

Ensure Proper Implementation of VA's Comprehensive Caregiver Program Expansion

On October 1, 2020, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced implementation of a new information technology (IT) system and officially launched the first phase of expansion of the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) to caregivers of eligible veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty on or before May 7, 1975. The new rules governing the PCAFC, which were implemented on October 1, 2020, also impact current program recipients and will result in veterans being removed from the program. Phase II of the PCAFC expansion is expected to begin on or about October 1, 2022, for eligible veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty on or after May 8, 1975, and on or before September 10, 2001.

The VA MISSION Act (Pub. L. 115-182) directed the PCAFC be expanded to severely injured veterans of all eras through a phased approach beginning October 1, 2019. However, due to IT delays and failures, VA implemented the first phase one year later. As a result, veterans in the second phase must wait even longer in order to participate in this important program. Prolonged delays are further straining caregivers who desperately need relief now, particularly in light of the impacts of the global pandemic.

There are no logistical or operational impediments to moving up the second phase of the caregiver expansion to October 1, 2021, as Congress intended. VA has confirmed that its new caregiver IT system does not require any additional functionality or capacity to handle the increased workload anticipated during Phase II and VA can easily hire the additional 700 staff needed over the next year. Veterans and their caregivers should not have to continue waiting for this critical support.

PVA Position

- Congress must conduct oversight of VA's implementation of the expanded PCAFC to ensure that eligibility determinations are consistent and the appeals process is fair and just.
- Congress must expedite implementation of Phase II of the caregiver program to October 1, 2021.