

## **Increase Access to Long-Term Care for Veterans with Catastrophic Disabilities**

The nation's lack of adequate long-term care (LTC) options presents an enormous problem for people with catastrophic disabilities who, as a result of medical advancements, are now living longer. There are few LTC facilities that are capable of appropriately serving veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D). The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) operates six such facilities; only one of which lies west of the Mississippi River. Many aging veterans with SCI/D need VA LTC services but the Department only has the capacity to provide this kind of care for about 200 patients. As a result, the need far exceeds VA's specialized LTC bed capacity.

When the demand for VA LTC beds exceeds capacity, VA has the authority to place the veteran in a community nursing home facility. However, in some areas, it is nearly impossible to even find community placements for veterans who are ventilator dependent and those with bowel and bladder care needs. Furthermore, providers in community nursing homes are not trained in providing SCI/D care. This often results in compromised quality of care and poor outcomes.

VA must expand the number of VA specialized LTC facilities and LTC SCI/D beds across the VA health care system. VA has identified the need to provide additional SCI/D LTC facilities and has included these additional centers in ongoing facility renovations. However, significant movement on these plans has been languishing for years.

### **PVA Position**

- Congress must ensure that VA designs an SCI/D LTC strategic plan that addresses the need for increased LTC SCI/D bed capacity within its system.
- Congress must provide increased funding directed at the completion of pending SCI/D-related construction projects.