

New and enhanced VA benefits provided to caregivers of veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is launching the first of a series of new and enhanced services supporting family caregivers of seriously ill and injured Veterans. In May 2010, President Obama signed the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 legislation authorizing VA to establish a wide range of new services to support certain caregivers of eligible Post 9/11 Veterans.

“Caregivers make tremendous sacrifices every day to help Veterans of all eras who served this nation,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “They are critical partners with VA in the recovery and comfort of ill and injured Veterans, and they deserve our continued training, support and gratitude.”

In addition to the new benefits and services for eligible Veterans who were disabled in the line of duty since Sept. 11, 2001 (Post 9/11 Veterans), VA will also begin providing enhanced benefits and services to caregivers of Veterans of all eras who are already enrolled in VA care, including;

- Access to VA’s toll-free Caregiver Support Line: (855) 260-3274
- Expanded education and training on caring for Veterans at home, and
- Other support services such as counseling and support groups and referral services.
- An enhanced website for caregivers

Some of the new benefits of the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act are restricted by law to the caregivers of the most seriously ill and injured Post 9/11 Veterans. Those additional benefits include:

- A monthly stipend,
- Health care coverage,
- Travel expenses, including lodging and per diem while accompanying Veterans undergoing care,
- Respite care, and
- Mental health services and counseling.

“DAV is happy to hear that caregivers of Veterans are getting additional support and services to care for our Nation’s heroes and unprecedented new services for our most recent severely ill and injured, said David W. Gorman, executive director of the Washington Headquarters of the Disabled American Veterans.

VA will take the opportunity to report to Congress in the future on the feasibility of expanding the enhanced services to family caregivers of Veterans of all eras. While some of these enhanced benefits are available now, many of the other significant newly enacted benefits will require the issuance of regulations. These additional benefits include monthly stipends, pay for travel costs, medical coverage, training, counseling and respite care designed to prevent institutionalization of Veterans whenever possible. The law requires detailed regulations for determining eligibility, designating and approving caregivers, and providing stipends and health care coverage to primary family caregivers. The complex process required to implement these regulations will provide Veterans, caregivers and the general public the opportunity to provide comments before those regulations are finalized.

“VA has supported caregivers of Veterans of all eras for almost eight decades, said Deborah Amdur of VA’s Care Management and Social Work Service, “and we know from our experience and research that Veterans are best served when they can live their lives as independently as possible surrounded by caring family and friends.”

Each VA medical center has designated caregiver support coordinators who will assist eligible Veterans and caregivers in understanding and applying for the new benefits. VA also has a Caregiver Support website, www.caregiver.va.gov, which will provide general information once final regulations are published.

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