IMPROVE BENEFITS FOR CATASTROPHICALLY DISABLED VETERANS

The Issue

Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) believes it is time to improve benefits for the most severely disabled veterans, particularly with regards to the rates of Special Monthly Compensation.

There is a well-established shortfall in the rates of Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) paid to the most severely disabled veterans that the VA serves. SMC represents payments for “quality of life” issues, such as the loss of an eye or limb, the inability to naturally control bowel and bladder function, the inability to achieve sexual satisfaction or the need to rely on others for the activities of daily life like bathing or eating. To be clear, given the extreme nature of the disabilities incurred by most veterans in receipt of SMC, PVA does not believe that a veteran can be totally compensated for the impact on quality of life; however, SMC does at least offset some of the loss of quality of life. Many severely injured veterans do not have the means to function independently and need intensive care on a daily basis. Many veterans spend more on daily home-based care than they are receiving in SMC benefits.

One of the most important SMC benefits is Aid and Attendance (A&A). PVA recommends that Aid and Attendance benefits be appropriately increased. Attendant care is very expensive and often the Aid and Attendance benefits provided to eligible veterans do not cover this cost. Many PVA members who pay for full-time attendant care incur costs that far exceed the amount they receive as SMC-Aid and Attendant beneficiaries at the R2 compensation level (the highest rate available). Ultimately, they are forced to progressively sacrifice their standard of living in order to meet the rising cost of necessary care. As the veteran is forced to dedicate more and more of their monthly compensation to supplement the shortfalls in the Aid and Attendance benefit, it slowly erodes the veteran’s overall quality of life.

PVA’s Position:

• Congress needs to improve benefits for the most severely disabled veterans, to include increasing the rates of Special Monthly Compensation as well as Aid and Attendance benefits.