



# Washington Update

Check out [PVA's new webpage on caregiving](#) and four new advocacy videos that highlight the [concerns in finding quality home care](#), the [limitations of VA programs](#), and the individual stories of [Anne](#) and [Daniel](#).

## SENATE HEARING ON WOMEN VETERANS

On April 10, PVA testified before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee to discuss women veterans' access to care. Several VA witnesses made up the first panel, including the Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Clinical Services, the Acting Chief Officer of the Office of Women's Health, the Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for the Office of Field Operations for the Veterans Benefits Administration, and a witness from the Office of Healthcare Inspections for the Office of Inspector General.

The second panel was made up of several veterans service organizations, including PVA, and a veteran who is a mental health professional from the Chairman's state of Montana. While the hearing primarily focused on overall access to VA healthcare and benefits, a significant amount of attention was given to the issue of military sexual trauma (MST) and ways the VA could improve outreach to women veterans and the benefits process for all MST survivors, as well as how Congress can continue to support VA's efforts.

PVA's testimony focused on the lack of accessibility provisions in the Deborah Sampson Act, a bill which passed a few years ago and made necessary improvements to the delivery of gender-specific care; the need to improve access to long-term services and

supports; and the necessity of more research into the needs of older women veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders. PVA also stressed the need for increased cultural competency for VA staff when it comes to processing claims for veterans with complex injuries and illnesses.

You can watch the hearing [here](#). You can read PVA's statement [here](#).

## PVA AWARDS 2024 GORDON MANSFIELD AWARD TO SENATOR ELIZABETH DOLE

PVA awarded this year's Gordon Mansfield award to Senator Elizabeth Dole. Established in 2015, the award recognizes members of Congress who champion PVA's legislative priorities in the areas of veterans' healthcare, benefits, and disability civil rights. Senator Dole was selected for this prestigious award due to her extensive history of advocacy and support for the care of veterans and their caregivers. Her dedication to the well-being of our nation's heroes and their families has left an indelible mark on the community, embodying the spirit of the Mansfield Award.

First presented to her late husband, Senator Bob Dole, this award recognizes elected officials who have consistently demonstrated exemplary leadership and steadfast support for PVA's priorities in the areas of



veterans health care and benefits, as well as disability civil rights. Previous honorees include Representative Mike Bost, former Representative Jim Langevin, Senator Tammy Duckworth, the late Senator Johnny Isakson, Senator Patty Murray, and former Representative Jeff Miller.

### HOUSE VA DAMA SUBCOMMITTEE HOLDS HEARING TO EXAMINE PENDING LEGISLATION

On April 10, the House Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs (DAMA) met to review 12 veterans-related bills. They included H.R. 1083, the Caring for Survivors Act of 2023, which would index the rate of compensation for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) payments to 55 percent of a 100 percent service-disabled veteran with a spouse to achieve parity with similar compensation federal employees' survivors receive. Additionally, the bill would reduce the timeframe for which a veteran must be rated totally disabled from 10 to five years. This change would allow greater numbers of survivors to receive DIC. Another bill, H.R. 3651, the Love Lives On Act, would ensure surviving spouses can retain many of the benefits they receive from both the VA and the Department of Defense, regardless of their age at the time of remarriage.

A third bill, H.R. 7777, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2024, would direct the VA to increase amounts payable for disability compensation, additional compensation for dependents, the clothing allowance for certain disabled veterans, and DIC for surviving spouses and children. The VA would be required to raise compensation amounts by the same percentage as the cost-of-living increase in benefits for Social Security recipients that is effective on December 1, 2024.

PVA submitted a statement for the record for this hearing. You can view a recording of the hearing [here](#) and read our statement [here](#).

### HVAC HOLDS VA BUDGET HEARING

The House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) held a hearing on April 11 to consider the VA's budget for fiscal

years (FY) 2025 and 2026. The VA Secretary faced the full committee and presented justification for the proposed VA budget. If passed, the proposed budget would be the largest VA budget in history.

Several themes arose from the questions, including oversight and implementation of the PACT Act and its toxic exposure fund (TEF), proposed reductions of the VA workforce, and significant cuts to proposed construction and IT funding.

The VA is requesting a total of \$369.3 billion for FY 2025, which is nearly 10 percent above FY 2024 levels. Per the VA, the budget request provides \$134 billion in discretionary funding with \$4.4 billion from medical care collections and \$307 million from the Recurring Expenses Transformational Fund for health care, benefits, and national cemeteries. This is an \$8.9 billion decrease over current year levels. The department also asked for slightly more than \$235 billion in mandatory funding for benefit programs, including compensation and pension, readjustment benefits, housing and insurance, and continued funding for the TEF. If Congress approves, this would be \$41.8 billion, or 21.6 percent above FY 2024 levels.

The Independent Budget Veterans Service Organizations (IBVSO)—PVA, DAV, and VFW—also participated in the hearing. In addition to recommending higher amounts for many areas of the department, they noted that VA's request for Major and Minor Construction is one-third lower than what the VA requested last year, and far below what is necessary. Recognizing the critical importance of having modern, up to date facilities, the IBVSOs urged Congress to provide \$5.2 billion for Major Construction and \$910 million for Minor Construction, a 30 percent increase over current year levels. They also expressed concern with the VA's increasing reliance on community care. While the IBVSOs agree that veterans must have non-VA options to fill gaps in care, they believe the VA must remain the primary provider and coordinator of veterans' care.

You can watch the hearing [here](#). You can read the IBVSOs statement [here](#).

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## VA PUBLISHES INSTRUCTIONS ABOUT INCREASED ELIGIBILITY FOR EXPANDED ACCESS TO IVF SERVICES

The VA recently posted official instructions regarding its decision to expand access to IVF services for veterans. Since 2016, VA has been authorized to offer IVF services to certain service-connected veterans. The eligibility criteria were very strict and left many veterans unable to access services due to their marital status and even their inability to produce their own genetic material.

As a result of changes to Department of Defense policy, the VA has removed the marriage requirement, as well as the prohibition on donated materials. PVA has advocated for this change because it will help more veterans access these services and grow their families. While veterans are now able to use donated materials, they will have to cover the costs associated with them.

You can review VA's instructions [here](#).

## BIPARTISAN HOUSE BILL FOCUSED ON REDUCING CAREGIVER BURDEN INTRODUCED

On April 16, Reps. Kat Cammack (R-FL) and Seth Magaziner (D-RI), along with Reps. Nicole Malliotakis (R-NY) and Jimmy Panetta (D-CA), introduced the Alleviating Barriers for Caregivers (ABC) Act (H.R. 8018). This bipartisan legislation would require the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), Social Security Administration (SSA), and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to review their eligibility, processes, procedures, forms, and communications to reduce the administrative burden on family caregivers. The ABC Act would then annually require CMS, SSA, and CHIP to report to Congress about any issues they are facing and any next steps they are taking to support family caregivers.

The bill language is the same as the Senate-version of the bill, S. 3109, introduced by Sens. Edward Markey (D-MA) and Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV). According to a [2020 report from AARP and the National Alliance for Caregiving](#), one in four caregivers expressed the need for help with completing paperwork and other requirements for benefits and services. PVA has

expressed similar concerns about the burden on family caregivers and supports this legislation.

## NEWS OF NOTE

### PVA Participates in International Air Travel Symposium

On April 16, Heather Ansley, Chief Policy Officer, attended the Symposium on Air Accessibility and the Law at the London offices of Clyde & Co. The event was sponsored by international law firm Clyde & Co; DEKA Chambers; and Flying Disabled. The invitation-only symposium brought together experts in UK and US aviation law to discuss the current roadblocks in accessible air travel, what needs changing, and where possible, how to effect these changes.

### DOJ Releases Final Rule on ADA Requirements for Web Access for State and Local Governments

Recently, the U.S. Department of Justice announced a final Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) rule on the accessibility of web content and mobile apps provided by state and local governments. The rule has been more than a decade in the making. Under the rule, state and local governments' web content and mobile apps usually need to follow the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Version 2.1, Level AA. However, there are exceptions to this requirement. More information about the rule, including when it applies, is available [here](#).

### HUD Awards \$30 Million to Fight Housing Discrimination

On April 2, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) [announced](#) the award of over \$30 million under its Fair Housing Initiatives Program. The grant funding helps fair housing organizations working to address violations for the Fair Housing Act. HUD is awarding grants for the Private Enforcement Initiative; the Education and Outreach Initiative; Education and Outreach Initiative Test Coordinator Training; and the Fair Housing Organizations Initiative. A state-by-state breakdown of the awardees is available [here](#).

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## Additional Student Loan Forgiveness Announced

The Administration recently [announced](#) another round of loan forgiveness for student borrowers. The newest expansion of forgiveness will impact millions of borrowers who experienced runaway interest rates since the start of their loans. It will also automatically cancel debt for borrowers who are eligible for programs like Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) who have yet to apply. It will also cancel debt for borrowers who entered repayment 20 years ago or more for undergraduate loans. If you have participated in student loan forgiveness, please contact Julie Howell, Associate Legislative Director, at [JulieH@PVA.org](mailto:JulieH@PVA.org).

## Reminder: Comment Period Open for DOT Proposal on Improving the Air Travel Experience for Wheelchair and Scooter Users

**WHO:** PVA needs you to help us keep [#PushingAccessForward](#).

**WHAT:** Send your comments in response to the U.S. Department of Transportation's (DOT) [proposed changes](#) to the Air Carrier Access Act rules that would improve the air travel experience for wheelchair and scooter users.

**WHEN:** Now until May 13, 2024.

**WHERE:** [Federal Register : Ensuring Safe Accommodations for Air Travelers With Disabilities Using Wheelchairs](#).

**WHY:** The disability community needs to let the DOT know why better training is needed to stop injuries and wheelchair damage, and why you need your assistive device fixed or replaced as soon as possible if it's damaged or lost.

**HOW:** Leave [comments on the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking \(NPRM\)](#) and post on social media to share stories about your [#Flightmares](#) and why air travel must improve for wheelchair and scooter users.

## WEBINARS & HEARINGS

### Reminder: Advocacy Training Webinars Available

PVA's five-part series, "The 5 W's: The who, what, where, why, and when of our government and the art of advocacy," is available on [PVA.org](http://PVA.org). You can learn more about the Fundamentals of Government, the Legislative Process, Stakeholders of Advocacy, Understanding the Issues and Becoming a Change Agent, and Connecting the Dots. If you have any questions about the series, please contact PVA Grassroots Advocacy Manager Lisa Elijah at [LisaE@PVA.org](mailto:LisaE@PVA.org).

### Upcoming Veterans' Committee Activities

Please visit the [House](#) and [Senate](#) Veterans' Affairs Committee webpages for information on upcoming hearings and markups.