinics gave him the confidence he needed to try sports again. And he loves the opportunity to connect with other Veterans through shared experiences.

"In this program, we encourage pushing – pushing you to your limits and getting you out of your comfort zone," he said.

All week long, Veterans were able to hit the slopes with skis, snowboards or other adaptive recreational equipment with the purpose of giving each person a sense of independence. Seeing the joy on the faces of Veterans achieving that independence is the greatest satisfaction a volunteer can receive, said Siroka.

"We get paid in smiles," he said.

Other events at the clinic this week included sled hockey, kayaking, massages and a wheelchair basketball game against a local fire department.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

To participate, disabled Veterans enrolled in VA health care begin by seeing their VA recreation therapy staff. They then create a plan that includes attending the clinic, said Jenny Vulpis, an adaptive sports case manager and certified recreation specialist with the VA Boston Healthcare System. Vulpis is the lead organizer for the clinic.

The clinic is a total team effort with NEHSA, said Jason Gray, chief of Voluntary Service and Recreation Therapy with the VA Boston Healthcare System. The team includes 20 VA staff members from all across the VA New England Healthcare System, more than 130 volunteers and community support that includes 25 major sponsors.

"We have an amazing community that supports this week," said Gray, who said members of the public can contact any VA Voluntary Service office to learn more about how to contribute and help grow programs like the clinic.

"Just to see how far people have come after coming to the clinic and seeing the effects it has had on their lives is great and, for me, it's overwhelmingly rewarding," said Carly Bascom, NEHSA director.

For both VA and NEHSA, the hope is that more Veterans find out about the clinic and what can be achieved.

John Paradis is a senior editor & writer at the VA New England Healthcare System



Join Vet Tix and Enjoy Free Tickets to Sporting Events, Concerts and More!

By Steven Weintraub is Chief Strategy Officer of the Veteran Tickets Foundation (Vet Tix) via Vantage Point



Veteran Tickets Foundation (Vet Tix) understands that our military members carry heavy burdens of stress and sacrifice. Many also spend time away from their families. It can take months or years for service members and Veterans to reintegrate. Veterans who experience challenges related to PTSD and other service-related disabilities could potentially be impacted for the rest of their lives. Thousands of families will forever grieve for their loved ones who have perished in service to our great nation.

Rest and leisure are of undeniable importance to a person's health and welfare. Our Founding Fathers declared the pursuit of happiness to be an inalienable human right.

To enrich our Veterans' quality of life and thank them for their service, Vet Tix provides free event tickets to currently-serving members of the military, Veterans (of all eras of service) and their families, as well as immediate family of those that have made the ultimate sacrifice while serving. These tickets are donated by organizations that include sports teams, concert promoters, entertainment venues and individual donors.

Veterans can help reduce feelings of stress and anxiety, rekindle relationships and reconnect with their community by attending entertainment events, shared interests and community activities. Vet Tix members do this by choosing available events in their local area that interest them and their family via daily email event notifications from Vet Tix.

We want to honor and support those that served and sacrificed so much in service to our nation. Sacrifices of serving, both mental and physical can stay with our Veterans the rest of their lives. Recognizing our Veterans and supporting their transition back into their communities and with their families is a gift of gratitude in which we all can take part in.

Vet Tix has grown to over 1.2 million members and continues to add new members every month. Over 6.7 million tickets have been distributed to our members and we are projected to distribute over 2.5 million tickets in 2019. Live Nation Entertainment, which is the largest donor and partner of Vet Tix, has donated over one million tickets to Vet Tix and continues to support our mission.

Importantly, Vet Tix has received more than 400,000 testimonials from Veterans, service members and their families describing the positive experience and impact on their family resilience and community integration as a result of attending events in their area through Vet Tix. We have received over 700 testimonials from individuals identifying themselves as experiencing Post-Traumatic Stress. They have shared their stories of success in addressing these challenges through attending events provided by Vet Tix.

Vet Tix is committed to helping put Veterans and service members (including Reserve and Guard) in empty seats at various games and so many other events across the nation. We are a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit that channels more than 95% of its revenues directly into programs. 100% of every dollar donated to Vet Tix goes to purchase additional event tickets.

To become a Vet Tix member, simply head to <https://www.vettix.org> and create an account for free. Once your service/status is verified, you will receive notifications and can submit requests for available event tickets to upcoming events in your local area. VetTixers request tickets to events that interest them, if randomly selected, pay a small delivery fee and receive their free tickets.

Steven Weintraub is Chief Strategy Officer of the Veteran Tickets Foundation (Vet Tix) and a Colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve.

Connect With What Matters



Being there makes a difference

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

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

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Update on Caregiver Expansion

Washington Update Volume 25, Number 12

Under the VA MISSION Act, veterans who sustained a serious military-related injury before May 7, 1975, were supposed to be able to enroll in VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) starting this fall. But, as we have previously reported, VA was unable to launch its new management system for the program so veterans will have to wait until at least June 2020 for entry. The timeline shift also pushes back eligibility for families of veterans who served from 1975 to 2001, from fall 2021 to fall 2022 at the earliest.

Meanwhile, VA is current working on new guidance for the program that could constrain eligibility for the VA's comprehensive caregiver program. Additionally, the current moratorium on discharges from the program and decreases in assistance will eventually be lifted. Thus, Congress needs to take steps now to ensure veterans applying for this program are evaluated through a process that is systematic and fair.

S.2216, the Transparency and Effective Accountability Measures for Veteran Caregivers Act, would require VA to allow veterans to identify more than one caregiver in their health record and to notify veterans' caregivers of clinical determinations made concerning the veteran's eligibility for the caregiver program. Any notification must be by letter and include the following information:

- A summary of the issues adjudicated;
- A summary of the evidence considered by VA;
- A summary of the applicable laws and regulations;
- Identification of findings favorable to the claimant;
- In the case of a denial, identification of elements not satisfied

leading to the denial;

- An explanation of how to obtain or access evidence used in making the decision; and
- If applicable, identification of the criteria that must be satisfied to grant service connection or the next higher level of compensation.

S. 2216 would also require VA to temporarily extend caregiver benefits to any veteran who has been determined no longer clinically eligible for an additional 90 days after the date of notification.

The bill is sponsored by Senator Gary Peters (D-MI) and has 14 cosponsors.

Sen. Blackburn, Marsha [R-TN]*	Sen. McCally, Martha [R-AZ]
Sen. Kaine, Tim [D-VA]	Sen. Rosen, Jacky [D-NV]
Sen. Moran, Jerry [R-KS]	Sen. Collins, Susan M. [R-ME]
Sen. Sinema, Kyrsten [D-AZ]	Sen. Murkowski, Lisa [R-AK]
Sen. Jones, Doug [D-AL]	Sen. Klobuchar, Amy [D-MN]
Sen. Durbin, Richard J. [D-IL]	Sen. Merkley, Jeff [D-OR]
Sen. Alexander, Lamar [R-TN]	Sen. Cortez Masto, Catherine [D-NV]

*Denotes Original Cosponsor

PVA has been actively promoting this important legislation. If your senators are not listed here, please contact their offices and urge them to cosponsor S. 2216. There is not currently a House companion for this legislation.

Washington Update: New Items of Note

Volume 26, Number 1

ANNUAL BUDGET REQUEST FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021

The President traditionally outlines his budget priorities in the annual State of the Union Address but the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921 (P.L. 67-13) requires him to submit his formal budget request to Congress by the first Monday in February. PVA has learned that the Administration intends to submit its Fiscal Year 2021 budget request to Congress on February 10, 2020. It's unclear if VA's nearly 20-year streak of funding increases will continue but we do know that defense spending is expected to remain about the same as current levels.

MORAN NAMED SVAC CHAIR

As predicted, Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS) is the new chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC). Senators confirmed him for the new role on January 7th, and he replaces Senator Johnny Isakson (R-GA) who left Congress at the end of 2019 due to advancing health issues. PVA Executive Director Carl Blake issued a statement in response to Moran's being named to the post.

DOD EXPANDS RETAIL & MWR PRIVILEGES TO ELIGIBLE VETERANS AND CAREGIVERS

On January 1, the Department of Defense (DoD) began allowing eligible veterans and caregivers access to base commissaries, military service exchange, and Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) activities. Before

entering the base, all newly eligible veterans, their caregivers and any guests age 18 or older traveling with them must stop at the visitor control center to verify their identify, establish the purpose for the visit, and undergo a basic on-the-spot background check. Answers to the 10 most frequently asked questions about the expanded benefit can be found here, including who is eligible, the types of identification required to enter the base, and a list of what kinds of MWR activities can be used (e.g., golf courses and campgrounds). As a reminder, all honorably discharged veterans have access to tax-free shopping through DoD's Online Exchange and VA's Veterans Canteen Service.

VA HOME LOANS NOW EASIER TO USE

VA's home county loan limits were eliminated as part of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act for veterans and service members with full entitlement. Historically, VA could only guarantee home loans up to the county conforming loan limits as determined by the Federal Housing Finance Agency. These loan limits reflect the changes in average U.S. home prices at the county level. Now, first-time homebuyers, or homebuyers who have sold their home and have full benefit entitlement available, will no longer have to worry about loan limits or down payment requirements when purchasing, refinancing, or constructing a new home. You can learn more about this change and even view examples of how the new formula works by clicking here.

Helping the Survivors of ALS

Washington Update Volume 25, Number 12

Senators Chris Coons (D-DE) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) along with Representatives Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr. (D-CA) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) recently introduced legislation to help ensure surviving spouses and families of veterans who die from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) receive the full benefits they are due.

S. 3091 and H.R. 4747, the Justice for ALS Veterans Act of 2019, would entitle Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) eligible survivors of veterans who died of service-connected ALS to an additional \$246 per month in DIC. The extra payment is commonly referred to in the veterans community as the “DIC kicker.”

Under current law, the higher rate of DIC is only payable if the veteran

was rated totally disabled for a continuous period of at least eight years immediately preceding death. VA regulations recognize ALS as a presumptive service-connected disease and, due to its aggressive nature, it is automatically rated at 100 percent once service connected. However, because the average life expectancy for a person with ALS is two to five years, many spouses of deceased veterans with ALS rarely qualify for the additional DIC benefit given the eight-year requirement.

PVA Chapters and members are encouraged to contact their elected officials during the holidays and ask them to support this important legislation.

IATA Wheelchair Assistance Workshop

Washington Update Volume 25, Number 12

On December 3, Senior Associate Advocacy Director, Lee Page, attended the International Air Transport Association’s (IATA) workshop on wheelchair and disability assistance at JFK International Airport. The workshop was supported by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and the JFK Terminal 4 Airlines Consortium. Attendees included representatives from the U.S. Department of Transportation, airlines, airports, travel agents, and disability organizations.

The Air Carrier Access Act of 1986 requires airlines to support disabled passengers in navigating the airport experience. No description or documentation of the disability being accommodated is required. According to the airlines, a significant percentage of persons requesting wheelchair support are not technically disabled. Rather many people are asking for wheelchair support in order to avoid walking long distances, to get through security lines faster, or for help in finding their gate or baggage claim area.

Wheelchair assistance represents a significant and growing cost to airlines. At JFK alone, it is estimated that airlines provide more than 1.4 million wheelchairs pushes each year (out of a total of approximately 65

million passengers), with an average cost of \$35 per push (\$70 round trip). Other major U.S. airports are seeing a similar volume of requests.

A 2018 IATA survey found that the number of wheelchair assistance requests increased by 30 percent globally between 2016 and 2017. The survey found that the reasons for request were age (elderly passengers), distance (unable to walk), language challenges, temporary disabilities (medical conditions), and wayfinding (worried about being lost in the airport).

The main objectives of the workshop were to: 1) assess the magnitude of the wheelchair assistance problem; 2) find ways to reduce the rate of wheelchair assistance by advocating for alternative service to those passengers who are not disabled but need assistance to navigate the airport; 3) promote dialogue between disability associations, policymakers, and industry for a regulatory framework that eliminates operational complexity and increases access to air transport for persons with disabilities; and 4) analyze the results of the workshop and provide recommendations for the ways to address this challenge.

IATA Wheelchair Assistance Workshop

Washington Update Volume 25, Number 12

In the near future, veterans who are challenging decisions made by VA may be able to make their case via virtual hearings. The Board of Veterans’ Appeals (BVA) and VA’s Office of Information and Technology have been working on a system to provide nationwide availability of virtual hearings that veterans can access using their mobile phone or laptop via the VA Video Connect app. The virtual hearings are based on the Veterans Health Administration’s Tele-health Platform which eliminates the need for travel and lets veterans participate in their appeals hearings from the comfort of their homes.

PVA endorsed the use of telehearings by the Board in testimony to the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee earlier this year. It can be very challenging for many veterans to travel to a VA Regional Office and the use of telehearings may increase the likelihood of veterans making their BVA hearings as scheduled. It could be particularly advantageous for veterans whose travel options are impeded by catastrophic disabilities.





**Paralyzed Veterans
of America**

**WHEELS HELPING
WARRIORS**

Your donated vehicle can go far in helping severely injured veterans. Donations are sold at auction with proceeds going toward programs and services for veterans and their families. You may also receive a tax break, too! Schedule your free, easy pickup today.

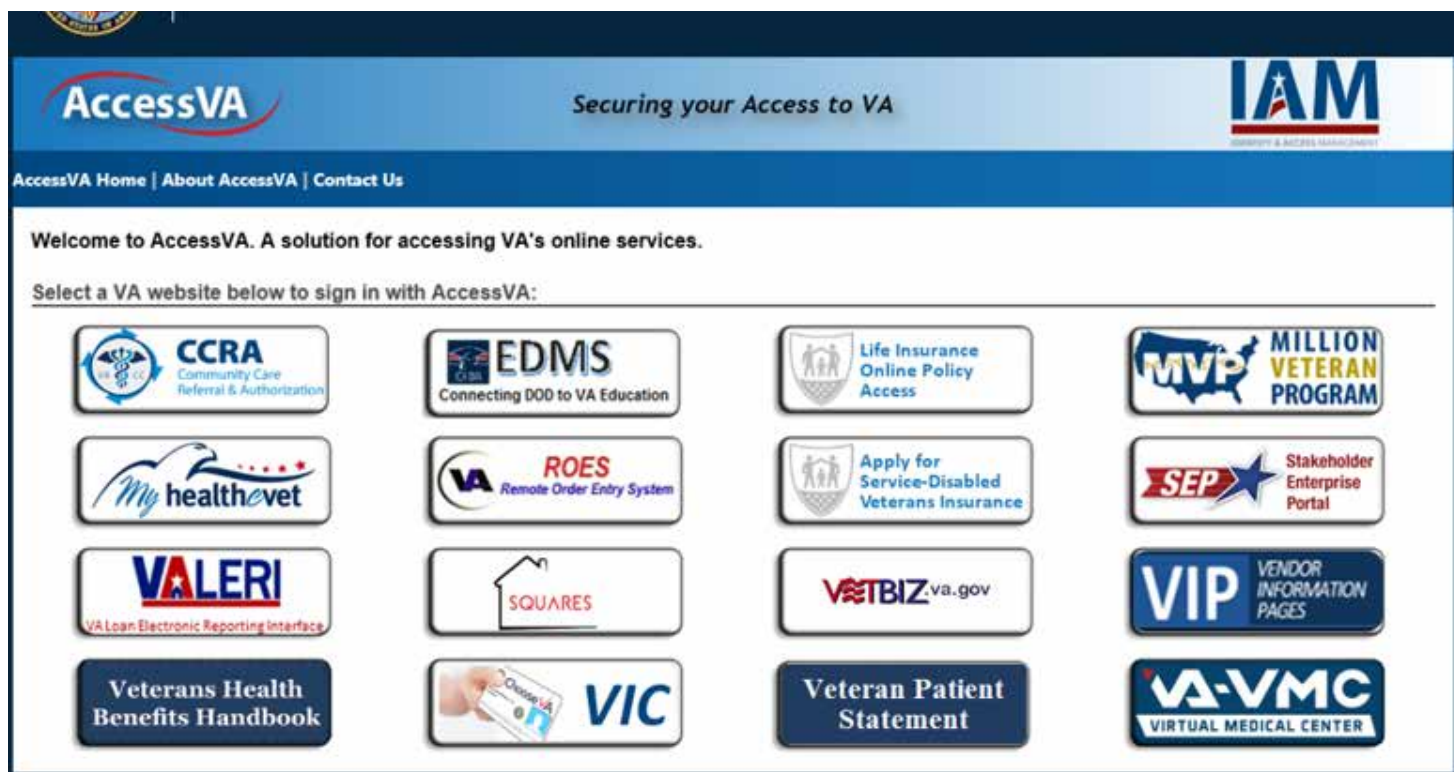


WheelsHelpingWarriors.org / 866-204-4548

Paid for by the Jeffrey Carlton Charitable Foundation

Veterans Can Now Access Patient Billing Statements Online

via VAntage Point



Do you want to save time when interacting with VA? Now, you can. AccessVA is a convenient new service allowing Veterans to access their patient billing statements online.

The new feature is for Veterans who receive care at a VA health care facility for non service-connected conditions and who therefore may owe a VA copayment (Veterans are not billed for service-connected care).

To access the patient statement online, Veterans can go to AccessVA and click on Veteran Patient Statement. Then, sign in with a DS Logon, ID.me, or MyHealthVet (MVH) Premium.

From there, Veterans can view, download, and print their patient billing statement. If a Veteran has any patient billing statements available, they will be able to review and print their statement, identified by the VA

medical facility location. If multiple statements are available for viewing, there is a drop-down option on the display for selecting the desired statement.

MANAGING YOUR CARE

This advancement will help Veterans to more efficiently manage their health care, and it shows how VA continues to leverage technology to help Veterans have greater access to their patient information. Although patient billing statements are available online for six months, VA will continue to mail paper statements.

For questions regarding information displayed on patient statements, please call the Health Resource Center (HRC) at 866-400-1238. The HRC is available Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. until 8 p.m. (ET).





Adaptive Ski Days

December: December 18, Bretton Woods, NEDS (full day)

January: January 8– Mt Sunapee, NEHSA (pm)

January 22nd– Mt Sunapee, NEHSA(am)

January 30– Mt Sunapee, NEHSA (pm)



February: February 11, Mt Sunapee, NEHSA (pm)

February 13, Loon, NEDS (full day)

February 26, Mt Sunapee, NEHSA (full day)

March: March 2, Women Veterans Appreciation Ski Day

March 12, Welcome Home Veterans Ski Day

March 18th, Mt Sunapee, NEHSA (am)

To sign up, please contact: Jennifer Stark, CTRS

@ ext. 4694



**ANNUAL AIR RIFLE &
AIR PISTOL PROGRAM**

**Camp Pendleton Air Rifle
and Pistol Tournament**
December 2-3, 2019
Camp Pendleton, CA

**Cal-Diego Air Rifle
and Pistol Tournament**
January 27-28, 2020
San Diego Naval Base
San Diego, CA

**Mid-Atlantic Air Rifle
and Pistol Tournament**
March 4-5, 2020
Colonial Shooting Academy
Richmond, VA

**Wisconsin Air Rifle and
Pistol Tournament**
March 21-22, 2020
Milwaukee Area Tech College
Milwaukee, WI

**Buckeye Air Rifle and
Pistol Tournament***
April 16-18, 2020
Spire Institute
Geneva, OH
**Buckeye Wheelchair Games*

**PVA BOATING/FISHING
TOUR**

Mid-America Bass Tournament
September 20-22, 2019
Lake Eufaula
Eufaula, OK

Vaughan Bass Tournament
October 4-6, 2019
Rend Lake
Mount Vernon, IL

**Florida Gulf Coast
Bass Tournament**
April 3-5, 2020
Lake Harris
Tavares, FL

**Kentucky-Indiana
Bass Tournament**
April 24-26, 2020
Lake Barkley
Kuttawa, KY

Mid-Atlantic Bass Tournament
June 5-7, 2020
James River
Hopewell, VA

Capital Clash Bass Tournament*
June 12-14, 2020
Potomac River
Marbury, MD
**Year-End Tournament*

**ANNUAL PVA/NWPA
BILLIARDS TOURNAMENT
SERIES**

**Mid-Atlantic Billiards Tournament
Chuck Willis Memorial**
March 20-22, 2020
Diamond Billiards
Midlothian, VA

**Mid-America
Billiards Tournament**
April 3-5, 2020
Slick Willies Pool Hall
Oklahoma City, OK

Buckeye Billiards Tournament
June 5-6, 2020
Wickliffe Lanes
Wickliffe, OH

**Mountain States
Billiards Tournament**
June 20-21, 2020
Widefield Corner Pocket Billiards
Fountain, CO

**ANNUAL PVA/AWBA
BOWLING TOURNAMENT
SERIES**

Nevada Bowling Tournament
December 5-8, 2019
Sunset Station Hotel & Casino
Las Vegas, NV

Mid-America Bowling Tournament
April 9-12, 2020
Firelake Bowling Center
Shawnee, OK

Vaughan Bowling Tournament
April 30–May 3, 2020
Bowlero
Romeoville, IL

**PVA NATIONAL SHOOTING
SPORTS CIRCUIT**

**Mid-Atlantic Shooting
Sports Tournament**
Dates TBD
Conservation Park of Virginia
Charles City, VA

**Nevada Shooting
Sports Tournament**
March 13-15, 2020
Clark County Shooting Park
Las Vegas, NV

**Cal-Diego Shooting
Sports Tournament**
March 27-29, 2020
Redlands Shooting Park
Redlands, CA

**Lone Star Shooting
Sports Tournament**
May 22-23, 2020
Desoto Gun Club
Waxahachie, TX

**Vaughan Shooting
Sports Tournament**
June 5-7, 2020
St. Charles Sportsman Club
Elburn, IL

**Iowa Shooting
Sports Tournament**
June 12-14, 2020
Otter Creek Sportsman Club
Cedar Rapids, IA

**Wisconsin Shooting
Sports Tournament***
June 26-28, 2020
Brown County Sportsman Club
Green Bay, WI
**Year-End Tournament*

BOCCIA

**PVA National
Boccia Tournament**
October 22-26, 2019
The Pavilion at Lemay
St. Louis, MO

Bayou Boccia Tournament
January 31-February 1, 2020
Harrison County Shelter
Gulfport, MS

Buckeye Boccia Tournament*
April 16-18, 2020
Spire Institute
Geneva, OH

Mid-Atlantic Boccia Tournament
May 7-9, 2020
Fort Monroe Community Center
Hampton, VA

Vaughan Boccia Tournament
June 26-28, 2020
Fountain View
Recreation Center
Carol Stream, IL

**Buckeye Wheelchair Games*

**CODE OF HONOR QUAD
RUGBY INVITATIONAL**

February 7-9, 2020
The St. James
Springfield, VA

**NATIONAL VETERANS
WHEELCHAIR GAMES**



**July 3-8, 2020
Portland, OR**

HANDCYCLING

Museum of Aviation Marathon
January 18, 2020
Warner Robins, GA

**Top End Euro-American
HC Championships**
February 1-2, 2020
Gainesville, FL

**PVA Racing
High Performance Camp**
February 3-8, 2020
Brooksville, FL

Valley of the Sun
February 14-16, 2020
Phoenix, AZ

Paralyzed Veterans of America
New England Chapter
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www.newenglandpva.org

Office Hours
Mon-Fri, 9:00am - 4:30pm



COMING EVENTS AND IMPORTANT DATES

Jan 27 - Sled Hockey, 1-3:30pm, Champion Rink, White River Junction, VT

Jan 29 - Green House, 9:30am-11am, White River Junction, VT

Jan 30 - Mass DCR Adaptive Skating and Games, 11am-12:50pm, Driscoll Rink, Fall River, MA

Feb 3 - Mass DCR Assisted Public Skating, 1:20-3:10pm, Asiaf Rink, Brockton, MA

Feb 10 - Mass DCR Adaptive Skating and Games, 1-2:50pm, Fitzpatrick Rink, Holyoke, MA

Feb 12 - Mass DCR Adaptive Skating and Games, 11:30am-1:20pm, Porazzo Rink, E. Boston, MA

Feb 24/26 - Gunstock Ski Trip w/LRDS. (Feb 1 Application deadline.)

Feb 27 - Mass DCR Adaptive Skating and Games, 11am-12:50pm, Driscoll Rink, Fall River, MA

Feb 29 - Waterville Valley Skiing, (Jan 27 Application deadline)

Mar 5 - Mass DCR Adaptive Skating and Games, 11:30am-1:20pm, Porazzo Rink, E. Boston, MA

Mar 10 - Mass DCR Adaptive Skating and Games, 1-2:50pm, Fitzpatrick Rink, Holyoke, MA

Mar 14 - Waterville Valley Skiing, (Feb 10 Application deadline)

For a complete list of Massachusetts DCR activities please visit their website at www.mass.gov/dcr/universal-access

For more information on upcoming sporting events or activities please contact the Chapter office at (800) 660-1181.

Mike Guilbault - Sports Director

Mike Moran - Asst. Sports Director

New England PVA's Official Facebook Page
www.facebook.com/NEPVA1947

