



Paralyzed Veterans  
of America

# WASHINGTON UPDATE

*Recent news regarding legislation and regulatory actions affecting veterans and people with disabilities.*

Written and produced by Paralyzed Veterans of America - Government Relations Department

April 29, 2020

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## UPDATE ON PVA'S COVID-19 RESPONSE

PVA continues to be responsive to the needs of our members during the coronavirus pandemic.

First, on May 6, PVA National will host a webinar for PVA members about the response of VA's SCI/D System of Care to the coronavirus pandemic. Dr. I. Manosha Wickremasinghe, MD, Executive Director, VA SCI/D System of Care, will provide updates on health care issues important to veterans with spinal cord injury or disease. Dr. Wickremasinghe will also answer questions from PVA members. The webinar will be recorded.

**Topic:** PVA COVID-19 Response Webinar: An Update on VA's SCI/D System of Care

**When:** May 6, 2020, from 02:00-3:00 PM EDT

**Register in advance for this webinar:**

[https://pva.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_wAZG24z0QoCkPhFkLqjCTw](https://pva.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_wAZG24z0QoCkPhFkLqjCTw)

Second, PVA conducted a second survey of our members in April to determine the impact COVID-19 is having on their health and their ability to access health care through VA. Nearly 850 PVA members responded to the survey. The top concern for respondents was whether or not they would be able to get the health care they need when they need it. Tied for second and third were what would happen to veterans if their caregivers become ill and whether or not they will be able to get their medications refilled or renewed in a timely manner. The fourth most cited concern was whether or not they would be able to recover if diagnosed with COVID-19.

Rounding out the other concerns were: rescheduling of routine appointments that have been canceled, having to receive care in the community, and accessing timely wheelchair repair services. A common concern written in by respondents was the desire for testing for COVID-19 and antibodies. PVA provided the full survey results to the leaders of VA's SCI/D System of Care.

Lastly, for the most up to date information about PVA's COVID response and resources, please continue to visit our COVID-19 webpage: <https://pva.org/covid-19/>.

**Paralyzed Veterans of America**

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## PRESIDENT SIGNS LATEST COVID-19 RELIEF BILL

On April 24, President Trump signed H.R. 266, the “Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act” into law. The \$484 billion relief bill replenished the depleted Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and provided much needed aid to the country’s hospitals amid the coronavirus outbreak. The bill, which was also referred to as “Stimulus 3.5,” allocates \$310 billion toward the PPP, \$10 billion for Emergency Economic Injury Disaster grants, and an additional \$50 billion for the Disaster Loans Program Account. The remaining \$114 billion goes toward hospitals and health agencies for the reimbursement of COVID-19 related expenses to replace lost revenue or cover necessary expenses to research, develop, validate, manufacture, purchase, administer, and expand capacity for COVID-19 tests. VA did not ask for, nor will it receive, any funds from this measure. VA received nearly \$20 billion in funding in the \$2 trillion-dollar COVID relief bill passed in late March.

## ECONOMIC IMPACT PAYMENTS FOR VETERANS ON VA BENEFITS

On April 17, VA announced it is working directly with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and U.S. Treasury Department to ensure delivery of “Economic Impact Payments” to veterans and survivors who receive Compensation and Pension (C&P) benefit payments from VA without additional paperwork or IRS filings. The “Economic Impact Payments” will be issued automatically to recipients of non-taxable VA benefits who did not file annual income tax returns for 2018 or 2019. For veterans who did not file a tax return in 2018 or 2019 and have dependents under the age of 17, they need to submit their dependent information to the [IRS's portal](#) prior to [May 5](#) in order to qualify for the additional \$500 per child payment. For more information on CARES Act ‘Economic Impact Payments,’ visit: <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/economic-impact-payments-what-you-need-to-know>.

## NEWS ITEMS OF NOTE

- Legislation to Support Veterans Seeking Emergency Care During the Pandemic

Representative Chris Pappas (D-NH) recently introduced legislation to ensure that veterans do not have to worry about seeking emergency COVID-19 care during the current public health emergency. Under current law, both veterans and community providers face bureaucratic obstacles to collecting VA payments for emergency medical care. Even if VA agrees to reimburse the treating facility for the veteran's care, veterans may be held liable if the department does not pay the provider in a timely manner. H.R. 6591 cuts through the existing red tape by repealing requirements like the need for the veteran to have received care from the VA within the past two years. It also makes VA the primary payer, even in cases where veterans may have other health insurance like TRICARE; covers emergency

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ambulance transportation; and allows VA to pay for emergency care beyond the point of stabilization.

- U.S. Access Board Holds Second Meeting on the Feasibility of Wheelchair Restraints in Commercial Passenger Aircraft

On April 20, the Committee for a Study of the Technical Feasibility of Wheelchair Restraint Systems in Passenger Aircraft held its second meeting via zoom conference. Meeting sessions explored the technical, engineering, and certification challenges in the use of personal wheelchairs (manual and motorized) as a seat in passenger aircraft, and the feasibility of addressing these challenges. Speakers covered technical and engineering issues related to wheelchairs, aircraft, and wheelchair restraint systems. Each session consisted of Q&A with committee members. Any technically feasible solution would have operational implications. The committee will explore these implications as warranted in a subsequent meeting.

- PVA Participates in Meeting with TSA to Discuss the Impact of the Pandemic on Passenger Screening

On April 23, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) held a call with stakeholders to discuss coronavirus-related policy changes and updates that affect people with disabilities. No TSA employees have been furloughed. Instead, they are being rotated at a different pace since the number of daily screenings has dropped from a couple of million per day to just over 100,000. Over 40 TSA officers have contracted COVID-19.

TSA has made changes to the screening process to address the pandemic. TSA has redesigned the screening lanes and put down floor markings promoting social distancing. Screening officers are not required to wear masks but are encouraged to do so. In addition, officers are being asked to change their gloves more often than have in the past. Passengers can also request that officers change their gloves prior to their performing any pat downs or examinations of luggage.

TSA is also trying to reduce pat downs for those who alarm when walking through the screening device. In the Q&A session, Lee Page, Senior Associate Advocacy Director, asked if the reduction in pat downs would apply to people who use wheelchairs. TSA reported that they are looking to reduce these pat downs through new technologies and other processes.

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- FEMA Publishes Civil Rights Bulletin

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has published a [bulletin](#) outlining best practices to assist partners in anticipating and attending to civil rights concerns during the COVID-19 response and recovery. FEMA is working with state, local, tribal and territorial partners to ensure that distribution of supplies and other relief efforts are done in an impartial manner, without discrimination on the grounds of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, English proficiency, or economic status. Under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Act, civil rights laws are protected during emergencies and cannot be waived.

The bulletin covers the following topics:

- Effective communication access;
- Inclusive planning, response and recovery;
- Language access; and
- Physical accessibility.

For more information on guidelines for ensuring civil rights during the COVID-19 response, review the document on the [FEMA website](#). Members of the public may bring civil rights complaints in connection with FEMA activities or FEMA-funded programs and activities by contacting the [FEMA Office of Equal Rights](#).

- HHS and FEMA Civil Rights Offices Convene Stakeholder Call

On April 16, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Office of Equal Rights (OER) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Civil Rights (OCR) held a stakeholders call to review the various programs and initiatives their departments are undertaking to ensure that the rights of people with disabilities and other protected classes are observed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Roger Severino with HHS OCR described the March 28 bulletin issued by his office that stated that “medical decision-making should not be based on stereotypes about disability or age, or on quality of life judgments that value some lives more worthy of care than others.” He also outlined actions that OCR had already taken to intercede with states that had adopted crisis standards in violation of federal civil rights laws. Linda Mastandrea, Director of FEMA’s Office of Disability Integration Coordination outlined the work that the office is doing to engage with emergency managers at the regional, state, and local level to facilitate integration of the needs of people with disabilities into response and recovery activities.

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## WEBINARS AND SURVEYS

- PVA Survey for ADA 30th Anniversary

As we prepare for the 30th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities on July 26, we need your help. Please complete our survey regarding the accessibility experience of people with disabilities who use wheelchairs. The survey link is available [here](#).

- Save the Date: PVA ADA 30th Anniversary Webinar

PVA will hold a webinar in honor of the 30th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act on July 23 at 2:00 p.m. ET. Information about how to register will be sent at a later date.